
Title: Dental Students' Training Experience with and Attitudes Towards Individuals with Mental Retardation.
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Objectives: The purpose of this study was to: (1) examine dental students' attitudes towards individuals with mental retardation, (2) understand whether previous experience and contact with individuals with mental retardation affect dental students' beliefs about mental retardation, and (3) determine whether dental education and training affect dental students' experience and comfort level working with individuals with mental retardation.

Methods: Five dental schools agreed to distribute the Prognostic Belief Scale (PBS) to their third and fourth year dental students along with a demographics questionnaire enabling the dental students to assess the strength of their educational curriculum's commitment to the treatment of individuals with mental retardation. The PBS measures the attitudes and beliefs of the respondents relating to individuals with mild, moderate, and severe mental retardation.

Results: A total of 169 third year and 126 fourth year dental students completed the survey. Sixty-three (N=184) percent of the dental students reported that they had never treated an individual with mental retardation. Eighty-two (N= 240) percent of the students reported receiving less than five hours of total lecture time devoted to individuals with mental retardation while in dental school. Sixty (N=176) percent of the students reported less than one hour of clinical experience devoted to individuals with mental retardation. Forty (N=119) percent of the dental students believed that dental school "did not prepare" them to treat individuals with mental retardation, while another forty-three (N=126) percent felt that dental school just prepared them "a little." Sixty-nine (N=203) percent of the dental students indicated that they "did not have any" or had "a little" understanding of the dental needs of individuals with mental retardation. Seventy-one (N=209) percent of the dental students reported "no confidence" or "a little confidence" in providing treatment to patients with mental retardation. However, eighty-three (N=245) percent of the dental students reported that they would "definitely" or "possibly" provide treatment for patients with mental retardation.

Conclusions: Dental schools are not providing dental students with sufficient educational or clinical experience in the delivery of dental care for people with mental retardation. This lack of training presents a significant barrier in access to care for individuals with mental retardation.