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Isolation: Willingness of Disabled Person to Integrate with its Community in the Context of Relationship after Disabled due to Accidents

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to observe the ability of accident-caused disabled individual to integrate within their surroundings, especially in terms of social relationships. Disabled are synonym with their tendency to isolate themselves from the community. They are also prone to place a barrier when it comes to relationships within the community. Three main focuses emphasized in this study were isolation, willingness to integrate within the society and contributing factors for such behavior. The study involved six respondents and the data collected was based on semi structured interview.

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Keywords: Isolation; willingness of disabled person to integrate; behavior; social relationship; boundaries to relationship

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, it is estimated that more than 1% of its residents are handicapped since born, due to accidents or caused by accidents (JKMM, 2009). Disability experienced by these patients has brought all kind of sensitive issues among themselves and the surrounding society. Disabled person are very synonym with psychological, emotional and social problems (Adi, 2001). They are extremely exposed to sensitive issues that are less felt by the normal population. Problems that are normally attached with this group are sensitive, shyness, lack of confidence, isolation (refusing to connect with their surroundings) and etc. This statement is also supported by another study done by Paw (2005), about disabled person generally which is an individual who experience disability often shows negative symptoms such as emotional stress, anxiety, depression, isolation, lack of self confidence, career, personal, social, peer and family problems. Didi (2008) stated that adults who are disabled will show general reactions such as shock, distress, denial, depression, anger, acceptance and adaption. However, Environmental and Functional model suggested that many of the difficulties of disability are located outside the individual, specifically within the environment and its functional requirements (Wolfensberger, 1972). There are two examples illustrate this term (a) the physical inaccessibility of environment and (b) the attitudes of the people without disabilities toward disability

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and people with disability (Smart, 2004). Furthermore, research conducted by ADA shown that many of the problems and obstacles experienced by people with disabilities are due to the environments. Effect from these problems may cause the disabled to refuse to face people around them, especially in the context of social relationship.

When it comes to social relationships, the first thing that encounters our mind is of the society's stigma towards the disabled. The society often shows negative attitudes towards them, especially in social relationships. Sociopolitical Model refuses to accept the inferior, dependent, and stigmatizing or disability where disability is defined as a social construction in the limitations and disadvantages experiences by people with disabilities have nothing to do with the disability but are only social constructions and therefore unwarranted. In other words, stigma, prejudice, discriminations, inferiority, and handicap not inevitable, natural, or unavoidable consequences of disabilities. Furthermore, they are also viewed as having obstacle within the environment they live in (Julie & David, 2006). This means that the model emphasize that the problem faced by the disabled does not have any relationship with the disability that they experience, but the society that they live in. Ismail (2008) stated that the social prejudice is one of the elements alienating the disabled from social life in Turkey where disabled people are excluded from society, educational, employment or cultural activity areas. He added that disability has always been a phenomenon which is perceived with prejudices.

In Malaysia, the society also has prejudice towards the handicapped by assuming that they do not have the ability to stand on their own (Hasiah & Husaini, 2006). Prejudice of members of one group against of another has long existed and is a classic topic in social psychology (Myers, 2002). Schneider (2001) said that institutionalized discrimination occurs when the limited mobility or disability of a group of people keeps them at the poverty level due to lack of available occupational opportunities. So, the mere disability of these people which other may dislike becomes the reason why people discriminate against them. Therefore, many from the normal society seem to show denial attitudes towards the disabled. Therefore, an uneasy feeling will exist within the disabled in their attempt to communicate and interact with the normal society especially people who are significant to them. They felt that they are not on the same level and are not accepted in the normal population. Therefore, it is difficult for them to integrate with their surroundings, especially in the context of social relationship either with family, peers, colleague or the surrounding social. Maylynn and Eleanor (2006) said that people with disabilities are human, and as a human they should not be hidden because they deserve all the rights and amenities effort to others in the community.

This study was performed in order to observe isolation phenomenon within the disabled which led them to be unprepared to face the surrounding society. Do they place a boundary between themselves and the normal surroundings until they try to deny the existence of significant person in their lives? Furthermore, this study also try to observe the preparedness for these disabled person to integrate with their surroundings and what is the factors which stimulate them to behave like so.

2. Purpose of the Study

The main objectives of this study are to determine whether the disabled who experiences physical disability due to accident will isolate themselves from their surrounding society. Isolation attitude has caused the disabled to be unprepared to connect with their surroundings especially in the context of social relationships. Surroundings meant here include family, peers and colleague, and the surrounding society. Do these people place boundaries to relationships with their significant people? Finally, this study was performed in order to determine factors which encouraged them to be prepared to face and connect with the surrounding society.

3. Methodology

There are four subtopics which will be discussed in this chapter, which are respondents, study procedures, interviews and finally data analysis of the interviews. Details on the subtopics are as follows:

3.1 Respondents

This study includes six disabled individuals who experience physical disabilities due to accidents. Choosing criteria for these individuals includes disabled person who have excellent hearing and ability to talk. These criteria limits were set so that the respondents are able to hear and deliver responses as the study was performed. There are

three disabled men and women respectively who are involved in this study. Respondents in this study are individuals who are physically disabled due to accidents and are involved in rehabilitation at a rehabilitation centre in Selangor.

3.2 Study procedures

The procedure of this study includes gaining data from the respondents. There are several steps which need to be done to gain data needed in this study. The first step in which needed to be done is to obtain approval from the responsible party who manage the disable, which is Social Welfare Department of Malaysia (JKMM). The time and date for the study will be decided after approval from the responsible party was obtained. Approval is needed so that these studies will not interfere the classes or courses in which the group need to attend. Furthermore, the approval and general view on the rehabilitation centre can help in the process for obtaining suitable respondents for this study.

Interview sessions take at least 10 to 15 minutes for each respondent. Details on ethics and study procedure were explained to the respondents in order to prevent from any problems that might arise while interviews were in session. Respondents were then handed with agreement forms to sign as an agreement to cooperate in this study prior to the interviews. Questions were given, where it revolves on issues such as isolations, preparedness to meet the society and factors encouraging them to behave like so. Respondents will answer the questions openly accordingly to their experiences since disabled.

3.3 Interviews

Results for this study are gained from partially structured interviews, accordingly to the questions which are constructed for answering a few question of study. While the interview sessions are being held, respondents are free to state anything that they feel or experience and every statement or act resulted from these reactions will be noted by the researchers as data or crucial information. According to Rabkin and Klein (1987), the usage of interviews can be used to obtain more relevant information. Furthermore, qualitative results can also be gained from implicit and explicit behaviours as well as from speaking intonations (Rehm 1987).

There are five questions that are addressed to the respondents, which are:

1. Do you prefer to isolate yourself?
2. How are your relationship with family, peers and surrounding society after you are became disabled?
3. Do you place a boundary in relationships with environment or society?
4. Are you prepared to face the society after being disabled?
5. What are the factors which make you prepared to face the society especially those who are significant to you?

3.4 Analysis of interviews

This study uses qualitative methods entirely. Therefore, results from interviews performed will be using term context analysis method. This method can be seen as very complex for researchers are needed to analyse results from interviews entirely (Baxter, 1994). According to Noraini (2010), qualitative data are usually abundant and came from all sorts of sources. Furthermore, data collection process will never end even though analysis process has taken place. Instead, the data collection process will continue subsequently so as incomplete data will be improved until the new data will no longer give any understanding and improvements. Collected data from recording tapes and notes were listened and read repeatedly to understand the containing terms.

Generally, analysis for this study will follow approaches as used by Miles and Huberman (1994) who places four major components at qualitative data analysis stage. The major components are organizational and discarding of data, data displays, results and approval. In collection stage, every data from interviews were collected and reduction of data will take place when the same data are combined according to recognized codes (Noraini, 2010). This step can be performed when researchers read the notes repeatedly and understands the notes and recordings. At the same time, researcher will prepare important notes accordingly to describe the recognized terms. Finally, the researcher can process and reorganise the data accordingly to the terms as pictured to answer the five questions.

4. Results

The analysis resulted that there are five themes with eleven sub-themes. The picture of the theme and subtheme are given in Table I, presented in the text below and illustrated by quotations from the interview text.

Table I. Overview of themes and sub-themes derived from the analysis of the interviews (n=6)

Theme	Sub-theme
Isolation	Happens at the early stage after becoming disabled Thought that isolation is better than being extrovert Afraid might felt hurt towards those surrounding them Afraid of assumption by others due to the disabilities
Social relationship with significant people	Family – became more close after disability and being treated in a different way Friends – distant due to isolated by friends Society – feels difficult to connect with the society
Prone to place boundaries/relationship limitation	Afraid of being hurt, feels ashamed and low
Preparedness to face the public	Happens at rehabilitation and realization stage
Encouraging factors to be prepared to face the public	Self – full acceptance of self condition Family Friends Society

4.1 Isolation

Study shows that all respondents will isolate themselves from families, friends and society at early stage after disabled. This happens for they always think that isolation is better rather than connecting with the society for they are afraid that the society cannot accept their deficiencies. Moreover, isolation seems be a better option since they will be protected from being hurt due to the prejudice that people might have towards them. Other than that, one of the respondents stated that he is constantly afraid to socialize for afraid of assumption towards his disability. He said that:

“When I went out of the house, I felt that normal people out there always looked and saying things about my disabilities. This makes me feels embarrassed to go out of the house. And so, I prefer to stay at home with my family. No need to connect with other people and don’t have to feel hurt to the normal group behaviours toward me”

4.2 Social relationship with significant people

There are three elements in social relationship, which are family, peers and the society. All subjects stated that their relationship with families has become tighter after disabled. They also were being treated in different ways as compared to their previous life. They felt that families are very caring and concerned of their health condition, their relationship with other family members as well as protection either at home or outside. This makes them feels more at ease to be at home with their family.

The opposite thing happens in their relationship among friends, including neighbours. Three respondents stated that they lost their friendship as soon as they encountered the accident. They were left by friend who previously always hanging around with them. Therefore, they try to avoid from meeting these friends who can hurt them. They became pickier at making friends for they are afraid at being left behind in the future. The same goes with the society. Two of six respondents stated that they have a hard time connecting with other people due to their disability. This disability limits them from the outside world. Furthermore, they also stated that families also prevent them from socializing with the society for they are afraid they might get hurt with some of the society who are insensitive towards re disabled. So, to prevent unnecessary things, they prefer to stay at home instead of going out even with families. According to one of the respondents, their families are too protective until they have to be sent

and invited wherever they want to go. The objective is so that they are protected from the negative stigma the society has towards the disabled.

4.3 Prone of placing boundaries/relationship limitations

Four of the respondents do not place any boundaries or relationship limitations with their significant people. This happens because they think it is unnecessary to place a boundary since they still have families who always supporting them socially, emotionally and physically. However, two of the respondents felt that they have placed relationship boundaries with their environment for they are afraid of being hurt, embarrassed to integrate and feeling low due to the disability they are experiencing. These people felt that these boundaries are necessary to prevent them from being exposed to the environment.

4.4 Preparedness to face the society

This preparedness happens at the rehabilitation and realization stage. A lot of the disabled realize this after about a year after disabled. This happens since at the earlier stage they still unable to accept their loss. However, they start to realize the importance of socializing so that they will no longer felt “unable” to be friends with the normal population. This feeling was shared by one of the subject who stated that after he became disabled, he felt that he only eligible to be friends with those who are in the same league and not with the normal population. However, he started to realize that he needs to integrate with the outside world so that he can improve himself from the negative to be more positive.

4.5 Factors encouraging for connecting with surrounding society

From interviews performed, it was found that there are four major factors which encourage preparedness to face the society including themselves, families, friends and their surrounding people. Two of the respondents felt that the main agent which helps them prepared to face the society especially people who are significant are themselves. For them, they have to be open towards themselves and accept all lacking without thinking what people might think of them. They also think that everyone have lacking and advantage and there should be interactions between the two parties so they will not felt left out.

This study also found that five of the respondents stated that they are ready to face the society after obtaining support and advice from families including foster families. For them, families play important role in forming courage in themselves so that they are able to accept themselves and the society entirely. From here, they try to be more open and prepare to integrate with the environment. They always go out with families. They also do not stay at home and abandon the outside world. Furthermore, they also were advised by families to be more open with themselves.

Peers also play an important role in order to help subjects to connect with the environment. This study showed that four of the respondents stated that friends are among those who supported them. Supports stated here includes the readiness of friends to accept them after being disabled and by not discriminate them from the normal population. Furthermore, emotional support also gives them the courage to accept their surroundings entirely. The presence of friends also helps them to feel that they are not alone.

Finally, there are supports from the society itself. Two out of the six respondents stated that they are able to be accepted by the society after the society showed positive attitude towards them. With this positive acceptance, therefore the respondents will be able to accept the society in their lives.

5. Discussions

Results gained from this study showed that there are various factors which help encourage disabled person to isolate themselves whether from families, friends or surrounding society. Prone of isolation came from the negative feelings toward themselves. The negative feelings and attitudes forced them to place relationship boundaries with their significant people. All recognized themes have significant relationship with each other in order to determine the preparedness of the disabled to integrate with the society in the context of social relationship. It was found that the isolation attitude in disabled person is the cause for other negative attitudes especially in terms of social relationship. Wilson (2003) found that disabled people may themselves also deny and overcompensate in terms of

their own attitudes to their disabilities. However, it is not entirely come from them but also came from other various factors such as families, friends and the surrounding society. Another study done by Ismail (2008) showed that behaviour of society based on social responsibility norms has vital importance in bringing about positive views of the disabled, in increasing the knowledge that able-bodied people have disability, and in preventing the nondisabled from shying away from the disabled. This study showed that the surrounding environment also influence disabled person attitudes.

This study also determined several factors which avoid this group from integrating with their surroundings such as shyness, feeling low and afraid that the society will hurt them. Furthermore, they also feel worried if the society is unable to accept their lacking and disabilities. Most of them also thought that those who are disabled are only eligible to befriend with the same kind and not the normal population. This prejudice attitude has caused them to be more negative with themselves and their surroundings. These attitudes appear at the earlier stage after being disabled, which is in the first year. This situation happens because at that time they still unable to think of the good and the bad side of themselves. However, this attitude will start to ebb away when they can think rationally about themselves and their future. They also like any normal individuals who needs attention, care and love so that they can recreate a new life. Morse et al. (2000) stated that children with disabilities able to normalize in the everyday world by seeking for commonalities to be “like them”, develop their own capabilities, and stretch the limits of their disability by maximizing capabilities.

This study also found out that the disabled actually wants to socialize with the normal population, but they are worried that they will not be accepted by the society. Results from the interviews found out that there are four factors which encourage the disabled to be prepared to face the surrounding society, which are themselves, family, peers and the society itself. This study found that almost all of the respondents received full support from families for the preparation to meet the society. Having a disabled child in a family will definitely have an impact, whether positive or negative on the structure and functionality of the family system, as well as the relationship of the family members with each other and the roles they play within the family (Aksoy & Bercin, 2008). Family plays a very important role in helping the disabled so that they will not feel left out from their surroundings. Study done by Aksoy & Bercin (2008) showed that the relationship of the non-disabled children with their disabled siblings is positive, this positivity decreases when their acceptance and acknowledgement of their disabled siblings is concerned. Morse et.al (2000) said that the child’s ability to use normalizing strategies is evaluates by mothers as they observe their child’s behaviour in the world of “normal”. This means that they allowed the child to venture into the outside world with her guidance and oversight demonstrates the mother’s acknowledgement of the child’s capabilities to normalize. There are various ways used by families to help open up these group so that they can interact with their surroundings, which is by strolling outside the house, attending parties and letting them to connect with the society without setting any limits. Through this, the disabled will have the chance to adapt with all social levels as well as lessen anxiousness and shyness towards the society.

Other than that, peers also play an important role as and agent for them to start integrating with the society. Moral support from peers or colleague also helps them. This statement is also supported by a study done by Yu et al (2005), who found out that good peer relationships make children feel less lonely because their relationships provide social support and a sense of security. In this study, visits from peers have reduced feelings such as embarrassment among the disabled. Furthermore, peers also share the same hobbies and interest with the disabled before being handicapped although at first they might feel a little unease with the relationship. However, the result from this process is the key that helped the disabled to open up themselves to accept the society to integrate with those who have significant relationship with them.

Results from this study also found that the surrounding people also play an encouraging factor to the preparedness among the disabled to integrate with the society. It is also found that one of third from the respondents stated that they starting to be accepted by the society when the society itself plays a role in it. According to them, the society showed concern and even pay a visit at the hospital. Furthermore, there are also some of them who asked about their health whenever they meet up, whether in the shopping complex, restaurants, parks etc. With the positive beginning showed by the society, the disabled will try to accept the society and try to throw away the boundaries which have been built previously. The caring attitude showed by some of the society towards the disabled helped them to feel that they are still acknowledged and appreciated by the society.

As a conclusion, results from this study showed that there are relationships between isolation, disabled person and society with the preparedness to integrate in the context of social relationship. Every event that happen, whether to

the disabled with families, peers and society have the solution is all parties plays its role and respects each other and not having any stigma and prejudice to the disabled. With the openness, psychological issues among the disabled can be overcome.

6. Implications

There are two major implications for this study. Firstly, implications for the disabled themselves and secondly effects to those who are significant to them. After performing this study, the disabled will then be able to determine the reason for why they isolate themselves from the society. After being able to determine the main reason, they start to think of the effect of such attitude towards their future. They even start to think of the solution for the problem. And then they also started to think of how to integrate with the surrounding society in the context of social relationship. This is important so that they will not feel small, lacking even though while in the normal population. Effects to those who are significant to them with the disabled are more prone to realization issues among this group. The society should not have any negative stigma towards them. Furthermore they should offer moral support to the disabled so that they won't felt left out from the normal population especially those with significant relationships. The surrounding society should also be more sensitive with the disabled needs in context of social relationship. With this, they will feel that the society can accept them entirely without any prejudice or having any stigma towards the disabled.

7. Conclusions

Results from this study showed that the majority of the disabled who suffers from physical disability due to accidents often put themselves far from the surrounding society especially peers and colleague and the society. This situation usually happens in the earlier stage after disabled. Isolation from the society happens due to shame and embarrassment. Then they try to place boundaries to relationship with the society. Disability, for them, has caused the society to be unable to accept them and thus discriminate them. These boundaries were also placed because they don't want be feel hurt from the society's attitude who are insensitive towards the handicapped. Therefore, this has resulted the disabled to isolate themselves from their significant people or the surrounding society rather than they have to suppress feelings due to unacceptance from the normal population.

However, the disabled also have the desire to live socially since they think that they need to go out of their world so that they can build a better future and not depend entirely on other people. Therefore, they try to accept themselves and try to make friends with the society so that they can socialize without any problems. From here, they try to prepare for integrating with their surroundings in hope to have the same chance in life as the normal population. From the results from this study, it is found that the main factors which encourage the disabled to integrate with the surrounding society are family. Family plays an important role as a platform to relate and communicate with the surrounding society.

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