A research project exploring:

‘The attitudes of 4th year Business Studies students in Athlone Institute of Technology towards people with intellectual disabilities.’

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation and the research involved in it are entirely the work of the author.

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## Index

### Contents

1. **Literature Review**
   1.1 Introduction .............................................................................. 9
   1.2 Intellectual disabilities ................................................................. 9
   1.3 Attitudes to people with intellectual disabilities having employment ......................................................... 9
   1.4 Attitudes to people with intellectual disabilities having sexual relationships .................................................... 10
   1.5 Attitudes to people with intellectual disabilities having independent living ......................................................... 11
   1.6 How attitudes are formed ............................................................. 12
   1.7 Conclusion .............................................................................. 12

2. **Methodology**
   2.1 Introduction .............................................................................. 14
   2.2 Research Methods ....................................................................... 14
   2.3 Participants ............................................................................... 14
   2.4 Procedure .................................................................................. 15
   2.5 Ethical considerations ................................................................ 15
   2.6 Limitations ............................................................................... 15
3. Results

3.1 Introduction ................................................................. 16
3.2 Demographic questions ...................................................... 16
3.3 Results under objective 1 .................................................... 16
3.4 Results under objective 2 .................................................... 24

4. Discussion

4.1 Introduction ................................................................. 26
4.2 Discussion under objective 1 ................................................ 26
4.3 Discussion under objective 2 ................................................ 28
4.4 Evaluation of methodology ................................................ 29

5. Conclusion ................................................................. 30

Reference ................................................................. 31

Appendices

(i) Consent form .............................................................. 33
(ii) Questionnaire .............................................................. 34
List of Tables and figures

Figure 3.A. Interacting with people with intellectual disabilities …………………17
Figure 3.B. Concerns about living next door to a person with an intellectual disability….18
Figure 3.C. Feelings about working alongside a person with an intellectual disability ….19
Figure 3.D. Concerns about working with a person with an intellectual disability………20
Figure 3.E. Concerns about a person with an intellectual disability dating …………….21
Figure 3.F. Feelings about people with intellectual disabilities having children…………22
Figure 3.G. Concerns about people with intellectual disabilities having children………..23
Figure 3.H. Where our attitudes come from……………………………………………..25
Abstract

This study explored the attitudes of 4th year Business Studies students in Athlone Institute of Technology towards people with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, it identified the perceptions of 4th year Business Stud students in Athlone Institute of Technology towards people with intellectual disabilities in relation to employment, relationships and independent living and investigated how attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability are formed. Overall, it was found that attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities are becoming more positive. Family and knowing someone with an intellectual disability were found to be the most important factors in influencing attitudes.
Introduction

Intellectual disability can be described as significant developmental delays, which occur before adulthood and affects the individual’s everyday functioning (Gates, 2007). According to the census 2011 there were 57,709 people with an intellectual disability in Ireland (Inclusion Ireland, 2013). Negative attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities can lead to them facing discrimination in areas such as employment, relationships and living independently (Hardie & Tilly, 2012). The aim of this research is to explore the attitudes of 4th year Business Studies students in Athlone Institute of Technology towards people with intellectual disabilities. The objectives are:

1. To identify the perceptions of 4th year Business students in Athlone Institute of Technology towards people with intellectual disabilities in relation to employment, relationships and independent living.
2. To investigate how attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability are formed.

This study will look at the following:

- Section one: The main literature review of the study.
- Section two: The methodology used for the study.
- Section three: Examining the results and findings.
- Section four: A discussion of the results and findings.
- Section five: The conclusion and recommendations of the study.
1: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction
This literature review will discuss society’s attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability. The focus of attitudes will primarily be on employment, relationships and independent living. Finally, the researcher will explore how attitudes are formed and influenced.

1.2 Intellectual disability
According to the National Disability Authority, how disability is described and understood has repercussions on how people with disabilities are treated in society (Share & Lalor, 2009). This social model of disability moves away from the traditional view that disability was an individual problem and recognises that people with disabilities are disabled by a society that excludes them from participating fully.

1.3 Attitudes to people with disability having employment
Employment for both people with and without an intellectual disability is one of the main ways of exercising citizenship (Quin & Redmond, 2003). For people with disabilities, work helps make them feel like part of a community and gives them a feeling of self-worth by allowing them to contribute. However, people with intellectual disabilities are less likely to be in employment, and for those who are, they are more likely to be underemployed with little chance of job advancement (Jenkins, 2002, cited in Talbot, Astbury & Mason, 2010). During a time of recession, the highly competitive labour market means people with disabilities may find it even more difficult to gain employment compared to those without disability (Grant, Ramcharan, Flynn, Richardson, 2010). According to the Irish Census 2011 there were 162,681 people with a disability in the labour force. This accounts for 30% of people with a disability compared to 61.9% of the overall population (Disability Rights Coalition, 2012). Watson & Nolan (2011) found that unemployment is higher for those with an intellectual disability, at 11% and that that their earnings are €1.25 per hour lower, on average, than the earnings of people without an intellectual disability. According to Russell et al. (2008), people with intellectual disabilities are also 2.8 times more likely to report having experienced discrimination in the workplace when compared to people with no disability (cited in Watson et al. 2011).
In 2011, the National Disability Authority (NDA) assigned social market research to conduct a national survey on public attitudes to disability in Ireland. Interviews were conducted on a face to face basis, of 1,039 adults in their homes. The survey found that 63% of respondents felt that people with disabilities do not receive equal opportunities in relation to employment. The most common reasons for the respondents’ discomforts were personal discomfort and suitability of work or work environment (NDA, 2011). However, the 2006 National Disability Authority survey found that 71% of respondents thought that people with disabilities do not receive equal opportunities in employment (NDA, 2007). These findings show that society has become more accepting towards people with disabilities in the workplace.

1.4 Attitudes to people with disabilities having sexual relationships

People with intellectual disabilities are often socially isolated and generally do not attend the various social, occupational or educational establishments that often create relationships (Noonan & Gash, 2004). Historically, people with intellectual disabilities had their right to have the opportunity to experience their sexuality, have sexual relationships and experience parenthood denied. Young people with disabilities were placed in segregated special institutions with no sexual education, while adults were sterilised and prohibited from engaging in sexual activities (Watson et al. 2011). Watson et al. (2011) believe that society is repulsed at the thought of people with disabilities being sexual, and even worse, in some cases presume that they are all asexual.

A person with a learning disability becoming a parent is a contentious topic in society. Becoming a parent involves responsibility; however, there is a view that people with learning disabilities are childlike and not capable of taking on adult responsibilities such as parenting. This negative view of people with intellectual disabilities means that many face difficulties in becoming parents (Grant et al. 2010).

The survey conducted for the NDA (2011), found that 51% of respondents agreed that people with learning disabilities have the same right to sexual relationships as everyone else. Not being capable of making decisions or of consenting were the main reasons given by the respondents who were unsupportive of this right. This percentage has fallen drastically when compared to the NDA survey 2006 which found that 75% of respondents agreed that people
with intellectual disabilities have the same right to sexual relationships as everyone else (NDA, 2007). They also found that support among respondents for adults with disabilities to have children if they wish was relatively lower, compared with that of the right to sexual relationships, with 38% of respondents agreeing that people with intellectual disabilities should have children if they wish. Concern about the child’s emotional well-being was the main reason why respondents were unsupportive (NDA, 2011). Again there is another drop in percentage when compared to the NDA survey in 2006 which found that 64% of respondents supported people with intellectual disabilities having children (NDA, 2007). These negative attitudes indicate that people with learning disabilities are still not fully accepted within society in relation to sexuality relationships and parenting.

1.5 Attitudes to people with intellectual disabilities having independent living

Independent living means living like everyone else. This involves people making their own decisions, having control over their own life, and engaging in activities (Quin et al. 2003). Historically, people with intellectual disabilities were viewed as unable to care for themselves and therefore services were set up to protect and care for them. This reinforced people’s views of them as being dependent (Odom, Horner & Snell, 2009). The first national sample survey of 2,898 adults with an intellectual disability in England in 2003/04 found that 64% of the people surveyed had no say in where they lived and who they lived with, and 54% said that someone else determined how much money they could spend each week (Emerson et al 2005 cited in Grant et al. 2010: p79).

In the NDA 2011 survey, respondents were asked how comfortable they would feel if people with different levels of disabilities were living in their neighbourhood. Respondents were scored on a scale from 1-10, where 1 indicates being uncomfortable and 10 indicates being comfortable. People with intellectual disabilities scored 8.5. The main concern among respondents who were unsupportive was disruption or dangerous behaviour (NDA, 2011). However, society may be becoming less comfortable living near a person with an intellectual disability as results from the 2006 NDA survey show that respondents comfort levels were 9.2 on the comfort scale (NDA, 2007).
1.6 How attitudes are formed

Antonak and Linveh (2000) describes attitudes as “latent or referred psychological processes that are present in all people and are given expression or form when evoked by specific referents” (cited in Yazbeck et al 2004, p.97). They are learned through experience and are influenced by people and places around us (Tregastis 2000, cited in Yazbeck et al 2004). Bernstein, 2011 states that attitudes form in early childhood and continue to develop throughout life. Social learning is the major role in forming attitudes. This involves watching parents and others, and learning from them. Children learn what they should think and feel about objects and the ways in which they should behave towards them.

Previous research on attitudes towards people with disabilities show, gender, age, personal contact, and cultural factors are important influences on our attitudes towards people with disabilities (Rees et al 1991, cited in Yazbeck et al 2004). It has been found that women and younger people are less likely to have a discriminatory attitude towards people with disabilities (Tak-fai Lau et al 1999, cited in Yazbeck et al 2004). Creating opportunities for society to socialise with people with disabilities may create more positive attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities (Grant et al, 2010). Researchers found that individuals who have interacted with people with intellectual disabilities over six months show less discrimination (Yazbeck et al 2004).

1.7 Conclusion

This literature review investigated the attitudes of society towards people with intellectual disabilities, particularly in relation to employment, relationships and independent living. It was discovered that negative attitudes towards people with intellectual disability still exist in society today. Important life choices for people with intellectual disabilities, such as employment, relationships and independent living are hindered by society’s attitudes. From the National Disability Authority studies in 2006 and 2011 it is clear that people’s attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities are changing. In relation to employment, the results show that there are more positive attitudes from respondents. However, the 2011 survey results show those attitudes of people towards sexual relationships, parenting, and independent are more negative compared to the 2006 survey. These results suggest that society has still not fully integrated people with intellectual disabilities. The researcher is not
aware of any other studies examining student’s attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities, thus a significant hiatus exists in the current levels of research. The researcher would like to investigate whether there has been a positive or negative change in attitudes since the NDA study carried out in 2011. Therefore, she feels it is necessary to undergo this research to explore 4th year Business Students attitudes in Athlone Institute of Technology towards people with intellectual disabilities.
2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction
This methodology aims to explain the ways in which the research method was carried out to meet the objectives of this research project.

This section will be divided into five headings, these are, research methods, participants, procedure, ethical issues and limitations.

2.2 Research method
It was important to consider both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research when deciding on a method to use. The purpose of qualitative research is to ‘achieve an understanding of how people make sense of their lives, delineate the process of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience’ (Merriam, 2009: 14). This type of research is commonly carried out by means of interviews or focus groups. Quantitative research provides ‘a numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population’ (Creswell, 2003: 153). This type of research is commonly carried out by distributing questionnaires. Questionnaires are used to measure people’s attitude, which is required by objective one. Therefore the researcher decided a quantitative approach was most suitable for this research. This method also allows the researcher to gather information from a large group of people in a short amount of time (Flick, 2011). The sensitive nature of the topic also meant that questionnaires were more appropriate to the researchers aim as many participants may not feel comfortable talking face-to-face.

2.3 Participants
To meet the aim of this research project the participants chosen for the questionnaire were fourth year Business Studies students in Athlone Institute of Technology. The researcher felt that twenty questionnaires to business students would give a good representation of the attitudes of students towards people with disabilities. The researcher felt that Business Studies students would be most suitable as it is a course that does not study disability and therefore would more likely reflect the attitudes of general students.
2.4 Procedure
Before conducting the questionnaire, three pilot questionnaires were carried out on a random sample of students in the college. A pilot study helps “ensure that survey questions operate well” and that “the research instrument as a whole functions well” (Bryman, 2008: 247). Afterwards some questions were modified to meet the needs of the objectives more clearly. In order to conduct the questionnaire the business lecturer had to be contacted and permission was sought. A time and date was arranged for the questionnaire to be carried out by the students. Twenty questionnaires were distributed to participants randomly in the lecture room at the date and time agreed. All participants were informed of the purpose of the questionnaire and thanked for their time.

2.5 Ethical considerations
The researcher was aware of the sensitive nature of the area of study. It was important that the questions in the questionnaire were phrased in a way that would not upset participants. All participants were informed beforehand of the nature of the questionnaire before consenting. A cover letter was included at the beginning of the questionnaire explaining that participating was on a voluntary basis with full anonymity and that the participant should not feel pressured into answering questions in which they do not feel comfortable with.

2.6 Limitations
Some limitations were encountered when carrying out this research. This research is not indicative of the wider population as it only involved twenty questionnaires to Business Studies students. As questions were aimed at participant’s attitudes, the researcher was aware that in a large setting some participants may not have answered as honestly as required. It is also important to note that participants may have answered how they think the researcher wanted them to answer and therefore may not have given their real opinion. The researcher felt that if participants had answered the questionnaire in a private setting, the results may have better reflected their attitudes.
3: Results

3.1 Introduction

In this section the researcher intends to present the responses of the twenty respondents. The findings relate to the two objectives of the study:

1. To identify the views of 4th year Business Studies students in Athlone Institute of Technology of people with intellectual disabilities in relation to employment, relationships and independent living.

2. To investigate what forms their attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability in society.

3.2 Demographic questions

Questions 1, 2 and 3 asked the gender, age and nationality of respondents.

It was found that 75% of respondents were female (n=15) and 25% were male (n=5). 75% (n=15) of respondents were aged 20-25, 20% (n=4) were aged 26-30 and 5% (n=1) was aged 31-40. 70% (n=14) of respondents were Irish, 10% (n=2) were Chinese, 10% (n=2) were Polish, 5% (n=1) were Latvian and 5% (n=1) were Croatian.

3.3 Objective 1: To identify the perceptions of 4th year Business Studies students in Athlone Institute of Technology to people with intellectual disabilities in relation to employment, relationships and independent living.

Question 4 asked respondents what was meant by the term “intellectual disability”.

The majority of students had a good understanding of what an intellectual disability was. 70% (n=14) of respondents described it as a learning problem, 20% (n=4) stated that it meant they cannot function normally and 10% (n=2) were unsure of what intellectual disability meant.
Question 5 asked if respondents know anyone who has an intellectual disability.

55% (n=11) of respondents did not know anyone with an intellectual disability and 45% (n=9) did know someone.

Question 6 asked how respondents would feel interacting with a person with an intellectual disability.

![Figure 3.A](image)

45% (n=9) of respondents said that they would feel comfortable interacting with a person with an intellectual disability. 40% (n=8) said they would feel somewhat comfortable and 15% (n=3) said they would feel awkward interacting with a person with an intellectual disability.

Question 7 asked respondents how they would feel living next door to a person with an intellectual disability.

The majority of respondents stated that they would feel comfortable living next door to a person with an intellectual disability. 75% (n=15) said they would feel comfortable, while 25% (n=5) said they would feel somewhat comfortable.
Question 8 asked respondents what would be their concerns about living next door to a person with an intellectual disability.

![Bar chart showing concerns about living next door to a person with an intellectual disability.

- 50% (n=10) said they would have no concern.
- 25% (n=5) were concerned that ‘they would be unable to cope’.
- 20% (n=4) felt ‘they would be bullied’.
- 15% (n=3) picked ‘they would be excluded in the area’.
- 20% (n=4) chose ‘they would be a danger to themselves’.
- 15% (n=3) felt there may ‘not be enough assistance for them’.
- A minority of respondents, 10% (n=2), felt ‘they would be anti-social’.
- A further 10% (n=2) felt ‘you would have to help them’.

Figure 3.B

When respondents were asked to tick what concerns they would have living next door to a person with an intellectual disability, 50% (n=10) said they would have no concern. 25% (n=5) were concerned that ‘they would be unable to cope’, 20% (n=4) felt ‘they would be bullied’, 15% (n=3) picked ‘they would be excluded in the area’, 20% (n=4) chose ‘they would be a danger to themselves and 15% (n=3) felt there may ‘not be enough assistance for them’. A minority of respondents, 10% (n=2), felt ‘they would be anti-social’ and a further 10% (n=2) felt ‘you would have to help them’.
Question 9 asked respondents how they would feel working alongside a person with an intellectual disability.

As figure 3.C illustrates, 45% (n=9) of respondents said they would feel somewhat comfortable working alongside a person with an intellectual disability. 35% (n=7) would feel comfortable, while 20% (n=4) would feel awkward.

Question 10 asked respondents if they feel a person with an intellectual disability would be able to work in the area they wish to work.

45% (n=9) of respondents felt that a person with an intellectual disability would not be able to work in the area that respondents wish to work compared to 35% (n=7) of respondents who felt they would be able to. 20% (n=4) of respondents selected ‘maybe’ for this question.
Question 11 asked respondents their concerns about a person with an intellectual disability having the same job as theirs.

![Concerns about working with a person with an intellectual disability](image)

Figure 3.D

Figure 3.d illustrates that when asked what would respondents concerns about a person with an intellectual disability having the same job as theirs, both, “they would not be competent” and “they would need a lot of help” was selected by 50% (n=10) of respondents. 20% (n=4) felt that they could be exploited and 10% (n=2) chose they may get bullied. 20% of respondents had no concern.

Question 12 asked how respondents would feel if a friend of theirs was considering dating a person with an intellectual disability.

50% (n=10) of respondents stated that they would “be okay” with a friend dating a person with an intellectual disability while 30% (n=6) said they would be somewhat okay with it. 20% (n=4) said they would be against it.
Question 13 asked respondents how they would feel about people with an intellectual disability dating each other.

55% (n=11) of respondents said they would be okay with people with intellectual disabilities dating each other and 30% (n=6) said they would be somewhat okay with it. 15% (n=3) felt “against it”.

Question 14 asked respondents what would be their concern about people with intellectual disabilities dating.

Figure 3.E

Of those who had concerns around people with intellectual disabilities dating 30% (n=6) stated that they were concerned about them having children, 25% (n=5) said they were concerned about communication problems, 15% (n=3) said they wouldn’t be able to understand being in a relationship and 5% (n=1) said they would be bullied.
Question 15 asked respondents how they would feel about a person with an intellectual disability having children.

Figure 3.F

Figure 3.f shows that 20% (n=4) of respondents would feel okay about people with intellectual disabilities having children, 35% (n=7) would be somewhat okay. 30% (n=6) of respondents stated that they would be against it and 15% (n=3) said they would be strongly against it.
Question 16 asked respondents what would be their concerns about a person with an intellectual disability having children.

Figure 3.G

Figure 3.g illustrates that the majority of respondents, 65% (n=13) had concerns that a person with an intellectual disability having children would need a lot of assistance, while 55% (n=11) felt that they would not be able to cope. Both ‘they would not be emotionally prepared to raise children’ and ‘the child would have to look after the parent’ was selected by 20% (n=4) of respondents. 10% (n=2) had concerns about the parent being violent towards the child and 5% (n=1) was concerned that the child would have a disability. 20% (n=4) had no concerns about a person with an intellectual disability having children.
3.4 Objective 2: To investigate how attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability are formed.

Question 17 asked if respondents feel people with intellectual disabilities are treated differently in their area.

The majority of people, 70% (n=14), feel that people with intellectual disabilities are treated differently in their area while 30% (n=6) feel that they are not treated any differently.

Q.18 Queried why respondents think people with intellectual disabilities are treated differently?

When participants were asked to select why they think people with intellectual disabilities are treated differently 55% (n=11) selected because ‘they act different’, 40% (n=8) chose ‘they look different’, 20% (n=4) picked because ‘they are less intelligent and 10% (n=2) said because ‘they don’t participate in the community’.
Q.19 Asked respondents where they feel their attitudes come from?

Figure 3.H

When respondents were asked where their attitudes come from the majority, 65% (n=13), stated their family. Experience of a family member with an intellectual disability, 30% (n=6) and the media and how they portray people with intellectual disabilities was 30% (n=6). 15% (n=3) said work experience with people with intellectual disabilities and 5% (n=1) said involvement with the community e.g. Special Olympics.
4: Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this section the findings of the results will be discussed and compared with similar studies carried out as seen in the literature review. They will be discussed under the two main objectives of this research.

4.2 Objective 1: To identify the perceptions of 4th year Business Studies students in Athlone Institute of Technology to people with intellectual disabilities in relation to employment, relationships and independent living.

The researcher found that the majority of respondents had some understanding of what the term ‘intellectual disability’ meant. The World Health Organisation describes intellectual disability as ‘a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills’ (World Health Organisation, 2013). 70% (n=14) of respondents described intellectual disability as a ‘learning problem’ while 20% (n=4) said it meant ‘they couldn’t function normally’. Only 10% (n=2) of respondents were unsure what an intellectual disability was. Although a high percentage of respondents did not know anyone with an intellectual disability, surprisingly 45% (n=9) said they would feel comfortable interacting with them and 40% (n=4) said they would feel somewhat comfortable. The author questions how respondents would know they feel comfortable interacting with people with an intellectual disability when a high per cent said they don’t know anyone who had one.

The researcher’s findings show that when compared to the NDA survey, attitudes towards living next door to a person with an intellectual disability are becoming more positive. The NDA 2011 survey found a drop in comfort levels from 9.2 out of 10 in 2006 to 8.5 in 2011. However the researchers’ findings show that no respondents felt uncomfortable or very uncomfortable about living next door to a person with an intellectual disability. 75% (n=15) of respondents said they would feel comfortable and 25% (n=5) said they would feel somewhat comfortable. When asked what concerns respondents would have about living next door to a person with an intellectual disability, the researchers findings conflict with that of the NDA 2011 who found that respondents viewed people with an intellectual disability as a burden or danger as opposed to the authors findings who found that respondents were more concerned for the welfare of the person with an intellectual disability.
25% were concerned that they would be unable to cope, 20% worried they may be bullied, and another 20% were concerned they may be a danger to themselves, while 15% were concerned that there would not be enough assistance for them.

The NDA (2011) found that people were becoming more positive towards people with intellectual disabilities taking up employment. In 2006 they found that 29% of respondents felt that people with intellectual disabilities received equal opportunities to employment, this rose to 37% in 2011. The researcher’s findings also coincided with this trend. It was found that 35% (n=7) of people would feel comfortable working alongside a person with an intellectual disability and 45% (n=9) would feel somewhat comfortable. Although the majority of respondents felt comfortable or somewhat comfortable working alongside people with an intellectual disability it was surprising to find that 45% (n=9) felt that a person with an intellectual disability would not be able to work in the area they wish to work and only 20% (n=4) said they may be able to. Only 35% (n=7) felt that they would be able to work in that area. The author wonders if those who felt that people with intellectual disabilities could work in their area were those who knew somebody with a disability. Watson and Nolan (2011) found that people with intellectual disabilities are 2.8 times more likely to report having experienced discrimination in the workplace. 30% (n=6) of respondents effectively agreed with this finding as they stated concerns about exploitation at work and bulling.

The researchers’ findings indicate a rise in positive attitudes towards people with intellectual dating when compared to the NDA surveys in 2006 and 2011. The NDA found that attitudes were becoming more negative around people with intellectual disabilities having sexual relationships. In 2006 75% of respondents felt people with intellectual disabilities have the same right to sexual relationships as everyone else, however, this dropped significantly to 51% in 2011. The researcher found that in this study the majority of respondents would feel okay with a friend dating a person with an intellectual disability and 30% (n=6) would feel somewhat okay. 20% (n=4) stated they would be against it and no respondents felt strongly against it. The findings did not change much when respondents were asked how they felt about people with intellectual disabilities dating each other. 55% (n=11) would be okay with it, 30% (n=6) somewhat okay and 15% (n=3) against it. Priestly (2003) states that society sees people with intellectual disabilities as incapable of engaging in relationships as they are seen to have limited social judgement.
This was supported in the researcher’s findings as the main concerns of respondents about people with intellectual disabilities dating were having children, communication problems and not understanding their decisions.

From the findings the researcher discovered that respondents felt most negatively about people with intellectual disabilities having children. The NDA Survey 2011 found that attitudes are becoming more negative around people with disabilities having children. They found that in 2006 64% of respondents felt that people with intellectual disabilities should have children if they want and in 2011 this dropped drastically to 38%. The researcher found that 35% (n=7) of respondents were against it people with intellectual disabilities having children and 15% (n=3) were strongly against. According to Priestly (2003), the media publicises people with intellectual disabilities being parents in a negative light, only publicising stories of children being removed from the parents. Therefore the media may have had an impact on the researcher’s findings. However, the findings showed that people were leaning more towards a positive attitude. This indicates an increase in positive attitudes when compared to the NDA 2011 survey.

4.3 Objective 2: To investigate how attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability are formed.

Stereo-types have had a negative impact on people with disabilities. According to Hardie & Tilly (2012) negative attitudes can often lead to discrimination towards people with intellectual disabilities and them not being treated like valued and equal members in society. The researcher found that 70% (n=14) of respondents felt that people with intellectual disabilities are treated differently in their area and only 30% (n=6) feeling that they are not. This tells us that society still has a long way to go in terms of their attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities. The researcher found that a large amount, 40% (n=8), of respondents chose because ‘they look different’ as the reason why society treat people with intellectual disabilities differently and 55% (n=11) felt because ‘they act differently’. However, Hardie and Tilly (2012) state that society is becoming more accepting of people with intellectual disabilities and no longer seeing them as different. Body image is seen as a big influence on young people and as the majority of respondents questioned were aged 20-25 the researcher feels this may have had an influence on respondents answers as often
people with intellectual disabilities do not conform to the ideal body image as portrayed by
the media. Bernstein (2011) states that social learning forms attitudes, and the researcher
found that the majority of respondents, 65% (n=13), felt that their attitudes came from their
family and 30% (n=6) said having a family member with an intellectual disability helped
form their attitude. This tells us that early education and knowledge of people with
intellectual disabilities is vital to young people to help form positive attitudes of people with
intellectual disabilities.

4.4 Evaluation of Method

The researcher used a quantitative method for this research. One of the main strengths of this
is that it allowed the researcher to gather information on student’s attitudes quickly. When
examining the findings there were two unfinished questionnaires. However the researcher
was prepared for this as she handed out 25 questionnaires. The study was carried out only on
20 students and therefore cannot be representative of the overall student population. The
researcher feels that a further study should be carried out on people who know and are close
to a person with an intellectual disability and people who do not know anybody with an
intellectual disability. It would be interesting to compare these findings and see if knowing
and being close to a person with an intellectual disability has an influence on our attitudes, as
5: Conclusion and recommendations

The main aim of this study was to explore the attitudes of 4th year Business Students in Athlone Institute of Technology towards people with intellectual disabilities. It was important that this study was carried out because current literature shows people with intellectual disabilities have more difficulties in achieving employment, relationships and independent living because of society’s attitudes. However, when compared to previous studies on attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities, this study shows that people’s attitudes are becoming more positive. 85% of respondents said they would feel comfortable or somewhat comfortable interacting with a person with a disability. These positive attitudes may mean that people with intellectual disabilities will be treated more equally in society and experience less discrimination in areas such as employment, relationships and independent living. Family and knowing someone with an intellectual disability were found to be the most important factors in forming attitudes. Therefore it is important that parents educate young children and interact with people who have intellectual disabilities. A high number of respondents did not know anyone with an intellectual disability and therefore the author suggests that a further study be carried out to compare the attitudes of those that know someone with an intellectual disability and those who do not know anybody with an intellectual disability. The findings of such results would help us understand the importance of interacting with people with intellectual disabilities.


Dear participant, my name is Donna Mills and I am a fourth year Social Care Practice student. For my research project I must complete a survey. Therefore I am asking you to please complete this questionnaire. The aim of my research project is to explore second year business student’s attitudes in Athlone Institute of Technology towards people with intellectual disabilities.

This survey is completely optional and participants will have complete anonymity. I ask that all questions are considered, and answered honestly. Participants do not have to complete any questions with which they do not feel comfortable. The information will be used for the sole purpose of this investigation. If participants have any questions please feel free to ask.

Thank you for your time and co-operation in completing this questionnaire, it is greatly appreciated.

Donna Mills
Questionnaire

Q. 1 Gender
Male   □
Female □

Q. 2 Age
<20   □
20-25 □
26-30 □
31-40 □
>40   □

Q. 3 What is your nationality?
________________________________________

Q. 4 What do you think is meant by the term “intellectual disability”?
________________________________________

Q. 5 Do you know anyone who has an intellectual disability?
Yes   □
No    □
Q.6 How would you feel interacting with a person with an intellectual disability?

Comfortable □
Somewhat comfortable □
Awkward □
Very Awkward □
Other □
If ‘other’ please state

Q.7 How would you feel living next door to a person with an intellectual disability?

Comfortable □
Somewhat comfortable □
Uncomfortable □
Very uncomfortable □
Other □
If ‘other’ please state

Q.8 What would be your concerns about living next door to a person with an intellectual disability? (please tick (✓) all that apply)

- No concern
- They would be unable to cope
- They would be bullied
- They would be excluded in the area
- They would be a danger to themselves
- They would be anti-social
- You would have to help them
- Not enough assistance for them
- Other

If ‘other’ please state  

Q.9 How would feel working alongside a person with an intellectual disability?

- Comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Awkward
- Very Awkward
- Other

If ‘other’ please state  


Q.10 Do you feel a person with an intellectual disability would be able to work in the area you wish to work in?

Yes ☐
No ☐
Maybe ☐

Q.11 What would be your concerns about a person with an intellectual disability having the same job as yours? (please tick ☑ all that apply)

No concern ☐
They would not be competent ☐
They would need a lot of help ☐
They may get bullied ☐
They could be exploited ☐
Other ☐
If ‘other’ please state ____________________________________________________________

Q.12 How would you feel if a friend of yours was considering dating a person with an intellectual disability?

I would be ok with it ☐
I would be somewhat ok with it ☐
I would be against it ☐
I would be strongly against it ☐
Other ☐
If ‘other’ please state ____________________________________________________________
**Q.13** How do you feel about people with intellectual disability dating each other?

- I would be ok with it
- I would be somewhat ok with it
- I would be against it
- I would be strongly against it
- Other

If ‘other’ please state ________________________________________________________________

**Q.14** What would be your concerns about people with intellectual disabilities dating?

_________________________________________________________________________________

**Q.15** How do you feel about a person with an intellectual disability having children?

- Ok
- Somewhat ok
- Against
- Strongly against
- Other

If ‘other’ please state ________________________________________________________________
Q.16 What would be your concerns about a person with a disability having children? (please tick (✓) all that apply)

- No concern
- Not being able to cope
- Being violent towards child
- Need a lot of assistance
- Child would have a disability
- Child would have to look after the parent with a disability
- Would not be emotionally prepared to raise children
- Other

If ‘other’ please state

Q.17 Do you feel people with intellectual disabilities are looked down on in your area?

- Yes
- No

Q.18 If yes, why do you think people with intellectual disabilities may be looked down on?

- They look different
- They act different
- They are less intelligent
- They don’t participate in the community
- Other

If ‘other’ please state
Q.19 Where do you feel your attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities originated from? (please tick (✓) all that apply)

- My Family
- Experience of a family member with an Intellectual disability
- Work experience with people with intellectual disabilities
- The media and how they portray people with intellectual disabilities
- Involvement with the community e.g. Special Olympics

Thank you