

Chapter 1

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR EMPATHIC TENDENCIES

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INTRODUCTION

Attitude is generally defined as the body of emotions, thoughts and beliefs that an individual displays towards a person or object in his/her environment (Alptekin & Batık, 2013). Individuals in the community develop several attitudes towards events, people or thoughts through social environment, media, knowledge, direct experience and interaction. Individuals with a disability are faced with many positive or negative attitudes in the society due to differences between them and people without disabilities (Özyürek, 2006). Positive attitudes displayed towards individuals with disabilities enable them to integrate into the society more easily and facilitate their acceptance by the society (Antonak & Livneh, 2000; Girli et al., 2016). Negative attitudes displayed towards individuals with disabilities create obstacles while they fulfill their roles in life and attain their life goals (Antonak & Livneh, 2010). It is noteworthy that although positive attitudes displayed towards individuals with disabilities are increasing nowadays (Girli et al., 2016; Altıparmak & Sarı, 2012), some people still display stereotyped, prejudicial and rejective attitudes towards them (Alptekin & Batık, 2013; Özyürek, 2006). Studies conducted on the issue demonstrate that particularly professionals working in the fields of health and education display negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (Alptekin & Batık, 2013; Sahin

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that the female students' empathic tendency scores were higher. In line with the study findings, it is recommended that future studies to assess empathic tendency for and attitudes towards people with disabilities should be conducted with larger sample groups showing homogenous distribution, that attitudes displayed towards people with disabilities should be improved, and that interventions to change perspectives for the elimination of prejudices should be implemented. It is also recommended that students should be given training aiming to improve their attitudes towards and empathy for people with disabilities.

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