

# Do education, volunteering, contacts and self-esteem relate with students' attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons?

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Izvorni znanstveni članak

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## Abstract

Attitudes toward people with disabilities influence their integration and employment, so it is valuable to examine what they may relate with. The objectives of this study were to investigate attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons among university students related to (1) their helping or non-helping study programmes; (2) their contacts with visually impaired persons; (3) their experience in volunteering; and (4) their level of self-esteem. There were 427 participants ( $M = 20.7$  years) from seven study programmes in Croatia. Attitudes were measured with the Croatian SZS scale, three closed-type questions explored contacts and volunteering, and self-esteem was measured with Rosenberg's scale. Results show that (1) students of helping professions, (2) students who had contacts with visually impaired persons, and (3) students with experience in volunteering related to human rights, persons with disabilities and psychosocial activities have more favourable attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons compared to students of non-helping professions, students who had no contacts with visually impaired persons and students without specific experience in volunteering. No significant differences were found in attitudes related to (4) students' self-esteem.

**Key words:** choice of profession; formal education; contacts; self-esteem; visually impaired persons, volunteering

## Introduction

Attitudes are favourable or unfavourable evaluations toward something of someone, manifested in a person's beliefs, thoughts, feelings or behaviour. Attitudes are multifactorial and it is important to explore their components and what correlates with them (Myers, 1993) because they influence a great deal of interpersonal interactions and relationships. Attitudes can encourage them, or discourage them by creating obstacles so information flow is stopped or distorted. It is documented that predominant attitudes toward persons with disabilities influence the process of integration (Keller & Siegrist, 2010; Korir, 2015).

Some authors consider employers' negative attitudes to be the primary barrier to employment of visually impaired persons (e.g. Golub, 2006; Lee, Abdullah, & May, 2011). Even the employers recognise that their negative attitudes are obstacles (Leonard, D'Allura, & Horowitz, 1999; Crudden, Williams, McBroom, & Moore, 2002) or at least concerns (Capella-McDonnall, 2005) to employment of visually

impaired persons. Literature indicates that labour force participation is substantially lower among persons with disabilities than among general population (Babić & Leutar, 2010; Leutar & Buljevac, 2012; Malakpa, 2007; Vijeće Europe, 2003). According to the studies of employers' attitudes toward employees with different disabilities, employers manifest the most unfavourable attitudes toward visually impaired employees when compared to other groups of persons with disabilities (Kiš-Glavaš & Sokač, 2006).

History of researches in domain of attitudes toward visually impaired workers in Croatia is dominantly related to Stančić and his colleagues (1979) who conducted a comprehensive project exploring professional integration of the visually impaired persons. One of the project's aims was to investigate attitudes of working colleagues toward employed visually impaired persons. Stančić (1981; 1991) confirmed positive correlation between favourable attitudes toward employed blind persons and success of their professional integration. However, the causality can be bidirectional: favourable attitudes help integration of blind persons, but successful integrated blind persons encourage positive attitudes toward themselves.

Few decades later McDonnell, Crudden and O'Mally (2014; 2015) conducted several studies in the USA in the domain of employers' attitudes toward visually impaired employees and revealed that the most important predictive variables of employers' attitudes were their experiences with visually impaired employees and their knowledge about these employees' abilities, accommodations etc. The employers with greater levels of knowledge had more positive attitudes toward blind or visually impaired persons as employees.

In this research four variables potentially related to students' attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons were explored: students' choice of helping or non-helping profession as the university programme, their contacts with visually impaired persons, their experience with volunteering, and the level of their self-esteem.

## Formal Education and Experience in Volunteering

According to Holland's theory the choice of a profession is an expression of personality: personalities look for and grow in career environments they fit (Holland, 1986; 1997; Holland & Gottfredson, 1994). Thus, students of helping professions dominantly have socially oriented personalities. Substantial personality group differences can be found across academic majors (Vedel, 2016). For example, students of some helping professions, such as medicine and psychology score high on agreeableness (Vedel, 2016). During the course of their formal education for the preferred helping profession, this is further reinforced. So personality shapes and is shaped by person's professional experiences (Wille & De Fruyt, 2014). There is evidence,

for example, that medical students have more positive attitudes toward people with mental illness than laypeople and their attitudes become even more positive in the course of the study (Zuchová, 2006).

The same goes for volunteering. It refers to voluntary involvement of time, effort, knowledge and skills that are provided as services or activities for the well-being of another person or for the common well-being without any material gain for the provided activity (Narodne novine, 2007; 2013). Volunteering is not a unidirectional process, because a volunteer gains experience and develops competences that are necessary and useful for active participation in society, for personal development as well as for personal well-being (Narodne novine, 2013).

In this paper it was assumed that students of helping professions would prefer pro-social activities and involvement in civil society organisations, what will influence shaping of their more favourable attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons.

## Contacts and Interactions

Contacts with people with disabilities are relevant for attitudes (Au & Man, 2006). Stereotypes are stronger when judging unknown individuals and when considering whole groups (Myers, 1993).

Attitudes do not change easily. One of the triggers for change to occur can be interpersonal contact. However, according to the contact theory proposed in the fifties by G. W. Allport (in Lieberman & Wilson, 2005) not just any contacts between people with differences sufficient. In order to achieve the change, the interaction has to be meaningful, pleasant and frequent. Sherrill (2004) summarises that the change in attitudes is more likely to happen if the interaction is cooperating rather than competing, if the supervisor is modelling positive behaviour and encouraging. It is also beneficial that interactions are planned and structured (Lienert, Sherrill, & Myers, 2001). Lieberman and Wilson (2005) confirmed that teachers' attitudes toward children with visual impairments and deafblindness improved after one-week practicum experience. Teachers acquired the relevant information about children with disabilities and their positive experience decreased their initial perceived obstacles in work with these children. Fichten, Schipper and Cutler (2005) discovered that working with children with disabilities not only minimizes social distance, but also improves self-focused aspects of attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. Self-focused aspects (Lindsay Gething, 1994) refer to how a person thinks or feels about others, in this case disabled persons. In their study Krahe & Altwasser (2006) formed a positively valued context that included joint sports activities of people with and without

disabilities. The personal contact between them brought to less negative attitudes towards the physically disabled persons.

## Self-Esteem

Self-esteem influences all aspects of a person's life, including attitudes, expectations or judgments (Lawrence, 2006). There are some explanations for the possible connection between self-esteem and attitudes. One of them refers to the hypothesis suggested by Tajfel and Turner (1979) that lower self-esteem can be enhanced by discriminating against lower status groups in the society. In this case the lower status group can refer to persons with disabilities. There are findings that support this hypothesis among student's population, reporting that self-esteem can correlate positively with social discrimination of people with disabilities (Bean & Hedgpeth, 2014).

Another explanation is that different levels of self-esteem are related to different interpretations of difficulties in life and to successful and unsuccessful dealing with them (Keller & Siegrist, 2010). So, persons with lower self-esteem have higher tendency to interpret difficulties in life as signs of their lower abilities. Unlike them, persons with higher self-esteem connect such situations less with themselves and more with situational circumstances, and as a result they cope with them better. According to this, it can be assumed that persons with disabilities trigger less insecurity and stress in persons with higher self-esteem, so persons with higher self-esteem have more favourable attitudes toward persons with disabilities than people with lower self-esteem (Keller & Siegrist, 2010).

There is a lack of information on students' attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons in the literature. Students of helping professions will be direct providers of educational and rehabilitation programmes for the visually impaired persons, while students of various professions, both helping and non-helping, will be future colleagues or employers of the visually impaired persons. Therefore students are potential enforcers of the integration processes that could help inclusion of the visually impaired persons in the labour market and give them opportunity for a (more) successful professional life (Lewis & Patterson, 1998). This is the reason why their attitudes are in focus of this paper.

## The Purpose of the Study

In order to examine potential correlates of students' attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons, four objectives were set in this research: (1) to explore possible differences in attitudes between university students of helping and non-helping professions; (2) to examine possible differences in attitudes concerning students'

contacts with visually impaired persons and (3) concerning the experience students had in volunteering; and (4) to investigate relationship between students' self-esteem and their attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons.

According to the elaborated theoretical background, it was hypothesised: (1) that university students of helping professions have more favourable attitudes toward employed visually impaired people than students of non-helping professions; (2) that students who have (had) contacts with visually impaired persons have more favourable attitudes toward them than students without such contacts; (3) that students with experience in volunteering have more favourable attitudes toward employed visually impaired people than students without experience in volunteering; and (4) that students with higher self-esteem have more favourable attitudes toward visually impaired persons than students with lower self-esteem.

## Method

### Participants

There were 427 persons aged 18 – 32 years ( $M = 20.7$ ;  $SD = 1.61$ ) included in the study in Croatia, 340 female and 87 male. They were university students attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the bachelor cycle from seven study groups, divided to students of *helping* professions (*Table 1*): teaching, social work, education, rehabilitation and physiotherapy, and *non-helping* professions (*Table 1*): agronomy, economy, electrical engineering and computing.

According to their contacts or interactions with persons with visual impairment, almost two thirds of all students report to have (had) them (*Table 1*), and according to the experience in volunteering almost half of them are or have been involved in a civil society organisation, initiative or a religious organisation's work (*Table 1*). Three quarters of these students had a more specific experience in volunteering, related to human rights, persons with disabilities or psychosocial work (*Table 1*).

### Description of Variables

*Attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons scale* (acronym SZS in Croatian) was used. It was constructed in the Croatian language (Stančić, Tonković, & Zovko, 1979). The scale was constructed from the basis of 400 opinions about employed visually impaired persons. The sample comprised people of various professional backgrounds. Among these initial 400 opinions 46 statements were chosen according to different criteria. Finally the scale consists of 24 statements, with the test-retest reliability of 0.73.

**Table 1.** Sample size according to study group, contacts and experience in volunteering

Variable		N	%
Study group	Helping professions	280	65.6
	Non-helping professions	147	34.4
Contacts with visually impaired persons	With contacts	250	62.3
	Without contacts	151	37.7
Experience in volunteering	Have experience	203	48.0
	Do not have experience	220	52.0
Specific experience in volunteering	Have experience	155	76.4
	Do not have experience	48	23.6

Example of a favourable statement: *Visually impaired persons show differences in capabilities as persons without visual impairment.*

Example of an unfavourable statement: *Visually impaired persons have more conflicts with other workers than persons without visual impairment.*

It is a Thurstone type of scale and participants have to choose only five of 24 statements they mostly agree with. Each statement has an ascribed value, not visible to the participants. These values can range from 125 to 1044; the higher the value, the more favourable the attitude.

Contacts with visually impaired persons were examined with a YES-NO type of question: *Have you ever had contacts/interaction with a visually impaired person?*

Experience in volunteering was explored with two YES-NO type of questions: *Have you ever been involved in any civil society organisation, civil initiative or religious organisation's work? If YES, was/is it related to human rights, persons with disabilities or psychosocial work?*

Self-esteem was measured with Rosenberg's scale. It consists of 10 Lickert type items, ranging from 0 (lowest) to 4 (highest). Total score can, therefore, range from 0 to 40; the higher the value, the higher the self-esteem. Its reliability in this study, estimated with Cronbach alpha, was 0.84. Example of an item: *I feel that I have a number of good qualities.*

## Procedure

Data were collected in a larger survey that examined factors influencing attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons. The questionnaire was administered in two largest cities in Croatia – Zagreb and Rijeka during regular lectures of various

subjects. Taking part in the study was anonymous and voluntarily. Questionnaire administration lasted for 10-15 minutes.

## Results and Discussion

In order to explore students' attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons related to their study group, contacts with visually impaired persons, experience in volunteering and self-esteem *t*-test was performed for each pair of groups. Results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Differences in students' attitudes regarding their study group, contacts with visually impaired persons, experience in volunteering and self-esteem

Variable		Attitudes		
		M SD	N	t df p
Study group	Helping professions	809.0 101.96	280	2.94 224
	Non-helping professions	769.7 144.30	147	0.004
Contacts with visually impaired persons	With contacts	807.4 100.99	250	-2.04 246
	Without contacts	781.0 138.86	151	0.043
Experience in volunteering	Have experience	798.6 100.80	203	-0.38 408
	Do not have experience	794.4 131.13	220	0.71
Specific experience in volunteering	Have experience	803.9 100.11	155	-1.98 162
	Do not have experience	771.9 139.65	99	0.05
Self-esteem	Higher	790.8 135.63	79	-0.23 161
	Lower	786.4 114.56	84	0.821



## Attitudes and Education for Helping and Non-Helping Professions

In order to examine possible differences in attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons between university students of helping and university students of non-helping professions, *t*-test for two independent samples was performed. Results (Table 2) show that the students of helping professions have, on average, more favourable attitudes than the students of non-helping professions.

A further, more thorough research of the possible differences was done on the particular scale statements. Chi-square test was used for comparison of the frequencies between the students of helping and the students of non-helping professions for each statement related to the employed visually impaired persons. Results show that both groups of students chose the same five statements as the statements they mostly agree with, with the highly similar ranking:

- Every visually impaired person is capable for some profession.
- Visually impaired persons show differences in capabilities as much as persons without visual impairment.
- Employed visually impaired persons easier live with visual impairment than the unemployed visually impaired persons.
- Visual impairment is a barrier for achieving good working results only for specific work places.
- Visually impaired persons are more persistent than the persons without visual impairment.

However, some significant differences related to particular statements appeared:

- 1) More students of **non-helping professions** think that *a visually impaired person can independently solve difficulties at the working place* ( $\chi^2 = 4.40$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.035$ ); *Visually impaired persons cannot be as well trained for work as persons without visual impairment* ( $\chi^2 = 4.93$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.026$ ); and that *visually impaired persons are dependent on their environment* ( $\chi^2 = 13.25$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ).
- 2) More students of **helping professions** think that *it is most appropriate for the visually impaired persons to work among persons without visual impairment* ( $\chi^2 = 5.05$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.025$ ); and that *visually impaired persons are as different in their capabilities as persons without visual impairment* ( $\chi^2 = 6.78$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.009$ ).

Although both groups of students express, in general, favourable attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons and both groups choose the same five statements as the statements they mostly agree with, the results confirm the first hypoth-

esis, that university students of helping professions have more favourable attitudes toward employed visually impaired people than students of non-helping professions. The explanation for the average more favourable attitudes reported by the students of helping professions can be related to two reasons. One reason, as Holland (1997) suggests, refers to personality influences on the choice of profession. When taken into consideration that high salaries and large availability of jobs for the helping professions cannot be the appealing factors for a young person to choose such a type of profession (in Croatia), it leads to a conclusion that students of helping professions have chosen their professions because of the higher intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation relies on various aspects of personality (e.g. personality traits, abilities, interests, etc.), so choosing a helping profession certainly reflects these aspects (Myers, 1993). On the other hand, attitudes reflect a person's cognitive, emotional and behavioural tendencies (Myers, 1993), relying on beliefs, knowledge, information, level of emotional involvement, etc. So there is a basis to believe that students of helping professions have congruent attitudes and professional choice toward higher sensitivity for the issues of persons with disabilities, in general, and therefore for the employed visually impaired persons, as well.

The second reason for these more favourable attitudes reported by the students of helping professions should be their more intensive university training in the field of persons with disabilities. Although all the students were on their early levels of university education, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the bachelor cycle, the curricula for the helping and non-helping professions are expected to differ in the core profession-related subjects at all levels. The training for helping professions specifically aims to extinguish any possible discrimination against persons with disabilities and at the same time to encourage them to take as active role in the society as possible. Having that in mind, the more frequent choice of statements that emphasise equal opportunities for the visually impaired persons by the students of helping professions is understood.

## Attitudes and Contacts

For the second objective, examining of the possible differences in the attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons concerning students' contacts or interaction with visually impaired persons, again *t*-test for two independent samples was performed. Results reveal (*Table 2*) that students who had contacts have somewhat more favourable attitudes what confirms the hypothesis.

Again, a more thorough investigation of the possible differences was done regarding the particular statements of the scale. Chi-square test was used for comparing the frequencies between students with and students without contacts with visual-

ly impaired persons. Results show that both groups chose the same five statements as those they mostly agree with (same as helping/non-helping professions). However some significant differences were found:

- 1) More students **with contacts** presume that *there are as many egoists among visually impaired persons as in the general population* ( $\chi^2 = 4.04$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.044$ ) and that *visually impaired persons are as different in their capabilities as persons without visual impairment* ( $\chi^2 = 4.33$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.038$ );
- 2) More students **without contacts** with visually impaired persons consider that *visually impaired persons are more likely to change work places than workers with normal sight* ( $\chi^2 = 0.69$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) and that *visually impaired persons depend more on other people's support* ( $\chi^2 = 9.05$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ).

Students who have or had contacts with visually impaired persons have slightly more favourable attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons than students without contacts. However, there is no information about the quantity and quality of the contacts students have (had) with visually impaired persons. The more detailed analysis reveals that students with contacts have a more realistic viewpoint of employed persons with visual impairment. The more realistic viewpoint refers primarily to the attitude that among visually impaired persons there are as many different people as in the general population. Such a viewpoint can prevent from making generalisations and stereotypes about people that share only one thing – visual impairment, and visual impairment does not predict what characteristics as workers these people will demonstrate. This supports one of recommendations for overcoming the attitudinal barriers to employment: it is beneficial to increase contacts between employers and persons who are visually impaired (Wolffe & Candela, 2002; Crudden, Sansing, & Butler, 2005).

## Attitudes and Experience in Volunteering

For the third objective, examining of the possible differences in the attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons concerning students' experience in volunteering, again *t*-test for two independent samples was performed. Results do not reveal any significant differences (Table 2) between students who report to have experience in volunteering and those who report not to have it.

When explored how many students of helping and non-helping professions had experience in volunteering, data show that 57.8% of students in helping and only 29.5% of students of non-helping professions reported to have had it ( $\chi^2 = 30.70$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ).

Like in the previous section, a more thorough investigation of the possible differences was done regarding the particular statements of the scale. Results show that

both groups chose the same five statements as those they mostly agree with, even with the same ranking. However two significant differences were found:

- 1) More students **with experience in volunteering** think that *there are as many egoists among visually impaired persons as in the general population* ( $\chi^2 = 9.98$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.002$ );
- 2) More students **without experience in volunteering** presume that *visually impaired persons are dependent on their environment* ( $\chi^2 = 4.28$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.039$ ).

The lack of differences in attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons between students with and students without experience in volunteering did not support the hypothesis. The explanation for this result can probably be found in the fact that the question is rather general, and that both quality and quantity of the experience in volunteering should be further examined. Namely, somebody's experience in volunteering could be related to the office work, environmental issues, cultural heritage etc., not having to do anything directly with people. That is why students with experience in volunteering were further asked about more specific experience in volunteering, and then were divided in two groups: those that have it and those who do not have it.

Specific experience in volunteering was defined as experience in volunteering related to human rights, persons with disabilities or psychosocial work. In this more detailed analysis, results show that students with specific volunteering experience have, on average, more favourable attitudes than the students who did not have such involvement (*Table 2*), confirming so the hypothesis.

When explored how many students of helping and non-helping professions had specific experience in volunteering, data show that 85% of students in helping professions reported to have specific experience in volunteering, compared to only 44.2% students of non-helping professions ( $\chi^2 = 33.56$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ).

Further exploration related to particular statements reveals no differences between the two groups related to the five statements they mostly agree with (also the ranking is the same). However, more students **without specific experience in volunteering** think that *visually impaired persons are educated only for simple jobs* ( $\chi^2 = 5.08$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.024$ ).

Students with specific experience in volunteering have slightly more favourable attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons than students without such experience probably because of three reasons. One reason can be related to their sensibility and pro-social work. However, the causal relationship cannot be determined, but very likely their sensibility and pro-social tendencies urged them to become volunteers in the specific areas and this experience, in return, reinforced their

sensibility and pro-social orientation. Being sensitive and pro-socially oriented, they also have slightly more favourable attitudes toward persons with visual impairment.

The second reason is very likely same as in the section related to helping and non-helping professions. There is certainly a high personality influence on choosing civil society activism in a particular field (e.g. human rights, people with disabilities, psychosocial work, etc.). Also the high percentage of students that have chosen helping professions that have experience in volunteering in such fields only confirms Holland's (1997) hypothesis on relationship of personal influence on the choice of profession. For sure voluntary and personal contact with a person with a disability satisfies some of the volunteer's needs, such as the need to be useful, helpful, powerful, satisfied, appreciated, etc.

The third reason is related with more realistic understanding of situations of persons with disabilities because of direct experience in volunteering.

Students of non-helping professions are future employers and colleagues of persons with visual impairment. In order to overcome barriers for employment of the visually impaired persons it would be useful to provide these students with some basic information and experience in volunteering in the field of human rights, persons with disabilities and psychosocial work.

## Attitudes and Self-Esteem

Students' self-esteem scores ranged from 10 to 40, with  $M = 30.46$  and  $SD = 5.50$ , showing a shift toward higher levels. In order to answer to the fourth objective – to investigate relationship between university students' self-esteem and their attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons, students were divided in two groups: the higher self-esteemed group comprised students whose score on Rosenberg's scale was higher than 1  $SD$  above  $M$ , while the lower self-esteemed group comprised students whose score was lower than 1  $SD$  below  $M$ . So the higher self-esteemed group consisted of 79 students (18.5%) and the lower self-esteemed group consisted of 84 students (19.7%).

Results did not reveal significant differences (*Table 2*) in attitudes toward employment of visually impaired persons between the lower and the higher self-esteem group. Further, both self-esteem groups chose the same five attitudes as in the previous sections.

However, few differences were found:

- 1) More students with **lower self-esteem** find *sheltered employment as the most appropriate working place for visually impaired persons* ( $\chi^2 = 3.91$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.048$ ) and that *visually impaired persons are as different in their capabilities as persons without visual impairment* ( $\chi^2 = 4.35$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.037$ ).

- 2) More students with **higher self-esteem** presume that *visual impairment is a barrier for achieving good working results only for specific work places* ( $\chi^2 = 13.17$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ).

Correlation between self-esteem and the attitudes was calculated and it confirms the lack of connectedness ( $\rho = 0.07$ ;  $p = 0.13$ ).

The probable explanation for the lack of connectedness between students' self-esteem and their attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons is a narrow range of self-esteem in the sample. It ranged from 10 to 40 (the possible range is from 0 to 40), and the mean value is as high as 30.46. University students are probably a selected population; it is very likely that university students have higher self-esteem than their peers who do not pursue higher education. It may be that more persons with higher self-esteem enrol universities, but it can also be that higher education increases self-esteem, so the causal relationship can go in both directions.

## Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that more favourable attitudes toward persons with visual disability can be connected with helping professions, with contacts with persons who have such impairment, as well as with volunteering experience in the fields of human rights, disabilities and psychosocial work. Prosocial tendencies and intrinsic motivation, as well as university training seem to play major roles in creating and/or maintenance of more favourable attitudes toward people with disabilities.

It is very important that nowadays students that are prospective experts in helping professions do have favourable attitudes. Namely, they are individuals that will be requested to support persons with disabilities in their employment, rehabilitation, education, job adjustment, coaching, mentoring, monitoring, supervision, etc. While doing all this, experts in helping professions will often have to confront and cope with unfavourable attitudes toward people with disabilities that are present in the working environment.

Results related to the first three objectives support recommendations for overcoming the attitudinal barriers to employment of persons with disabilities that fall in two broad categories: 1) those directed toward educating employers about visual impairment and how it affects functioning (Skočić Mihić & Pinoza Kukurin, 2009) and 2) those directed toward increasing contact between employers and persons who are visually impaired (Wolffe & Candela, 2002; Crudden, Sansing, & Butler, 2005). Related to the first category, in order to more sensitise students of non-helping professions as potential future employers or colleagues of persons with visual impairment, it would be useful to provide them with specific information on disabled



persons (about their potentials, positive job experiences, information on technologies for visually impaired persons) (Owens, 2008; Kiš-Glavaš, Majsec Sobota, Sokač, Gavrilović, & Sobota, 2008). Related to the second category, it would be useful to encourage students to engage in voluntary work in the fields of human rights, persons with disabilities and psychosocial work, for example in courses at their universities.

Based on the obtained results in this study, several recommendations for further research can be offered. It would be useful to analyse specific attitudes toward people with visual impairment and disabilities in general among students of helping professions in order to tackle the unfavourable ones and reinforce the favourable ones during their university training. It would be interesting to further examine the nature in both, quantity and quality of the experience in volunteering and attitudes toward employed visually impaired persons. In this study attitudes were examined by paper-and-pencil method. In certain situations attitudes which are expressed verbally may bear little relationship to expressed behaviour. This is one of the problems which continues to plague attitude research and could influence results in this study (Vargo & Semple, 1988). And finally, having in mind the time when the SZS was constructed, it might be good to re-examine the statement values of the scale and check whether they have changed over the time.

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## **Jesu li obrazovanje, volontiranje, kontakti i samopoštovanje povezani sa stavovima studenata i studentica prema zaposlenim osobama oštećena vida?**

### **Sažetak**

Stavovi prema osobama s invaliditetom uvelike utječu na njihovu integraciju i zapošljavanje te je stoga korisno istražiti s čime mogu biti povezani. Ciljevi ovog rada su ispitati stavove studenata i studentica prema zaposlenim osobama oštećena vida s obzirom na to (1) studiraju li u programima pomažućih ili nepomažućih struka; (2) jesu li ili nisu imali kontakte s osobama oštećena vida; (3) jesu li ili nisu imali iskustvo volontiranja; te (4) kolika je razina njihovog samopoštovanja. U istraživanje je bilo uključeno 427 studenata i studentica ( $M = 20.7$  godina) sa sedam studijskih grupa u Hrvatskoj. Stavovi su ispitani Skalom stavova prema zaposlenim slijepim osobama (SZS), o kontaktima i volontiranju bila su postavljena tri pitanja zatvorenog tipa, a samopoštovanje je ispitano Rosenbergovom skalom. Rezultati pokazuju da (1) studentice i studenti pomažućih struka, (2) oni koji su imali kontakte s osobama oštećena vida, kao i (3) oni s volonterskim iskustvom povezanim s ljudskim pravima, psihosocijalnim radom i osobama s invaliditetom imaju povoljnije stavove prema zaposlenim osobama oštećena vida. Nisu utvrđene značajne razlike u stavovima s obzirom na razinu samopoštovanja studentica i studenata (4).

**Ključne riječi:** formalno obrazovanje; izbor zanimanja; kontakti; samopoštovanje; volonterski rad