

The relationship between knowledge of and attitudes towards children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Division of Psychology, University of Northampton



Jenine Rogers and Rachel Maunder



Contact: Rachel.Maunder@Northampton.ac.uk

Introduction

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity that interferes with the individuals' family and peer relationships, and with their social and academic functioning (DSM-IV, APA, 2000).
- Due to the number of children affected (estimates range from 3-7%: APA, 2000; Tannock, 1998) and current educational policies around inclusion (DfES, 2004), mainstream teachers are increasingly likely to work with pupils with an ADHD diagnosis.
- According to Ajzen's (2005) Theory of Planned Behaviour, attitudes can be used to predict behaviour. This implies that teachers' perceptions of ADHD could impact on their teaching practice and behaviour towards pupils. However, little is known about teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards ADHD and how their perceptions relate to those of trainee teachers or the general public.

Method

- A Quasi-experimental design was used to investigate the perceptions held by In-Service teachers (n=33), Pre-Service trainee teachers (n=71) and the General Public (n=72).
- Knowledge of ADHD was measured using an adapted version of the 'Knowledge about Attention Deficit Disorder Questionnaire' (KADD-Q) (West *et al.* 2005). Higher scores indicate more knowledge (maximum possible knowledge score = 30, minimum = 0)
- Attitudes towards children with a diagnosis of ADHD were measured using likert-style responses to 22 attitude statements (cronbach's alpha = 0.88). Higher scores indicated more positive attitudes (maximum possible attitude score = 110, minimum = 22)

Findings

- In-Service teachers had more knowledge about ADHD compared to Pre-Service and General Public groups (Table 1). In-service teachers had more knowledge than trainee teachers ($U = 650.00$, $n = 104$, $p < 0.001$), and trainee teachers' knowledge was not different to the general public ($U = 2499.00$, $n = 143$, $p = 0.818$). This suggests that pre-service trainee teachers would benefit from more instruction on ADHD through their training.
- The In-Service teachers had the most positive attitudes towards children with ADHD, and the General Public the least (Table 1). The attitudes scores of Pre-Service trainees were not significantly different to In-Service teachers ($U = 1150.00$, $n = 104$, $p = 0.88$). Over half of the participants in both groups reported previous or current experience with children with ADHD indicating that personal contact relates to more positive attitudes (Hasting & Graham, 1995). However, years spent in-service was not related to teachers' knowledge or attitudes (for knowledge: $\rho = -0.20$, $n = 23$, $p = 0.36$; for attitude: $\rho = -0.32$, $n = 23$, $p = 0.13$) – suggesting that experience alone is not sufficient for improved knowledge and/or attitudes.
- A significant relationship was found between knowledge and attitude scores for all groups ($\rho = 0.42$, $n = 175$, $p = < .001$). The higher the knowledge scores, the more positive the attitudes. Linear regression showed that for every one point increase in the knowledge score, attitude scores increased by 1.20 points, which represented half a standard deviation ($F(1, 174) = 56.43$, $p = < 0.001$). **This suggests that improving knowledge of ADHD through training could improve attitudes towards individuals with a diagnosis of ADHD.** If one is able to predict and/or influence individual behaviour from attitudes (Ajzen, 2005) then it is important to encourage more positive attitudes towards children with a diagnosis of ADHD to aid their integration within mainstream schooling.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for questionnaire responses

Group	Knowledge of ADHD	Attitude to ADHD
In-service Teachers	M = 14.70, sd = 5.77	M = 81.27, sd = 12.04
Pre-service trainee teachers	M = 10.41, sd = 4.28	M = 80.44, sd = 6.49
General public	M = 10.32, sd = 6.49	M = 68.79, sd = 16.98

References

- Ajzen, I. (2005). *Attitudes, personality and behaviour*. (2nd Ed.). New York: Open University Press.
- APA. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistic manual of mental disorders - text revision (4th ed.)*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- Department of Education and Skills (DfES). (2004). *Removing barriers to achievement, The government's strategy for SEN*. London: DfES.
- Hastings, R.P. & Graham, S. (1995). Adolescents' perceptions of young people with severe learning difficulties: The effects of integration schemes and frequency of contact. *Educational Psychology, 15*, 149–159
- Tannock, R. (1998). AD/HD: advances in cognitive, neurobiological and genetic research. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 39(1)*, 65–99.
- West, J., Taylor, S., Houghton, S., & Hudymam S. (2005). A comparison of teachers' and parents' knowledge and beliefs about Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). *School Psychology International, 26*, 129–134.