



The Impact of Follow-Up Special Olympics Athletes on Attitudes Toward Their Social Inclusion

Original scientific paper

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special Olympics athletes among people who follow and do not follow the Games in general, collecting data through a survey questionnaire from 227 participants aged 18 years. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were used to analyze the data. The results showed that participants generally hold positive attitudes towards social inclusion, particularly in creating inclusive activities tailored to the physical and cognitive abilities and interests of people with disabilities. However, there was some variability in attitudes towards specific aspects of social inclusion, with social activities outside of support services being less valued. Females had slightly more positive attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special Olympics athletes than males while age was weakly negatively correlated with attitudes toward social inclusion. Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special Olympics athletes among people who follow and do not follow the Games and provides important implications for policymakers and organizations seeking to promote social inclusion for this population, with the study showing suggestions for tailored inclusive activities, recommendations for increasing positive attitudes, and potential directions for future research.

Keywords: *Social Inclusion, Disability, Attitudes, Special Olympics Athletes, Inclusive Activities*

Social exclusion is a significant issue faced by people with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, which can limit their access to education, employment,

and social activities (Kirakosyan, 2019a). Follow-up Special Olympics athletes are a continuation of organized sports programs and events beyond the initial Special

Olympics Games to promote social inclusion and community participation of athletes with intellectual disabilities (Storey, 2008).

Social inclusion refers to ensuring that individuals with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in social and economic activities and are valued members of their communities, which has become increasingly important in disability studies and social policy (Goering, 2015; United Nations, 2016). Disability, defined as an impairment, activity limitation, or participation restriction that affects an individual's ability to participate fully in society (World Health Organization, 2001), can lead to social exclusion and discrimination due to the physical, social, and attitudinal barriers that people with disabilities face. Attitudes towards disability play a critical role in shaping the social inclusion of people with disabilities, with negative attitudes leading to social exclusion, discrimination, and unequal treatment while positive attitudes promote inclusion, respect, and equal opportunities (Gething & Wheeler, 2018).

The Special Olympics organization has been instrumental in promoting social inclusion and community participation of athletes with intellectual disabilities through providing year-round sports training and athletic competitions. Previous research has shown that volunteering for Special Olympics Games can enhance positive attitudes toward the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities (Lysaght, 2015b).

Li and Wu (2012) conducted a study on the attitudes of Special Olympics athletes and volunteers toward the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in China. The study found that exposure to individuals with intellectual disabilities through secondary sources, such as parents and mass media, was positively correlated with attitudes toward their inclusion. One effective way to promote social inclusion is through sports participation and initiatives such as the Special Olympics (Goering, 2015). Despite the historical focus of the Special Olympics athletes on non-disabled athletes, there has been a growing emphasis on including athletes with disabilities through initiatives such as the Special Olympics (Martin et al., 2019). However, hosting major sporting events like the Olympics can positively and negatively

impact social inclusion for people with disabilities. Inclusive activities such as sports participation can promote social inclusion for people with disabilities by providing opportunities to develop their skills, build social connections, and challenge negative stereotypes and stigmas associated with disability (United Nations, n.d.).

The study builds on previous research on the role of Special Olympics in promoting social inclusion and community participation of athletes with intellectual disabilities (Storey, 2008). The findings of this study can contribute to the broader literature on the impact of sports programs and events on social inclusion and community participation of people with disabilities. Moreover, understanding the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes can provide insights into the sustainability of the positive attitudes towards inclusion generated by the initial Special Olympics Games. Follow-up Special Olympics athletes have the potential to reinforce and build upon the positive attitudes towards inclusion developed through participation in the Special Olympics Games, thereby ensuring that the benefits of the initial Games are sustained over time.

Impact of Sports Participation and Initiatives

Several studies have explored the impact of sports participation and initiatives, such as the Special Olympics, on social inclusion for people with disabilities. For example, Defroand (2012) found that Olympic education and the promotion of social capital through Physical Education and School Sports can positively impact social capital development among young people, which can lead to increased social inclusion. Similarly, a study by Martin et al. (2019) found that participation in the Special Olympics can lead to increased visibility, recognition, and empowerment for athletes with disabilities, which can challenge negative stereotypes and stigmas associated with disability. The study also found that athletes with disabilities participating in the Special Olympics are likelier to report positive mental health outcomes and improved social connections.

Li and Wang (2013) investigated the effect of exposure to the Special Olympics Games (SOG) on the attitudes of volunteers toward the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. A repeated

measures design with a 3-week follow-up was used, and the study found that a 1-week exposure to SOG improved volunteers' attitudes toward the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities significantly ($p = 0.016$). Females had more positive attitudes than males at all three-time points of measures. The study concluded that a 1-week exposure to SOG can enhance volunteers' positive attitudes toward the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, and this effect can be maintained for up to a month. This study highlights the potential impact of the Special Olympics Games in promoting social inclusion and positive attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities.

Other studies have also found that sports participation can promote physical fitness, self-esteem, and social connections, which can lead to increased social inclusion for people with disabilities (DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Ferrara et al., 2019; Gould & Carson, 2008; Hutzler et al., 2013). However, it is important to note that sports participation is not a universal solution for promoting social inclusion, and the benefits may vary depending on factors such as the type of sport, level of participation, and individual characteristics (Ferrara et al., 2019).

Costs and Benefits of Hosting Major Sporting Events

While sports participation and initiatives such as the Special Olympics can positively impact social inclusion for people with disabilities, there are potential drawbacks associated with hosting major sporting events such as the Special Olympics athletes. For example, Fleur (2012) found that the heavy burden of constructing infrastructures and financial, political, and social costs can outweigh the tangible and intangible benefits of hosting the Games. This highlights the need to make hosting the Olympics a more cost-effective endeavor for their host communities.

Evidence suggests that hosting major sporting events such as the Special Olympics athletes can negatively impact social inclusion for marginalized groups, including people with disabilities. For example, a study by Hanstad et al. (2017) found that the displacement of low-income residents and the construction of inaccessible infrastructure in Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 Special Olympics athletes negatively impacted social inclusion for people with disabilities. The

study highlights the importance of ensuring that major sporting events are planned and executed to promote accessibility and inclusivity for all community members.

Representation of Disability in Media and Advertising

In addition to the impact of sports participation and initiatives on social inclusion for people with disabilities, it is important to consider the representation of disability in media and advertising. Leavitt (2012) found that media representations of Paralympians often reproduce the myth of the "supercrip," which fails to acknowledge the complexity of the individual experiences of those with disabilities. This highlights the importance of critically analyzing representations of disability in media and advertising and the potential impact these representations can have on shaping societal attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Overall, the literature highlights the importance of sports and physical activity in promoting social inclusion for people with disabilities and the need for ongoing efforts to promote accessibility and inclusivity in sports and media representations of disability. The theoretical concepts and aspects related to social inclusion, media representations, and the economic and social costs and benefits of hosting major sporting events will inform the research design and methodology. Further research is needed to address potential limitations and gaps in the existing literature, such as biases in participant selection or measurement methods.

Problem Statement

The social exclusion of people with disabilities, including limited access to education, employment, and social activities, is a persistent problem that requires further investigation (L. Kirakosyan, 2019b). Despite recent progress towards promoting social inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities, there is still a need to investigate the longer-term impact of follow-up the Special Olympics on attitudes towards social inclusion. This is important because while previous research has shown that the Special Olympics can positively impact attitudes towards disability and inclusion, much of this research has focused on the immediate effects of the Games, with little attention paid to the longer-term impact.

A study conducted by Haegele and Sutherland (2017) found that although the

Special Olympics have the potential to promote positive attitudes towards disability and inclusion, there is still a need for continued efforts to increase awareness and understanding of disability issues. Similarly, in a report by the European Paralympic Committee (2020), it was highlighted that while the Special Olympics have made significant progress in promoting social inclusion and accessibility, there is still a need for sustained efforts to ensure that these events lead to lasting changes in attitudes towards disability and inclusion.

Furthermore, previous research has shown that factors such as gender, education level, and personal experience with disability can influence attitudes toward the social inclusion of people with disabilities (Lysaght, 2015). For example, Li and Wu (2012) found that exposure to individuals with intellectual disabilities through secondary sources, such as parents and mass media, can promote positive attitudes toward their inclusion. This highlights the importance of considering potential factors that may influence the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes on attitudes toward the social inclusion of people with disabilities. In investigating this problem, the study will focus on the following main research question: What is the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities on attitudes towards their social inclusion? This main question will be further explored through the following sub-questions:

1. What is the reality of the social integration of people with disabilities in society?
2. What is the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes on attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities, specifically focusing on the longer-term impact of these events?
3. Is the practice of physical activity mediating the relationship between following the Olympic Games and the trend toward social inclusion of people with disabilities?
4. Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the mean scores of gender, different educational levels, and individuals who have a relative with a disability, and those who do not, toward

the social integration of people with disabilities?

These sub-questions aim to investigate the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes on attitudes toward the social inclusion of people with disabilities and to explore potential factors that may influence this impact. By answering these research questions, the study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of follow-up Special Olympics athletes as a tool for promoting social inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities and to inform policy and practice in organizing these events.

Objectives

This study aimed at the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities on attitudes toward their social inclusion. Specifically, the study examined how follow-up Special Olympics athletes can promote social inclusion and community participation of people with disabilities and compare this impact to the initial Special Olympics Games. By understanding the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes on attitudes toward the social inclusion of people with disabilities, policymakers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies for promoting social inclusion and community participation among people with disabilities. By achieving these objectives, the study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of following the Special Olympics as a tool for promoting social inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities and to inform policy and practice in organizing these events.

Hypothesis

The study's main hypothesis is: There are statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the mean scores of the follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities and attitudes towards their social inclusion. This main hypothesis will be further explored through the following sub-hypothesis: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the mean scores of male and female individuals, different educational levels, and individuals with different age groups towards the social integration of people with disabilities.

Methodology

Participants

A random sample of 227 individuals aged 18 years and above who follow and do not follow the Special Olympics athletes, in general, were recruited for the study. Participants were recruited through disability organizations, online disability forums, and social media platforms.

Data Collection

The data collection was done through a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on the research questions and sub-questions. The questionnaire included questions related to attitudes toward social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special Olympics athletes and demographics such as gender, education level, and whether they had a relative with a disability.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the survey questionnaire was analyzed using statistical analysis techniques such as descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution were used to summarize the data. Pearson correlation was used to determine the relationship between following the Special Olympics athletes and attitudes toward social inclusion among people with disabilities. The statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS v26.

Results

Based on the data collected from the survey questionnaire, 227 individuals aged 18 years and above participated in the study. Of these participants, 82 (36.1%) were male, and 145 (63.9%) were female (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Gender Distribution of Participants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	82	36.1	36.1	36.1
Valid Female	145	63.9	63.9	100.0
Total	227	100.0	100.0	

Source: Note. Conducted by the author based on SPSS v26 output.

The gender distribution of the participants in the study is presented in Table 1. Two hundred twenty-seven individuals aged 18 years and above participated in the study, of which 82 (36.1%) were male, and 145 (63.9%) were female. The "Percent" column shows the percentage of each gender group in relation to the total number of participants while the "Valid Percent" column shows the percentage of each gender group in relation to the total number of valid responses. The cumulative percent column shows the running percentage of each gender group, which is useful for tracking changes in the distribution of

responses. In this case, the cumulative percent for males is 36.1%, indicating that 36.1% of the participants were male while the cumulative percent for females is 100%, indicating that all participants were accounted for in this category. Table 2 presents the educational qualification distribution of the participants in the study. Two hundred twenty-seven individuals aged 18 years and above participated in the study. Of these participants, 38 (16.7%) had a primary education (elementary, intermediate, secondary), 151 (66.5%) had a bachelor's degree, 28 (12.3%) had a postgraduate degree, and 10 (4.4%) had a diploma (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Educational Qualification Distribution of Participants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Primary education (elementary, intermediate, secondary)	38	16.7	16.7	16.7
Bachelor's	151	66.5	66.5	83.3
Postgraduate	28	12.3	12.3	95.6
Diploma	10	4.4	4.4	100.0
Total	227	100.0	100.0	

Source: Note. Conducted by the author based on SPSS v26 output.

The “Percent” column shows the percentage of each educational qualification group to the total number of participants while the “Valid Percent” column shows the percentage of the educational qualification group to the total number of valid responses. The cumulative percent column shows the running percentage of each educational qualification group.

The majority of the participants in the study had a bachelor's degree (66.5%),

followed by those with a postgraduate degree (12.3%). Participants with primary education (elementary, intermediate, secondary) and a diploma accounted for 16.7% and 4.4%, respectively (see Figure 2). Table 3 shows the age distribution of the participants in the study. Two hundred twenty-seven individuals aged 18 years and above participated in the study. Of these participants, 147 (64.8%) were aged 18-25, 30 (13.2%) were aged 26-35, 28 (12.3%) were aged 36-45, and 22 (9.7%) were older than 45 (see Table 3).

Figure 1.
Educational Qualification Distribution of Participants.

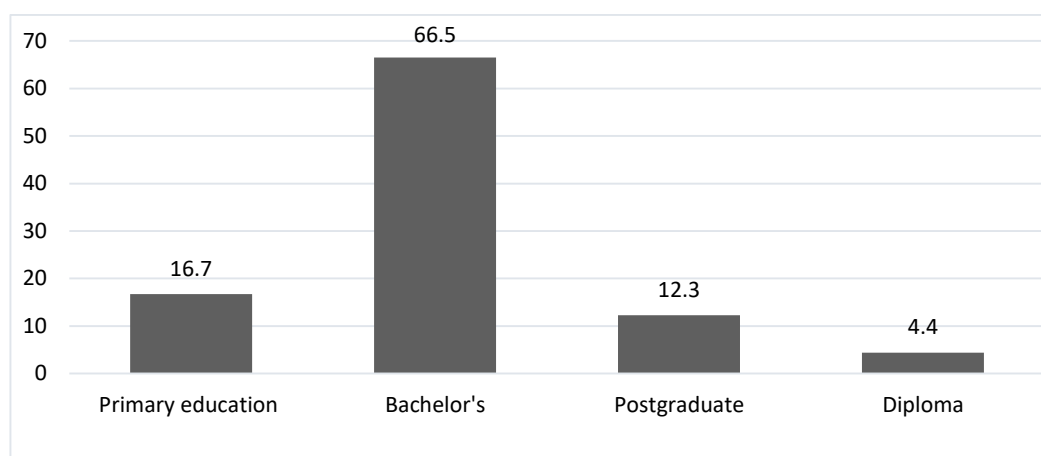


Table 3.
Age Distribution of Participants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-25	147	64.8	64.8	64.8
26-35	30	13.2	13.2	78.0
Valid 36-45	28	12.3	12.3	90.3
Older than 45	22	9.7	9.7	100.0
Total	227	100.0	100.0	

Source: Note. Conducted by the author based on SPSS v26 output.

The “Percent” column shows the percentage of each age group to the total number of participants while the “Valid Percent” column shows the percentage of each age group to the total number of valid responses. The cumulative percent column shows the running percentage of each age group.

The majority of the participants in the study were aged 18-25 (64.8%), followed by those aged 26-35 (13.2%). Participants aged 36-45 and those older than 45 accounted for 12.3% and 9.7% of the sample, respectively. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables related to integrating people with disabilities into society. The sample size for

Figure 2.
Age Distribution of Participants

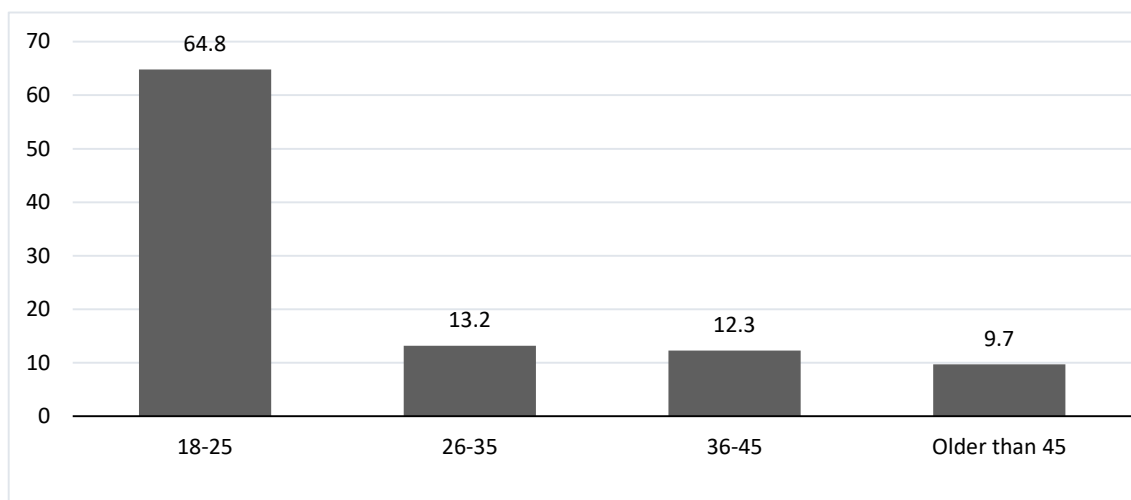


Table 4.*Descriptive Statistics of the Reality of Integrating People with Disabilities into Society*

The reality of integrating people with disabilities into society	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The person with disabilities is integrated with his peers in the classroom.	227	2.40	.805
The person with disabilities engages in recreational activities with peers of the same age.	227	2.54	.821
The person with a disability has opportunities to go to other environments different from where he lives (traveling, trips, and ...)	227	2.48	.904
The person with a disability participates in activities in his/her community with people outside their support group.	227	2.40	.864
Specific measures are taken to enhance the participation of a person with a disability in society.	227	2.66	.925
A person with a disability interacts with people outside their support group.	227	2.50	.864
A person with a disability participates in recreational and cultural activities in community settings (for example, restaurants, libraries, swimming pools, cinemas, parks, and beaches).	227	2.45	.903
A person with a disability participates in normal groups of their community (e.g., athletic, social, educational, religious).	227	2.52	.894
Valid N (listwise)	227		

Source: Note. Conducted by the author based on SPSS v26 output.

all variables is 227.

The “N” column shows the number of valid responses for each variable. The “Mean” column displays the average score for each attitude towards social inclusion, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes. The “Std. Deviation” column shows the variation in each variable’s responses. The results show that the highest mean score was for “Specific measures are taken to enhance the participation of a person with a disability in society,” with a mean

score of 2.66, followed by “The person with disabilities engages in recreational activities with his peers of the same age” with a mean score of 2.54. The lowest mean score was for “The person with disabilities is integrated with his peers in the classroom” and “The person with a disability participates in activities in his/her community with people outside his or her support group,” both with a mean score of 2.40. The standard deviation values indicate some variation in the responses for each variable, suggesting

that the reality of integrating people with disabilities into society is not entirely uniform among the participants. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of the

variables related to the impact of the Special Olympics athletes on the social integration of people with disabilities. The sample size for all variables is 227.

Table 5.

Descriptive Statistics of the Impact of the Special Olympics Athletes on the Social Integration of People with Disabilities

The impact of the Special Olympics athletes on the social integration of people with disabilities	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
A person with a disability enjoys holidays in inclusive environments (such as a hotel, home on the mainland, a green mountainous area, swimming pools, camps, recreational parks, ...).	227	2.56	.867
The person with a disability participates in inclusive activities commensurate with their physical and cognitive abilities.	227	2.72	.987
The person with a disability participates in inclusive activities consistent with their interests.	227	2.69	.946
The person with a disability participates in social activities outside the place where they receive support services.	227	2.39	.847
Valid N (listwise)	227		

Source: Note. Conducted by the author based on SPSS v26 output.

The “N” column shows the number of valid responses for each variable. The “Mean” column displays the average score for each attitude towards social inclusion, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes. The “Std. Deviation” column shows the variation in each variable’s responses. The results show that the highest mean score was for “participates in inclusive activities commensurate with their physical and cognitive abilities,” with a mean score of 2.72, followed by “participates in inclusive activities consistent with their interests,” with a mean score of 2.69. The lowest mean score was for “participates in social activities outside the place where they receive support services,” with a mean score of 2.39. The standard deviation values indicate some variation in the responses for each variable,

suggesting that the impact of the Special Olympics athletes on the social integration of people with disabilities is not entirely uniform among the participants.

Hypothesis Tests

The Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the mean scores of male and female individuals towards the social integration of people with disabilities.

The Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationship between gender and the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities (see Table 6).

Table 6.

Pearson Correlation Analysis of Gender and the Impact of Follow-up Special Olympics Athletes for People with Disabilities

		Gender	The impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	.141*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.034
	N	227	227
The impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities	Pearson Correlation	.141*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	
	N	227	227

Source: Note. Conducted by the author based on SPSS v26 output.

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results of the analysis show a statistically significant positive correlation between gender and the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities ($r=0.141$, $p=0.034$, two-tailed). This suggests a weak positive relationship between gender and the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities. The positive correlation coefficient indicates that as gender (male or female) increases, the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities also tends to increase. The results suggest that females may have slightly more positive attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special

Olympics athletes than males. However, the correlation coefficient is weak, indicating that gender alone is not a strong predictor of the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities.

Hypothesis 2: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the mean scores of individuals with different educational levels towards the social integration of people with disabilities.

The Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationship between educational qualification and the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities (see Table 7).

Table 7.

Pearson Correlation Analysis of Educational Qualification and the Impact of Follow-up Special Olympics Athletes for People with Disabilities

		Educational Qualification	The impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities
Educational Qualification	Pearson Correlation	1	-.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.167
	N	227	227
The impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities	Pearson Correlation	-.092	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.167	
	N	227	227

Source: Note. Conducted by the author based on SPSS v26 output.

The analysis results show a non-significant negative correlation between educational qualification and the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities ($r=-0.092, p=0.167$, two-tailed). This suggests no significant relationship exists between educational qualification and the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities. The negative correlation coefficient indicates that as educational qualification increases, the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities decreases slightly. However, the correlation coefficient is weak

and insignificant, indicating that educational qualification alone is not a strong predictor of the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities.

Hypothesis 3: There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the mean scores of individuals with different age levels towards the social integration of people with disabilities.

The Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationship between age and the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities (see Table 8).

Table 8.

Pearson Correlation Analysis of Age and the Impact of Follow-up Special Olympics Athletes for People with Disabilities

		Age	The impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	-.227**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	227	227
The impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities	Pearson Correlation	-.227**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	227	227

*Source: Note. Conducted by the author based on SPSS v26 output. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The analysis results show a statistically significant negative correlation between age and the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities ($r=-0.227, p=0.001$, two-tailed). This suggests a weak negative relationship between age and the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities. The negative correlation coefficient indicates that as age increases, the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for people with disabilities tends to decrease slightly. This negative relationship could suggest that older individuals may have less positive attitudes toward the social inclusion of people with disabilities

following the Special Olympics athletes or may be less likely to participate in social inclusion activities themselves.

The main findings of this analysis were as follows:

1. There were statistically significant differences between males and females in their attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities, with females showing slightly more positive attitudes
2. Educational qualification was not found to be a significant predictor of attitudes toward the social inclusion of people with disabilities.
3. Older individuals tended to have less positive attitudes toward the social

inclusion of people with disabilities and were less likely to participate in inclusion activities themselves.

4. Some limitations of this study were the reliance on self-reported data in the survey and the use of a convenience sample that may not represent the general population.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate attitudes toward the social inclusion of people with disabilities following Special Olympics athletes. The study results provide insights into the sample's demographic characteristics and the participants' attitudes toward social inclusion.

The gender distribution of the participants in this study was skewed towards females, with 63.9% being female. This is consistent with previous research showing that females are more likely to participate in research studies and surveys than males (Leuteritz et al., 2018). Most participants had a bachelor's degree (66.5%), followed by those with a postgraduate degree (12.3%), indicating a highly educated sample. The age distribution of the participants was skewed towards younger age groups, with 64.8% being aged 18-25.

The descriptive statistics of the attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special Olympics athletes showed that the highest mean score was for "participates in inclusive activities commensurate with their physical and cognitive abilities," with a mean score of 2.72, followed by "participates in inclusive activities consistent with their interests" with a mean score of 2.69. The lowest mean score was for "participates in social activities outside the place where they receive support services," with a mean score of 2.39. These results suggest that participants generally hold positive attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special Olympics athletes, although there is some variability in their attitudes toward specific aspects of social inclusion.

Interestingly, the Pearson correlation analysis results revealed that gender was weakly positively correlated with the impact of follow-up Special Olympics athletes for

people with disabilities, suggesting that females may have slightly more positive attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special Olympics athletes than males. However, this relationship was weak and not a strong predictor of attitudes toward social inclusion. Educational qualification was not significantly correlated with attitudes towards social inclusion while age was weakly negatively correlated with attitudes, indicating that younger individuals may be more receptive to social inclusion initiatives. However, the demographic factors alone were not strong predictors of attitudes, highlighting the need to consider multiple factors that may influence the impact of the Special Olympics on attitudes toward social inclusion.

The results also showed that participants generally hold positive attitudes towards the social inclusion of people with disabilities, particularly in creating inclusive activities tailored to their abilities and interests. However, there was some variability in attitudes towards specific aspects of social inclusion, with social activities outside of support services being valued less. This suggests that while there is overall support for social inclusion, more work is needed to promote inclusive activities that meet the diverse needs and interests of people with disabilities.

There are several implications from this study. First, there is a need for continuous efforts to promote awareness and understanding of the barriers faced by people with disabilities and the importance of creating inclusive environments tailored to their needs and interests. The Special Olympics can be an important platform for raising awareness of these issues, but education and advocacy programs are needed to sustain interest and action beyond these events. Second, inclusive activities should allow people with and without disabilities to interact and connect based on shared interests. This can help overcome unfamiliar and uncomfortable barriers that may limit social inclusion. Finally, initiatives that specifically target younger generations may be an effective way to promote more positive and receptive attitudes toward disability and inclusion over the long term.

Suggestions

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and organizations that aim to promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special Olympics athletes. Specifically, the results suggest the following:

1. Efforts should be focused on creating inclusive activities that are tailored to the physical and cognitive abilities and interests of people with disabilities and that enable them to participate in social activities outside of their support services.
2. Efforts to promote social inclusion should be targeted towards younger individuals, who hold more positive attitudes towards social inclusion of people with disabilities.
3. The Special Olympics athletes can become more inclusive by including events open to athletes with special needs. This can help break down barriers and promote social integration by allowing people with disabilities to compete alongside their non-disabled peers.
4. Educational programs can be developed to teach people about the challenges that individuals with special needs face and how sports can help them overcome these challenges.
5. Accessible infrastructure at Olympic venues can help make the Games more inclusive for people with special needs.
6. Volunteer programs can be established to support and assist people with special needs during the Special Olympics.
7. The media can play an important role in promoting social integration by providing coverage of athletes with special needs competing in the Special Olympics.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study should be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, using a random sampling technique and self-reported attitudes may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research using larger representative samples and more objective measures of attitudes and behaviors would strengthen the results. Secondly, the study focused specifically on the impact of follow-up the Special Olympics, so additional research is needed to compare the differences in the

immediate and long-term effects of these events. Finally, qualitative research that explores experiences of social inclusion from the perspectives of people with disabilities would also provide valuable context.

Future Research

For future research, the following could be considered:

1. Conducting a longitudinal study to track changes in attitudes over time, particularly after subsequent Special Olympics athletes
2. Including a wider age range of participants and oversampling older individuals to better understand how age influences social inclusion attitudes
3. Using qualitative methods such as interviews to gain deeper insights into participants' perspectives on the social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of attitudes toward the social inclusion of people with disabilities following the Special Olympics. The results highlight the impact of these events in promoting more positive attitudes and the need for ongoing efforts to create inclusive environments tailored to the diverse needs and abilities of people with disabilities. Targeting younger generations and providing opportunities for meaningful interactions between people with and without disabilities may be effective strategies for sustaining interest in social inclusion initiatives over the long run. By building on the momentum of the Special Olympics through continuous education, advocacy, and inclusive programming, real progress can be made toward achieving equal participation in society for people with disabilities.

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