

## Are We Disabled among The Disabled?: Disability Awareness Among University of Malaya Students

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### Abstract

*Accessibility of Person with Disability (PWD) in institutions of higher learning has brought much attention for university to raise the disability awareness in the campus community. The disability awareness is crucial in promoting the rights and provides equal opportunities to ease the mobility of PWD in university. This study examined the factors related to level of disability awareness among students in University of Malaya. Purposive samples of 269 of undergraduate and postgraduate students were asked to answer the questionnaire in their convenient time in regards with the level of disability awareness. The association between students' demographic background in terms of education level and gender was examined to determine the level of disability awareness among students in University of Malaya. Surprisingly, it was found that the students of University of Malaya showed a moderate level of disability awareness. Thus, the study provides a strong evidence that it is crucial for the university administration to embark on more effective campaign social work programmes among students in the university in which the disability awareness was not at its highest level since the disabled-related issues were only rise since the Paralympic Games 2016. Since the number of disability is expected to increase, therefore, it is crucial for more intervention programmes and comprehensive discussion to be advocate to raise the disability awareness among the society..*

**Keywords:** Disability Awareness, Persons with Disability (PWDs), Disabled, University of Malaya

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### INTRODUCTION

Person with disabilities (PWDs) comprise about ten percent of the world population, which made them as the largest minority. However, throughout the world, they were among of the underprivileged and vulnerable group. It was highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities 2006 that a study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found ninety percent of children with disabilities in developing countries did not attend school. On top of that, the convention also reported in a study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1998, the global literacy rate for adults with disabilities is as low as three per cent. This indicates PWDs have nit been given insufficient attention in terms of education.

One of the most significant long-standing issue is the level of public awareness towards disability-related issues. This includes rights of PWDs with regard to their social inclusiveness in terms of accessibility, mobilization, education and employment

which has become a debatable issue. It is a discrimination against them since there are problems of accessibility in the education and also their mobility in the public places such as shopping complexes, recreational parks and universities unlike their counterparts. Rhoads, Slate and Steger (1994) proposed that educational opportunities include the physical access to buildings and architectural renovations are duly to be given besides ensuring the campuses provide academics accessibility by eliminating attitudinal and programmatic barriers such as modifying instructional methods, policies for admission and academic requirements.

This situation is to be put on alert as Acton (1981) assumed that workers with disabilities are always the last to be hired and the first to be fired through various types of regulations are implemented in countries around the world. Apart from that, Perry (2002) reported that the unemployment rate among people with disabilities in Asia was high which was at eighty percent. Moreover, it was estimated that 20 percent of the world's poorest people are disabled and tend to be regarded in their own communities as the most disadvantaged as reported by the World Bank. This can be further implied that the unemployment percentage among people with disabilities of working age in developing countries is high, which is 80-90%, (Zarocostas, 2005). Therefore, it is crucial to understand that the right to attain proper education until tertiary level and the right to access and to mobilize in the public places affected the opportunity for persons with disabilities to be employed.

Nevertheless, over the years, the disability awareness has attracted much attention as more open discussions about PWDs rights besides the support group's efforts to increase the rights public awareness of disability-related issues. Rezaul Islam (2015) estimated that there will be an increasing number of PWDs due to population ageing, rapid increase of chronic disease and improvement in methodologies to measure disability. He also has proposed a new model of disability as a process of social exclusion to comprehensively include the family level, society and community level besides institutional and state level significantly to encourage the whole public to become aware of the disability related issues. Hence, the PWDs should not be socially excluded from the mainstream development, besides, there is a crucial need to intensify the level of disability awareness among public.

## **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

The Rio Paralympic Games 2016 has remarkably brought attention of Malaysian to acknowledge that disabled people can be successful in their life. The news and social media were pouring with messages of hope, prayers and motivational support for the Paralympic athletes. One of the most significant event was reported that more than

thousands people had gathered at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on 22 September to give a rousing welcome to the Malaysian Paralympic athletes whom brought home three gold medals. Furthermore, it is undeniable that the Paralympic Games promote the disabled people to be included into wider community by providing necessary infrastructure to ensure their mobility and to protect their rights. Earlier, Weed and Dowse (2009) also draw attention in their perspective that Paralympic Games is an important social vehicle to promote social changes for the disabled which include attitudinal, economic, social, political and environmental barriers that have been seen to limit the role of disabled people in society. In recent study by Mataruna, Melo, Range and Guimaraes (2015) opined that Rio Paralympic Games 2016 could change the perception of public towards disability in which it can enhance positive attitudes towards them.

However, the recent development on the level of disability awareness in Malaysia are still at a status quo many are socially ignorant towards disability-related issues since they are not a part of the disability group. Most are not aware of the fact that they may someday become a person with disabilities due to illness or accident. Moreover, in the past few decades, Rezaul Islam (2015) claimed that the disabled has become one of the most neglected development agenda by government and non-government actors. They have always been judged as those who should only receive charity, protection and welfare. For example, Suhaili and Syuhada (2014) highlighted that the public seem to lack basic of good information and experience with disabled. Similarly, Hazreena Husin (2006) also found that campus citizens lacked of awareness and knowledge of the needs of the disabled. Without sufficient knowledge and experiences with the disabled, Bruder and Mogro-Wilson (2006) found that university awareness and attitudes toward people with disabilities may create a culture of acceptance or negativity for disabled students. It was found that the majority of students and faculty felt pity and embarrassment when interacting with dis (Bruder & Mogro-Wilson, 2006).

Recent studies have confirmed that the creation of university environment towards PWDs is crucial to enhance the awareness of students toward disabled. Mariana, Fatimah, Izzati & Mansor (2014) revealed that the awareness of needed programs for people with disabilities was still lacking. The incidence of the need to improve access and facilities concerning on accessibility of young people with disabilities remains low is on the rise such the Minister of Education in explaining this matter said that there is rising concern of this matter. (*The Star*, July 5, 2015). Thus, they argued to pushing off disability awareness training as a vital activity by involving all parties. A university is perceived as a center of education process play a major role in ensuring students' disabilities also gain the opportunity to pursue in the education sector. Regarding this the Deputy of Education Minister, Datuk Mary Yap urged parents

and public of disabled students in the education sector (*The Star*, August 13, 2014). It is crucial to propagate appropriate practices awareness toward person with disabilities, as they also have right to gain benefit and enjoy the campus life without difficulties.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The study aims (1) to examine the level of disability awareness among students in the University of Malaya (2) to identify preferred terms used by students to address the disabled (3) to determine the association between the level of education and gender) with the level of disability awareness (4) to determine the potential of becoming a disabled person due to an illness and accident (5) to propose several recommendations in order to intensify the level of disability awareness among University of Malaya students.

### **Disability Awareness Among University Students**

The disability context proposed in this study refers to the social model of disability referring to the disabling environment and disabled people were empowered as citizens with rights (Rezaul Islam, 2015). The disability also may refer to the situation that hinders people with disabilities from full and effective participation in the society that caused by social prejudice and environmental barriers as the society fails to accommodate and include them in social process (Hashim et. al, 2011). According to Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, 'disabled' include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which may hinder their full and effective participation during interaction in society. There are several categories of people with disabilities. This includes hearing, vision, speech, physical, learning problems, miscellaneous (multiple disabilities) and mental (Official Website of Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, 2016).

Brown (1995) and Olkin (2002) argued that the disability should not only be indicated by a defect within individuals that requires 'fixing and rectification', however, it should be perceived as social and environmental barriers that failed to accommodate (PWDs) needs. Viewed from the aspect of social and cultural paradigm, disability awareness should enable full social, physical and spiritual participation of a person with disabilities in the society when the social and environmental barriers have been removed as suggested by Brown (1995) and Gilson and Depoy (2000). There was a consensus among social scientists such as Reddy and Sukathamalini (2006) and Columna et al. (2009), that the disability awareness should address these key benefits: a) acceptance of the PWDs from other people; b) increase in socialization experiences by the PWDs; c) improvement of the standard of living of the PWDs; and d) enabling the PWDs to live independently.

As highlighted by Rezaul Islam (2015), the social model of disability has been introduced as a reaction opposing the medical model of disability which regards disability as an impairment that needs cure and healing from the medical and paramedical professions. Therefore, in recent years, the social model of disability has been conceptualized with a political approach in the context of disabling environment and disabled people were empowered as citizens with rights (Rezaul Islam, 2015). This social model proposed views the disability in a larger context and regards disability as a process of social exclusion that happened in the family level, community and social level, lastly, institutional and state level.

In the global arena, there were discussions on the issue of disability as a product of social exclusion, however, most studies attempted to indicate that the disabled persons were excluded from the state development agenda because of their own disability, resulting in PWDs to become unaware of their needs and rights. Furthermore, the European Disability Forum (n.d.) highlighted that the problem with lack or limited access to social environment and unemployment, lack or limited access to goods and services, stigmatization of PWDs, lack of adequate training, lack of specialized services, inadequacy in the education systems, lack of economic policies for compensation towards disabled persons and finally living in institutions had resulted to the social exclusion for the PWDs. As a result, the PWDs have been alienated by the society and they often distance themselves from the larger community as society failed to respond to their needs.

The research findings by Scior and Furnham (2011) pointed towards the development and validation of a measured design to assess public's intellectual disability literacy. They developed the Intellectual Disability Literacy Scale (IDLS) to measure the intellectual disability literacy of the public aged between 18 to 78 years old. The IDLS was a good tool to measure the knowledge, belief and social distance to intellectual disability among lay people that helped to identify the potential 13 hindrances to social inclusion. The study was conducted in United Kingdom, India, Hong Kong and Singapore by using convenience sampling through distribution of printed measure and e-recruitment. Two vignettes which are mild intellectual disability, secondly, schizophrenia had been used for the study. It was found that a belief in the environmental causes was correlated with belief in adversity and fate related causes, and lifestyle interventions was positively related with both vignettes. However the IDLS was more suitable for a cross-cultural research and potential clinical use of measure, since the participants were mostly highly educated, young and have access to internet, they were over-represented in the study, and the generalizability is therefore questionable.

Nevertheless, since most empirical studies on disability awareness were focused on teachers, librarians and health professionals (Wilson & Liberman, 2000; Reddy & Sukathamalini, 2006; Sahin & Akyol, 2010), little is known about disability awareness among university students. It is crucial to address disability awareness in order to dispel the negative societal attitude and beliefs which are caused by ignorance (Mullen, 2001). Ison, McIntyre, Rothery, Smithers-Sheedy, Goldsmith and Parsonage (2010) who argued that negative attitudes towards people with disabilities are resulted from the ignorance. Therefore, through discussion on disability issues, it would create a comprehensive environment as Fittippaldi-Wert and Brock (2007) argued that the disability awareness helps to provide people with a better understanding on the challenges faced by the PWDs. Apart from that, the researchers found that awareness programme on disability issue is essential as it leads to a positive attitude towards person with disabilities (Morin et al., 2013). In another study by Ison et al., (2010) they addressed that the awareness program is a way of promoting acceptance, understanding and increase knowledge about different disabilities.

Bruder and Mogro-Wilson (2006) claim that there was minimal research on student perceptions of full participations towards disability awareness in college education. In their study, they investigated on on faculty and student awareness of disabilities on a university campus. These included the student's interaction with the disabled, student's opinion on disability issues, student's perception on how well the faculty treat and provide facilities for person with disabilities and preferred term used by students to indicate disability. The study indicated that generally, students admired PWDs, however, their limited interactions had promptly made them to feel pity, discomfort, embarrassment and awkwardness around PWDs. It also found that majority of students felt that full participation and inclusion towards students with disabilities benefited everyone in the campus. However, majority of the students perceived that more could be done to raise awareness of disability-related issue inside the campus. They highlighted that more than half of the faculty and graduate students who teach did not include disability-related topic in their classroom. This lack of culture of understanding and inclusion for students with disabilities has posed a challenge to the concerned authorities to raise awareness towards the disabled.

### **Association Between Level of Education And Gender With Level of Disability Awareness**

McGinnis (2006) reported that "students who are exposed to diversity and understand the importance of individual differences of any kind, whether it is ability, race, gender, religion or language, are less afraid and more likely to establish relationship, which leads to acceptance and a more positive environment." Previous

research shows that children who have limited knowledge or lack of exposure to individuals with disabilities may differ with those who had regular contact (Antonak & Linveh, 1988). Meanwhile, Yucker (1988) states that this rejecting attitude toward people with disabilities was developed as early as in kindergarten, supported by the findings in the study by Favazza, Phillipson and Kumar (2000). They found that children without disabilities demonstrate negative attitude towards children with disabilities since there is no programme that supports social integration. On contrary, Kaur et al, (2014) found that respondents with higher education or have attended special schools have a higher rating of disability awareness, contradicting Yerevan's (2012) wherein vocational or higher educational institutions did not provide people with additional information or knowledge about disability.

In a more recent study by Bilter (2013), it was found that the change in general education students' perception towards peers with special needs shifted when there was a strategic intervention such as small group counselling session and classroom guidance lessons. He concluded that when school-going children were given more opportunities to share their perceptions, these children were more readily to engage with their peers with disabilities. In fact, a study on the effects of the disability awareness educational program in schools by Williamson (2014) has suggested that it would be beneficial to the school and children if the disability awareness is incorporated into the curriculum. Another suggestion was the disability awareness program could be in the form of simulations, discussions, literature exposures, real-life contact and collaboration as well as role playing. This kind of effort could be enhanced if all the respective parties collaborate to support the input of disability awareness program. McGregor and Forlin (2005) added that there were intervention programmes implemented not only to increase the level of disability awareness, but also to reduce the prejudice and to establish opportunities for social interaction between students with and without disabilities which may be turn the attitudes toward disabled people more favourable.

In a gender-based study conducted by Morris (1993), men felt that their disability prohibited them from living up to society's images about being a man. In partial support of Morris' views, women felt that they received more pity than women without disabilities. Another evidence from the British Social Attitudes Survey (2009) revealed that just over half of women said they were very comfortable with someone with a physical disability or sensory impairment as their boss (56 per cent and 52 per cent respectively) compared with 52 per cent and 45 per cent of men (Staniland, 2009).

## METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out to examine the level of disability awareness among university students. The type of investigation employed for this study is through the correlational study with cross-sectional survey. The use of questionnaires through a self-administered survey was employed to gather data from the undergraduate and postgraduate students in the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. For this study, the total population refers to all students in the University of Malaya, which consisted of 17,580 students as at February 2016 as recorded in the University of Malaya Official Website (2016). As suggested by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) for a population of over 10,000 at 95 percent confidence level, a sample of 370 was the appropriate for the study. Thus, a number of 370 questionnaires were distributed to the students in the University of Malaya to fulfil this study. The use of questionnaires as a data collection method was appropriate as it costs less expensive and it motivated the respondents. The questionnaires were printed and English language was used as a medium of communication in the questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent directly to the undergraduate and postgraduate students in expecting that they would complete the questionnaires. On top of it, the study ensured that the questionnaires distributed to them are kept confidentially and will not result any bad effect towards their academic performance in relying that this research was only meant for academic purposes. The constructs in this study were measured using Likert scales drawn from existing study. Hence, the level of disability awareness with a 5-item scale were adopted and adapted from (Bruder & Mogro-Wilson, 2006), 2007 Disability Awareness Survey Findings” by The Council of Disability Awareness (2007) and Yung Yau and Wai Kin Lau (2015).

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Demographic Respondents

In this study, the population of all undergraduate and postgraduate students in University of Malaya as at February 2016 was 17,580 students. For a number of population more than 10,000, the proposed sample by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) is 370. The calculation of total responses rate is as below:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Total response rate} &= \frac{\text{Total number of responses}}{\text{Total number in sample} - \text{ineligible}} \\
 &= \frac{269}{370 - 4} \\
 &= \frac{269}{366} \\
 &= 73.5 \text{ percent}
 \end{aligned}$$

Table 1 shows the summary of demographic profiles of all the 269 respondents. Respondents who were between 18 until 30 years old above were chosen and most of them aged 21 to 23 years old. 23 percent of the respondents were males and 77 percent were females. Majority of the respondents were Malays and Muslim. 87.7 percent of the respondents were undergraduate students and most of them stayed in residential college. Moreover, based on the result, it was found that majority of students in University of Malaya were not categorized as the disabled.

Table 1: *Summary of Demographic Background of Students*

Demographic Background of Students	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	62	23.0
Female	207	77.0
Ethnicity		
Malays	227	84.4
Chinese	15	5.6
Indian	14	5.2
Others	13	4.8
Age		
18-20 years old	72	26.8
21-23 years old	178	66.2
24-26 years old	13	4.8
27-29 years old	4	1.5
30 years old and above	2	0.7
Religion		
Islam	237	88.1
Buddha	12	4.5
Christian	7	2.6
Hindu	13	4.8
Others		
Current academic undertaking in University of Malaya		
Foundation	24	8.9
Degree	236	87.7
Masters	5	1.9
PhD	4	1.5
Staying in residential college		
Yes	153	56.9
No	116	43.1
A person with disability(s)		
Yes	11	4.1
No	258	95.9

Meanwhile, based on the reported results in Table 2, out of 269 respondents, 11 possessed various kind of disability, ranging from visual impairment (3), followed by physical impairment (2), unknown (2), intellectual impairment (2), hearing impairment (1), Myasthenia Gravis (MG), and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Table 2: *Summary of Respondents' Category of Impairments*

Category of Impairments	Frequency
Visual impairment	3
Physical impairment	2
Intellectual impairment	2
Hearing impairment	1
Myasthenia Gravis (MG)	1
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	1
Unknown	2

### Level of Disability Awareness among University of Malaya Students

In determining the level of disability awareness among students, the mean was been calculated and used. Results in Table 3 show that the mean score for level of disability awareness was above average (M 17.84, SD 2.96, N=269). The level of disability awareness was represented by three categories which are low, moderate and high respectively. This indicates that most of the respondents had a moderate level of disability awareness among students (M 17.84, SD 2.96, N=269).

Table 3: *Level of Disability Awareness among University Students*

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Level of disability awareness	17.84	2.96	6.00	25.00

\*Low= 6-12, Moderate=13-19, High=20-26

### Preferred Terms Used by Students towards Persons with Disabilities

Based on Table 4, it indicated that majority of university students (88.5) percent were familiar with the term 'a person with disability(s)' as the highest percentage to describe people with disabilities. This was followed by the term 'A Down's Syndrome child' with the percentage of 84.4 percent. However, the term 'A manic-depressive' had least familiarity among university students to represent the people with disabilities when only 52.8 percent had agreed on it. Furthermore, it was proven that the term did not recognize by university students as the result shows, 47.2 percent disagreed the term of 'A manic-depressive' as to describe people with disabilities in which the percentage indicated the highest value.

**Table 4: Preferred Terms Used by Students towards Persons with Disabilities**

Terms	Percentage	
	Yes	No
A person who is handicapped	78.8	21.2
A peson with disability(s)	88.5	11.5
A person with mental retardation	71.1	28.3
A Down's syndrome child	84.4	15.6
A manic-depressive	52.8	47.2

### **Association between Demographic Factors (Level of Education and Gender) with Level of Disability Awareness**

The level of education and gender were selected to observe the association with the level of disability awareness among the respondents. Table 5 shows the analysis of  $X^2$  / chi-square is 2.304 with Phi-value (0.512) at  $p>0.05$ . It can be implied that the level of education were found not to be associated with the level of disability awareness. Similarly it was also found that there was no association between gender and the level of disability awareness, with  $X^2$  / chi-square at 0.782 with Phi-value (0.377) at  $p>0.05$ .

**Table 5: Summary of Level of Education and Gender with the Level of Disability Awareness**

Variables	Chi-square value	df	p-value	Phi-value	Decision
Level of Education and Level of Disability Awareness	2.304	3	$p>0.05$	0.512	No significant association
Gender and Level of Disability Awareness	0.782	1	$p>0.05$	0.377	No significant association

### **Potential to become A Disabled Person due to An Illness or Accident**

To observe the students' awareness on whether they are aware of their potential of becoming disabled person, the frequency analysis had been conducted. Based on Table 6, the majority of students 72.9 percent in the University of Malaya indicated that they were aware that they would become a disabled person if they encounter with an illness or if they involve in any accident. of the potential to become a disabled person. While 27.1 percent were not aware that they had potential to become a disabled person either to illness or accident.

Table 6: *Summary of Potential to become a Disabled Person due to an Illness or Accident among University of Malaya Students*

Item	Frequency	
	Yes	No
I am aware of my potential of becoming a disabled person due to an illness or an accident	196 (72.9 percent)	73 (27.1 percent)

## DISCUSSION

### Level of Disability Awareness among University of Malaya Students

Based on the results, the mean score for the level of disability awareness is 17.84. It indicates that most of the respondents had a moderate level of disability awareness among university students since it is slightly above the average score. The present finding is consistent with the survey conducted by Bruder and Mogro-Wilson (2006) at the University of Connecticut. They have demonstrated that the increasing awareness and creating a culture of understanding and inclusion for students with disabilities should be started from the classroom. As the mean score for the level of disability awareness in University of Malaya is slightly above the average score, this indicated that the students are aware of disability-related issues. However, there was an increase from low level to moderate level and not at its highest level. The discussion on disability-related issues were only on the rise since the Paralympic Games in September 2016. The remarkable performances of Malaysian Paralympic athletes in Rio de Janeiro had gained the public attention upon disability-related issues. Thus, the findings of this research resulting to high level of disability awareness was also affected by the current situation in Malaysia. This is because the discussion on the inspirational stories of Paralympic athletes in Rio Paralympic Games 2016 and also their victories had changed the perception of public towards disability. This also had enhanced positive attitudes towards them. Moreover, the Ministry of Youth and Sports also had encouraged the persons with disabilities especially the youth to join sports professionally.

The findings differ with an earlier study conducted by Suhaili and Syuhada (2014) reported that the level of awareness of students towards disabled people is still low. The most probable explanation here is that the study was conducted before the Paralympic Games that had been highlighted in both media and social media platform. Thus, it can be concluded that the level of disability awareness among university students was moderate. Further effort such as the inclusion of the disability awareness program in curriculum would help reduce the negative attitude towards people with disabilities.

## **Percentage of Preferred Terms Used by Students Towards People with Disabilities**

From frequency analysis, the majority of students with a total of 238 students (88.5 percent) reported to be familiar with the word ‘a person with disability’ to indicate persons with disabilities. The term ‘a down’s syndrome child’ also was recognised by the majority of students (84.4 percent) when describing the people with disabilities.

Similarly, the students’ perspective on the preferred term ‘a manic-depressive’ received more than half 52.8 percent . Meanwhile, almost half of the respondents (47.2 percent) reported disapproval to represent person with disabilities compared to their terms. This might due to the negativity and the connotations.. This is contradicted with the finding by Bruder and Mogro-Wilson (2006) that reported only 8 percent preferred to use the terms to regard as disability.

On top of it, referring to the study done by Louari (2013) in Greece, this study also found that majority of respondents only recognized ‘physical disability’ as person with disabilities and they did not had heard the word of autism before. It is worth mentioning that a study conducted by Jasni (2011) also found that majority of the respondents did not understand about autism (in disability context) in general and how to recognize them. In conclusion, the students had the general concern about the language and behaviour towards PWDs and avoid to use negative connotations by using phraseology that give more attention on the individual.

## **Association between Demographic Factors (Level of Education and Gender) with Level of Disability Awareness among University of Malaya Students**

Firstly, in the discussion between level of education with the disability awareness, the results showed that there was no significant association between the levels of education with level of disability awareness. This indicates the level of education did not play a role in determining the level of disability awareness. The finding contradicted with the findings by Kaur et al. (2014) which found that respondents with higher education or have attended special schools have a higher rating of disability awareness. However, it is consistent with the finding in Yerevan’s study (2012) which concluded that vocational or higher educational institutions did not provide people with additional information or knowledge about disability. PWD’s varied form one individual to another depending on the availability of awareness programmes in a particular education institution. This indicated the level of awareness toward disability.

Based on the results, there was no association between gender and the level of disability awareness. This present findings differ from other studies particularly the

survey conducted by Morris (1993) which viewed that men felt that their disability prohibited them from living up to society's images about being a man. In partial support of Morris' views, women felt that they received more pity than women without disabilities. Another evidence demonstrated from the British Social Attitudes Survey (2009), just over half of women say they are very comfortable with someone with a physical disability or sensory impairment as their boss (56 per cent and 52 per cent respectively) compared with 52 per cent and 45 per cent of men (Staniland, 2009). The difference is due to the different sampling groups. The present study was carried out among university students while Morris' selected workers on his study sample.

### **Potential of Becoming a Disabled Person due to an Illness or Accident among University of Malaya Students**

Based on this study, frequency analysis was used to identify and determine the potential to become a disabled person due to an illness or accident University of Malaya. The results showed that the majority of University of Malaya students 72.9 percent were aware that they will become a disabled person if they encountered with an illness or if they involved in any accident as compared to those who are least aware on their potential of becoming disabled person due to accident or illness 27.1 percent. This finding shows that disability was not on top of mind in most people. Most people did not anticipate the potential to become the disabled since they always regard impairment or disability only happen because one was born with. They had unforeseen the circumstance that they could becoming disabled due to illness or accidents. This can be supported by the findings from 2007 Disability Awareness Survey findings conducted by the Council for Disability Awareness in America (2007) in which most workers grossly underestimated their chances of becoming disabled and did not consider the financial impact of disability. The statistics was alarming since three out of ten workers between the age of 25 to 65 years old would experience an accident or illness which would refrain them to work for more than three months or longer.

Although 72.9 percent of respondents were aware of their potential of becoming disabled persons in the future, the level of disability awareness is very much inherent in oneself. But the level of awareness did not match the finding. In reality, with the current knowledge-based society and economy, the number of people with disabilities is expected to increase as a result from aging population, rapid increase of chronic disease and improvement in methodologies to define disability as highlighted by Rezaul Islam (2015).

## CONCLUSION

The study was conducted in University of Malaya with 269 respondents. Findings found that out of the total respondents, the level of disability awareness among the UM students was at moderate level. The disability awareness witnessed an improvement from low to moderate level although they were no association found between gender and disability awareness and between level of education and disability awareness. Also the disability awareness concluded that the higher the education one receive does not necessarily determine the level of their disability awareness. Similarly being a woman cannot guarantee the degree of the disability awareness. Thus, it can be concluded that the level of disability awareness could be influenced by other factors other than education level and gender.

In reality, with the current knowledge-based society and economy, the number of people with disabilities is expected to increase as a result from aging population, rapid increase of chronic disease and improvement in methodologies to define disability as highlighted by Rezaul Islam (2015). Since the number of disability is expected to increase, therefore, it is crucial for the university administration to take necessary action to propagate the disability awareness among students. Thus, students should be more aware of their potential to become a person with disability so that they would be prepared for the situation such as planning for future circumstances in case of disability in terms of financial, insurance and other supports.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends several ways or approaches to intensify level of disability awareness among university students as follow:

The first recommendation is intensifying level of disability awareness among university students is to include the disability topic in the curricular academic course to instil understanding on disability among students in the university. This action may increase the knowledge students towards people with disabilities and consequently the students would portrays more positive attitude. Apart from that, the university may include in class discussions' on how the disabled students could adapt with the environment whether in and outside of the campus. The communication of information could be exercised through class discussion, new student orientation sessions, bulletin postings and the University of Malaya official website.

Apart from that, education on disability should be a part of curriculum academic courses to help increase the level of disability awareness among students. Besides of

nurture and strengthening the ethical value among students towards the disability. However, it is challenging as to embed the disability awareness fully into university curriculum because it requires a concerted effort from administrative staff and academicians for the desired inclusion of disability awareness in curriculum.

Nevertheless, the faculty should encourage more academic discussions to increase the disability awareness such as disseminate the information or reminders to all of the lecturers at the beginning of semester that they are allowed to discuss on disability-related issue. The staff also need to welcome the students with disabilities to seek for assistance inside the campus either for accommodation, financial support, accessibility, barrier-free passageways as well as supporting material for their study. The UPSOKU, specifically should empower the students with disabilities appropriate skills information in the campus that would help them to feel inclusive with the university communities so as to enhance the literacy.

Moreover, it is suggested for the university administration to increase the accessibility of disabled person not only the level of awareness. For instance, the students with disability should be accompanied with the sign language interpreters, gain opportunities for them by provide class session with Braille lessons. Besides, the teaching method should be modified to suit with the level of understanding among disabled students. In addition to that, the university should look for more opportunities to involve students with disabilities in more social activities in the campus. This could alleviate some discomfort feeling that faced by students when they are interacting with PWDs. Likewise, the student with disabilities should not be socially isolated. They should be encouraged to participate in social functions either sports occasions, social gatherings, awards or recognition events.

Although the University of Malaya has established its policy regarding disability, there are still lack of comprehensive inclusion of PWDs into the communities. Therefore, it is suggested that the administration should establish a customer care charter for PWDs in order to support its willingness to serve the PWDs with quality service. It would promote the university to practice barrier-free environment as well as adopting the universal designs in the campus. It also would ensure that the service provided by the university satisfied the needs of students with disabilities. Moreover, it could be used as performance indicator that evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes, facilities or assistance provided by the university towards PWDs. This would give the chance for the university to observe the current need of students with disabilities, hence, it can be a tool to improvise the service quality in line of the university aspiration to become the PWDs Inclusive University.

## **DIRECTION FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

In future, the researchers should look for other relevant factors that contribute to the level of disability awareness among students. In this study, only five factors were examined, which are knowledge on disability, attitude towards PWDs, policy on disability-related issue, campus support towards PWDs and social background. The researchers may come up with other various factors or intervening factors that possessed the strong relationship and easy to be analysed. One of the most prominent discussion is on the disability awareness educational programme inside the classroom. As discussed by Williamson (2014), the programme was influential in shaping positive behaviours towards students with disabilities. The discussions had allowed students to critically think about the treatment of people with disabilities and the importance of inclusion of PWDs into the community. Pertaining to the above matter, scholars had added the intervention program that has been implemented not only to increase the level of disability awareness, but also to reduce the prejudice and to establish opportunities for social interaction.

Apart from that, this study did not explore the role of technology especially the social media towards the level of disability awareness among students. The advancement of technology such as use of smartphones and ubiquity of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn had potentially increased the disability awareness among the society. The digital platform had become well popular among the society and university students who are mostly the youth are the active users of the social networking. The social networking users always share the posts with their online friends, and often times, the trending or viral posts would captured the attention of the social media users in a short time. Therefore, the role of social media can be further discussed to observe its relationship with the level of disability awareness since the social stigma could be reduced and more positive messages of PWDs are spread into the social media.

The other limitation of this study is the research design. In this study, a correlation with cross-sectional survey was conducted. The study was conducted only once in the University of Malaya by distributing the questionnaire to the students. A longitudinal survey could be conducted to assess the level of disability awareness among students for a longer time. Besides that, future studies should take more sample from different universities. This is to get the respondents to share their opinions by answering the questionnaire. If the sample was taken from several universities, the researcher could make a comparative analysis pertaining the disability awareness among those universities that involved in terms of student's perception towards the disabled, the accessibility and accommodations, and the other educational approach to include the disabled students' in campus learning.

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