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Original Research

Athletic Trainers' Beliefs Toward Working With Special Olympics Athletes

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Abstract

Context: Certified athletic trainers (ATs) are often the first health care providers to treat injured athletes. However, few researchers have studied ATs' beliefs concerning working with Special Olympics athletes.

Objectives: To examine ATs' beliefs toward working with Special Olympics athletes by using the theory of planned behavior model and to examine the influence of moderator variables.

Design: Cross-sectional survey.

Setting: Athletic Trainers' Beliefs Toward Special Olympics Athletes survey instruments were mailed to 147 directors of Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs–accredited athletic training education programs (ATEPDs) in 43 states and 120 cities.

Patients or Other Participants: One hundred twenty ATEPDs (44 women, 76 men).

Main Outcome Measure(s): We used stepwise multiple regression analysis to determine whether attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control predicted intention and to determine which moderator variables predicted attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Pearson product moment correlations were used to determine ATEPDs' beliefs about how competent they felt working with Special Olympics athletes and whether they were currently working with these athletes.

Results: We found that subjective norm, attitude toward the behavior, and perceived behavioral control predicted intention ($R = 0.697$, $R^2 = 0.486$, $F_{3,112} = 35.3$, $P < .001$) and that intention predicted ATEPDs' actual behaviors ($R = 0.503$, $R^2 = 0.253$, $F_{1,118} = 39.995$, $P < .001$). Moderator variables that predicted attitude

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toward the behavior included more years of experience working with Special Olympics athletes, completion of 1 or more courses in adapted physical activity, ATEPDs' competence, completion of 1 or more special education courses, and sex ($R = 0.589$, $R^2 = 0.347$, $F_{5,111} = 11.780$, $P < .001$). Moderator variables that predicted subjective norm included more experience working with Special Olympics athletes and more Special Olympics certifications ($R = 0.472$, $R^2 = 0.222$, $F_{2,112} = 16.009$, $P < .001$). Moderator variables that predicted perceived behavioral control included ATEPDs' competence, more years of experience working with Special Olympics athletes, and a higher educational degree ($R = 0.642$, $R^2 = 0.412$, $F_{4,113} = 19.793$, $P < .001$).

Conclusions: Certified athletic trainers had favorable attitudes about the behavior beliefs toward working with Special Olympics athletes; however, their subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and intention beliefs were unfavorable. The ATEPDs reported they did not feel competent to work with Special Olympics athletes.

Keywords: [disability sport injury](#), [intellectual disabilities](#), [autism](#), [theory of planned behavior](#), [attitude research](#)

Phillip Conatser, PhD, CAPE; Keith Naugle, MS, LAT, ATC; Mark Tillman, PhD, CSCS; and Christine Stopka, PhD, LAT, ATC, CSCS, contributed to conception and design; acquisition and analysis and interpretation of the data; and drafting, critical revision, and final approval of the article.

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