

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Attitudes of Special Education Teachers Towards Sexuality of Male Students with Intellectual Disability in Keramat, Kuala Lumpur

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## Abstract:

Positive attitudes of professionals towards the sexuality of male students with intellectual disability (ID) are crucial to promote their healthy sexual development and their sexual rights. Special education teachers are one of the professionals working in close proximity to the students with ID and plays big role in delivering sexuality education to these students. This study aims to examine the attitude of special education teachers towards the sexuality of male students with ID and to identify any relationship between the attitudes of special education teachers towards the sexuality of male students with ID and their demographic characteristics. Cross-sectional quantitative study design with purposive sampling were utilized. Attitudes to Sexuality Questionnaire: Individuals with an ID (ASQ-ID) were distributed to 114 special education teachers in 13 primary and secondary schools in Keramat, Kuala Lumpur. It was found that the special education teachers have positive views towards the sexuality of male students with ID. There is relationship found between attitudes and the age of special education teachers. Future research should consider increasing the sample size and include participants from both rural and urban locations.

**Keywords:** Sexuality, special education teachers, male students, intellectual disability, attitudes

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Persons with ID exhibits significant limitation in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, which originated before the age of 18 [1]. Although persons with ID have normal sexual development and drive, their limitations might cause socially inappropriate sexual expressions and behaviours [2]. It also makes them vulnerable to various social health problems such as sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy [3].

Sexual education is crucial to equip a person with information, skills and positive values which will help them understand and enjoy their sexuality, have safe and satisfying relationships and to be responsible of their own and others' sexual health and well-being [4]. However, the frequency of sexual education among persons with ID is very low. Furthermore, the topics are very limited and superficial, which causes lack of meaningful and comprehensive sexual education for persons with ID [5].

Most professionals hold a restrictive attitude towards the idea of persons with ID being sexual [6]. In Malaysia, sexuality issues are still regarded as negative matter to be discussed openly [7]. This creates a barrier for sexual education for persons with ID.

Various contradicting results were found in earlier literatures. Professionals and members of the general community have positive attitudes towards the sexuality of persons with ID [8]. However, another study that involved professionals

including special educators, working in close proximity to persons with ID have negative attitudes towards issues related to sexuality of persons with ID [9].

The objectives of this current study were i) to determine the attitudes of special education teachers on the sexuality of male students with ID and ii) to identify the relationship between demographic characteristics and attitudes among special education teachers on the sexuality of male students with ID. The results of this study can be used to create a preliminary information in creating sexual education contents for persons with ID in Malaysia.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Study design

This study utilized a quantitative study design by using cross-sectional survey.

### 2.2 Sampling and Population

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. A total of 114 special education teachers working in 13 primary and secondary schools in Keramat, Kuala Lumpur were invited to participate in this study.

### 2.3 Instruments

The questionnaires encompassed socio-demographic questions section and the revised versions of The Attitudes to Sexuality Questionnaire: Individual with and ID (ASD-ID)

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(male version) [10]. ASQ-ID was used to determine the attitudes of special education teachers towards sexuality of male students with ID. It consists of 34 questions comprising eight themes of sexual expression: sexual feelings, sex education, masturbation, personal relationships, sexual intercourse, sterilization, marriage, and parenthood [10]. The items are scored on a 6-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating more positive or accepting attitudes.

## 2.4 Ethical approval

Ethical approvals were gained from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Ministry of Education, Malaysia and Kuala Lumpur Education Department.

## 2.5 Data analysis

The questionnaires were collected three weeks after distributions. The data were then entered using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. Results of normality testing using Shapiro- Wilk test indicated non-normality of the data thus; non-parametric statistical analyses were used.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 58% ( $n=66$ ) of special education teachers responded from 114 questionnaires distributed.

Table 1 shows demographic profile of the participants in this study. Majority or 45.5% of the participants are belong to 30-39 years old group. Only 17% ( $n=11$ ) male teachers participate in this study and the rest or 83% ( $n=55$ ) were female teachers. Majority or 89% ( $n=59$ ) of the teachers were Malay. In term of qualifications, only 27% ( $n=18$ ) have first degree in education, 58% ( $n=38$ ) have degree in special education whilst the rest or 10% ( $n=15$ ) have degree in other field. There was equal number of teachers which was 50% ( $n=33$ ) in primary and secondary schools participated in this study. 13% ( $n=20$ ) of the teachers have immediate family with ID whilst the rest or 80% of the teachers declared that they do not have any immediate family with ID.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of Participants ( $n=66$ )

Characteristics	Frequency ( $n$ )	Percentage (%)
Age		
20-29	7	11
30-39	30	46
40-49	13	20
50-59	16	24
Gender		
Male	11	17
Female	55	83
Marital Status		
Single	11	17
Married	55	83
Race		
Malay	59	89
Others	7	11

Qualifications (Degree)		
Education	18	27
Special Education	38	58
Others	10	15
Teachers in		
Primary school	33	50
Secondary school	33	50
Having immediate family with ID		
Yes	13	20
No	53	80

## 3.1 Attitudes of special education teachers toward sexuality of male students with ID

Table 2 below shows the result for attitudes of special education teachers toward sexuality of male students with ID by using ASQ-ID. The mean total score of all participants was 123.7 (SD =13.86). This shows that the special education teachers have a liberal attitude towards sexuality of male students with ID.

However, the finding of current study opposes with another study which found that professionals working at school for special education in Serbia have conservative views regarding sexuality of person with ID [11]. This might professionals might be more concerned on all the complications and issues that person with IC can face in all aspects of sexual functioning [12]. In addition, a study using semi structured interviews also found that staffs working with people with ID expressed unfavourable attitudes toward their sexuality [13]. They indicated that they were not clear and ready to support sexual relationships of their client [13].

Between the four subscales in ASD-IQ, participants of our study were most positive toward 'sexual rights' of male students with ID with total of mean score of 49.58 (SD=6.70) compared to the other subscales. This is in contrast with a study in Taiwan where participants with ID feels that professionals showed less support for their rights on sexuality [14]. The view of people who are in contact with persons with ID on their sexuality right are critical to improve their sexual autonomy and promoting their care and wellbeing.

The participants of our study responded most negatively in 'self-control' subscales with a mean total score of 9.64 (SD=2.98). This is in contrast with few studies in which their participants acknowledged pharmacological intervention as a means of inhibiting sexual desires among men with ID. In a review, majority of caregivers were found to be prescribing medications to reduce sex drive in male with ID [15]. Allied professionals were also support the use of libido-suppressing drugs amongst person with ID [16]. The use of pharmacological interventions was an effort to prevent people with ID involves in sexual crime due to their deficits in cognitive functioning and emotional regulations [17].

Table 2: Teachers' attitude score on the ASQ-ID subscales toward sexuality of male students with ID ( $n=66$ )

Subscale	Mean	SD
Total Score		
Sexual Rights	49.58	6.70
Parenting	25.86	5.12
Non-reproductive sexual behaviour	15.36	6.10
Self-control	9.64	2.98
Total Scores	123.70	13.86

### 3.2 Associations between attitudes of special education teachers and their demographic variables

Demographic profiles (age, gender, marital status, qualifications, teaching locations and either having immediate family with ID or not) and total score of ASD-ID were tested in identifying the relationships between these variables. Table 3 shows that there were only statistically significant differences between age and attitudes towards sexuality of male with ID with  $p = .02$  and no other associations were observed in other demographic variables.

Age were found to be an influence on attitudes towards sexuality of male with ID, with older adults having more conservative attitudes [18]. Previous studies also shown that age was an important predictor affecting attitudes towards sexuality, where younger participants shows more liberal attitude compared to older participants [19]. This finding is consistent with another study involving nursing students in Turkey that younger people have more liberal attitudes towards sexuality of persons with ID [20]. The availability of information and the role of social media across various people of various age influences their attitudes towards sexuality of persons with ID [21].

The attitudes towards sexuality in male with ID in this study was somewhat positive and there was no different between both sexes. Previous studies testing these variables yield similar findings [22, 23].

The current study also found no relationship between participants' attitude towards sexuality of male with ID and their qualification background. No other study was found in comparing these variables with participants' attitude. However, it is worthy to note that other studies did find that participants from general population, who had lower level of education had a very negative attitude towards the sexuality of persons with ID [14]. This finding is contradicted with another study with group home employees in United State, in which they found that there was no statistically significant difference between attitudinal score and level of education [24]. However, since the information and education on sexuality are more accessible from the Internet and mobile phone nowadays, even people with low level of education can be more sexually aware.

This study found no relationship between participant's attitude towards sexuality of male students with ID and the presence of an immediate family member with ID. Nevertheless, when comparing attitudes by ASQ-ID subscale, it was found that there is relationship on attitudes of Self-Control subscale and having an immediate family member with ID [24]. The reason behind this may be families are the first source for persons with ID to turn for continuous

support, and because family always tries to find balance from stress and crisis brought upon by the person with ID, while also working for their positive development (Aldersey, 2012).

Table 3: Relationships between participants demographic profiles and total ASQ-ID score ( $n=66$ )

Variables	Mean Rank	$p$
Age		
20-29	20.43	0.02*
30-39	38.12	
40-49	40.08	
50-59	25.22	
Gender		
Male	28.41	0.33
Female	34.52	
Marital Status		
Single	36.91	0.52
Married	32.82	
Qualifications (Degree)		
Education	31.31	0.80
Special Education	34.84	
Others	32.35	
Teachers in		
Primary school	36.00	0.29
Secondary school	31.00	
Having immediate family with ID		
Yes	36.00	0.22
No	31.00	

\*sig value  $< 0.05$

## 4. CONCLUSION

The special education teachers in Keramat have a generally liberal and positive views towards the sexuality of male students with ID. It is also noted that there were significant differences between the participant's attitude towards sexuality of male students with ID and the participant's age.

Participants were purposively recruited from special educations setting which have engaged with individuals with ID, hence they had more thought of individuals from this population. With that, we cannot assume/ generalize their attitude from Malaysian general populations.

Malaysia is a country with strong religious beliefs and also cultural norms. The current study did not incorporate these that may influence the attitude toward sexuality in individual with ID. For future research, it would be interesting to include the role of religious beliefs and cultural norms.

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