



# Implicit attitudes towards children with autism versus normally developing children as predictors of professional burnout and psychopathology

Amanda Kelly<sup>a,\*</sup>, Dermot Barnes-Holmes<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Psychology, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland

<sup>b</sup> National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Ireland

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 13 April 2012

Received in revised form 17 July 2012

Accepted 17 July 2012

Available online 30 August 2012

### Keywords:

Implicit

Autism

Attitudes

Burnout

Psychopathology

## ABSTRACT

Tutors trained in applied behaviour analysis ( $n = 16$ ) and mainstream school teachers ( $n = 16$ ) were exposed to an Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure (IRAP) designed to assess implicit attitudes towards individuals with autism versus normally developing individuals. Participants also completed a range of explicit measures, including measures of professional burnout and psychopathology. All participants produced more negative biases towards children with autism compared to children who were normally developing. Increased negativity towards autism on the IRAP predicted similar attitudes on some of the explicit measures and also correlated with increased levels of self-reported psychopathology and professional burnout for the tutors working with children with autism. Results suggest that implicit measures of attitudes may provide a marker for professional burnout.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

In psychology there has been a long history of interest in people's attitudes, and attempts to measure these attitudes are both varied and ongoing (e.g., Akrami, Ekehammar, Claesson, & Sonnander, 2006; Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Devine, 2003; De Houwer, Crombez, Baeyens, & Hermans, 2001). It has long been recognised that attitudes can differ and vary in strength, and attempts have been made to quantify and assess the centrality or importance of attitudes for individuals (Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986). Some early research on attitudes and their effect on behaviour focused on attitudes toward people with developmental or intellectual disabilities (e.g., Leyser, Kapperman, & Keller, 1994; Pittock & Potts, 1988). The importance and need for useful and accurate measurement of professionals' attitudes specifically toward people with disabilities continues to be acknowledged (e.g., Pruett & Chan, 2006).

Wright (1988) described the unspoken pervasiveness of the bias against people with disabilities in society and related how this can be manifested in rehabilitation practice, education, and research. Attitudes of practitioners can affect people with disabilities in that they frequently have control over rehabilitation monies, services, and information. Therefore if negative attitudes prevail services can be compromised (Pruett & Chan, 2006). Negative attitudes have also been found to affect working alliances and inhibit the equal status of the client, which in turn can result in further disempowerment of the client (Reeve, 2000). Overall, negative attitudes of rehabilitation professionals toward clients have been shown to translate into less than optimal outcomes (Kaplan, 1982). The importance of accurate measurement of professionals' attitudes

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +353 868475390.

E-mail addresses: AMANDA.KELLY.2009@nuim.ie, mandiekelly@gmail.com (A. Kelly), Dermot.Barnes-Holmes@nuim.ie (D. Barnes-Holmes).

towards clients be gleaned from the fact that with insight into underlying biases, necessary interventions to improve rehabilitation processes and outcomes could be implemented (Pruett & Chan, 2006).

The importance of practitioners' awareness of their own potentially negative attitudes toward people with disabilities has also been acknowledged (Pruett & Chan, 2006). Although the vast majority of rehabilitation professionals are aware that they should have egalitarian attitudes and behaviours toward their clients, some practitioners may endure personal struggles in that they are outwardly expressing attitudes in line with what is thought to be socially appropriate, while attempting to overcome their own biases and assumptions. Recent studies suggest that caring practitioners may suppress or avoid negative thoughts and feelings pertaining to a client population, which in turn produces various forms of psychological stress (Hayes et al., 2004). This may in turn lead to burnout (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2006). Burnout is thought to be a syndrome which fosters feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). The consequences of burnout are thought to be potentially harmful for workers, clients, and institutions. Various studies on burnout (e.g., Jackson & Maslach, 1982; Maslach & Jackson, 1985; Maslach & Pines, 1977; Maslach, 1982) suggested that it may lead to deterioration in the quality of care or service provided by professionals in both human services and educational institutions. For both practitioners and teachers burnout was found to be a factor in absenteeism, low morale, personal dysfunction, and various personal problems ranging from increased drugs and alcohol use to marital problems (Lowenstein, 1991; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). The impact of burnout on service providers' mood and social behaviour may have direct implications for their capacity to maintain a good working environment due to factors such as increased exhaustion and cynicism (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Various studies have found that 'mindfulness'; meaning becoming aware of one's own thoughts and feelings, is a useful approach for increasing awareness and responding skilfully to mental processes that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviour (see Bishop et al., 2004). Thus, an awareness and acceptance of professionals' own negative attitudes toward clients or students may serve to decrease psychological stress and burnout.

Increased knowledge regarding attitudes has been identified as an important factor in enhancing the integration of people with disabilities into society (Wong, Chan, Cardoso, Lam, & Miller, 2004). For example, Praisner (2003) noted that integration has become a critical part of efforts to improve the delivery of education services to students with disabilities, with focus centred on the placement of these individuals in general education settings. Wilson (2005) acknowledged that in order for inclusion to be successful peoples' attitudes must be addressed. Praisner (2003) found that success of integrating students with disabilities into education settings depended heavily on the willingness of administrators to make decisions that provided appropriate opportunities for these students to remain in general education settings. Individuals in leadership positions are particularly influential. For example, a school principles' attitude may result either in increased opportunities for students' general education, or in limited efforts to reduce the segregated nature of special education services (Praisner, 2003). In fact, positive attitudes of all participants in inclusive settings (i.e., teachers, practitioners, students, parents, administrators, support staff, carers, etc.) are thought to be of the utmost importance, as without it restricted or minimal learning and growth is likely (Kolar & Dickson, 2002). With such influential effects, the accurate evaluation of attitudes and the subsequent fostering of positive attitude development may be fundamental when considering integration of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Considering the impact negative attitudes can have in applied settings, the importance of effective attitude measurement is clear. The literature on the measurement of attitudes is indeed vast (e.g., Wittenbrink & Schwarz, 2007), but in broad terms there is general agreement that measures should be divided into two types – measures that seek to tap into explicit attitudes and those that seek to tap into implicit attitudes.

Within social psychology it is theorised that explicit attitudes involve controlled processes and require active attention on the part of the individual. For example, upon becoming aware of a situational cue implying the importance of considering ones attitude toward an object, an individual may attempt to retrieve a previously stored evaluation of the attitude object, or actively construct an attitude, both of which are reflective and active processes (Fazio et al., 1986). Several theories thus suggest that explicit measurement of attitudes is particularly valuable for the prediction of deliberate controlled behaviour (see Friese, Hofmann, & Wanke, 2008). Explicit self-report measures serve to assess such deliberate evaluations.

In contrast, implicitly measured attitudes are assumed to be more important for the prediction of less controlled, more spontaneous behaviour. Petty, Haugtvedt, and Smith (1995) reported that the stronger an attitude is the more likely it is to predict behaviour, and the strength of an attitude was thought to be related to the extent that it is automatic (Fazio et al., 1986). Fazio et al. (1986) argued that in order for an attitude to occur automatically without consideration or reflection, a previously well learned set of associations or responses must exist (e.g., Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977). Fazio and colleagues also noted that if an attitude is activated automatically upon encountering the attitude object (i.e., social issues, categories of people, specific individuals, or physical objects) it is far more likely to guide the individual's behaviour towards the object than if it is not.

Due to theories that impulsive or automatic processes are important in guiding certain types of behaviour and a belief that implicit cognitions are strongly related to attitudes, stereotypes, and self esteem (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), explicit measurement of attitudes has been somewhat overshadowed by attempts to measure implicit attitudes effectively. There are also issues such as response bias effects and socially desirable responding to consider when using measures designed to target explicit attitudes. That is, explicit attitude scales and survey questions will almost always be influenced to some extent by the particular person asking the question or by the whole verbal culture in which the survey is conducted (Silver, Abramson, & Anderson, 1986).

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات