



ELSEVIER

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

SCIENCE @ DIRECT®

Research in Developmental Disabilities 26 (2005) 565–576

Research  
in  
Developmental  
Disabilities

# Assessment of terms to describe mental retardation

Paul E. Panek\*, Jessi L. Smith

*Department of Psychology, The Ohio State University, Newark Campus, OH 43055, USA*

Received 25 August 2004; received in revised form 4 November 2004; accepted 10 November 2004

---

## Abstract

There is currently debate among professionals in the area of mental retardation/developmental disabilities regarding the use of, and a possible replacement for, the term mental retardation. Using the semantic differential technique, 284 participants drawn from various Midwestern populations completed assessments of several terms used to describe the condition known as mental retardation (e.g., intellectual disability) as well as the person with the condition (e.g., mentally challenged) and other disabilities (e.g., physically disabled). Assessments were made on three factors: evaluation, activity, and potency. Results indicated that although all of the terms were generally assessed neutrally, the term Mentally Challenged emerged as the most positive particularly compared to evaluations of the other investigated terms. Moreover, mentally challenged was evaluated as significantly more positive compared to the term physically disabled but was similarly evaluated as the term visually disabled. Implications of the results are discussed.

© 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Mental retardation; Developmental disabilities; Assessments

---

## 1. Introduction

Over a decade ago, a positive shift occurred in society's attitude towards persons with mental retardation (Rees, Spreen, & Harnadek, 1991). Nevertheless, the label "mentally retarded" is replete with negative beliefs and expectations imbued by mainstream America

---

\* Corresponding author.

*E-mail address:* [panek.1@osu.edu](mailto:panek.1@osu.edu) (P.E. Panek).

(Kanaya, Scullin, & Ceci, 2003; Nelson, 1994; Taylor, 2002). As such, at the 2001 meeting of the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) the Board decided to change the name of the Association to eliminate the words “mental retardation”. A number of AAMR leaders (e.g., Goode, 2002; Schalock, 2002) expressed their thoughts regarding the advantages and disadvantages of a name change, and this discussion was chronicled in a 2002 issue of *Mental Retardation* (vol. 20, number 1). The general consensus emerging from those discussions was that a new term is needed, although what that new term should be was unclear. Suggestions for a term to replace mental retardation have included “Intellectual Disability/Disabilities” (Gelb, 2002; Schalock, 2002), “Developmental Disabilities” (Smith, 2002), and “Cognitive-Adaptive” Disability or Delay (Walsh, 2002). Thus, the term which professionals in the field and AAMR are going to use as a substitute for mental retardation is still a matter of debate.

Mental retardation professionals in other countries have also debated the most appropriate substitute term for mental retardation. For example, research has indicated that professionals in English-speaking countries vary considerably in their preference for the term used to describe mental retardation. Specifically, the phrase “person with mental retardation” is widely accepted in the United States, but is considered offensive to many in the United Kingdom, where the preferred term is “Learning disability;” which is also preferred in Australia (Fernald, 1995). In Japan the preferred term is “Intellectual disability” (Horner-Johnson et al., 2002). Fernald (1995) has suggested that the term “Intellectual Disability” is widely understood and apparently not offensive across countries. In fact, the international community is moving toward the use of the term “intellectual disabilities” (Goodey & Stainton, 2001; Schalock, 2002). The primary purpose of the current study was to investigate individuals’ beliefs and expectations associated with the various substitute terms, and how their responses compare to the present term mental retardation.

The language that is used to describe a group of people constrains individuals to the confines of the label (Hebl & Kleck, 2000). Indeed, regardless of what term is selected to replace mental retardation, experts are concerned that, over time, the new term will become “stigma-stained” (e.g., Danforth, 2002; Gelb, 2002; Goode, 2002; Kanaya et al., 2003; Turnbull, Turnbull, Warren, Eidelman, & Marchand, 2002; Walsh, 2002; Wolfensberger, 2002). That is, persons with mental retardation will (still) be defined by the stereotypes triggered by the new term and subsequently devalued (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). As suggested by Bogdan and Taylor (1976) mental retardation is a social construction or a concept which exists in the minds of the “judges” (p. 47). Thus, a person with mental retardation is one who has been labeled as such according to rather arbitrarily created and applied criteria (Bogdan & Taylor, 1976). Moreover, the individual who is diagnosed as mentally retarded may feel threatened by the possibility of confirming a negative stereotype, and as such, fear failing to such an extent that actual task performance suffers (e.g., Smith, 2004; Smith & White, 2002; Steele & Aronson, 1995, see also Kanaya et al., 2003).

Research suggests that in the United States (and in other countries) there is a preponderance of negative stereotypes associated with persons with mental retardation and other disabilities (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1993; Gartner, Lipsky, & Turnbull, 1991; Nelson, 1994; Tang, Davis, Wu, & Oliver, 2000). In fact, evidence exists in the literature for what

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