

# Disability: Attitudes to people with disabilities: misconceptions & myths.

## NID Training Disability Diary

- Compiled by Dr Jean Mitchell



### Introduction

The attitudes of society and communities and the way they respond to disability influences policies, education, and treatment of persons with impairments change constantly. Assumptions, misconceptions, traditional and religious beliefs influence how society react to persons with disabilities and can result in prejudice and even physical attacks and psychological harm (Baker & Imafidon, 2020).

### Discussion

Research conducted by Masasa, Irwin-Carruthers and Faure (2005) found that many caregivers of people with disabilities had little knowledge of the nature and causes of the disability of the person in their care. Some ideas they had were that the disability was the result of human error, while others included witchcraft, the Will of the Almighty, or punishment for the wrongdoing of parents or grandparents.

Stereotyping is one of the results of a lack of information, and it influences the attitudes of society about what it is like to live with a disability. For instance, some people might have pity on those who 'suffer' from a disability, and consider them to be brave and courageous, when what the disabled people need is to be adaptable to a lifestyle that is different from the norm. Another example is that all people who use wheelchairs are chronically ill. This might not be so, as they might merely use their wheelchairs as a way to be mobile. In addition, people in wheelchairs are not necessarily deaf, and so they do not need to be shouted at.

They are also not invisible, and should be spoken to directly and not through a companion.

Other misconceptions are that members of society seem to think that people with disabilities prefer to mix with others that have similar disabilities, or that they are not capable of so-called 'normal' relationships. In most cases this is a false assumption as they remain people who have disabilities, and are thus do not live lives that are very diverse from those of the rest of society, provided the society accepts them as equal, if different members (Easterseals, 2021).

### Conclusion

The word 'disability' is a broad term, but the causes and treatment of disabilities are often not known. The beliefs and misconceptions of society influence attitudes and the way those with disabilities are treated.

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### References

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