

ASSESSMENT OF THE ATTITUDE OF DISCRIMINATION – A NEW RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

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Abstract: We intend to present in this article an electronic application, provided within the project POSDRU/156/1.2/G/142145 “Medical Higher Education Oriented towards a Non-Discriminatory Treatment of Patients”, through which the attitude of discrimination can be measured. The application is an integrated tool that brings together scales measuring attitudes of discrimination in general, and, specifically, the attitude of discrimination against various vulnerable groups, such as persons with HIV/AIDS, persons with different sexual orientation, persons suffering from mental illnesses or members of the Romani ethnic group. The application’s structure was built based on the results of the study of the “Lucian Blaga” University students’ attitude towards discrimination, which was attended by 1 135 students aged between 18 and 48 years old. The application can be used in any area, valuing the attitude of discrimination in the fight for equality and non-discrimination.

The history of building the application we want to describe in this article includes items related to the activities within the project POSDRU/156/1.2/G/142145, entitled “Medical Higher Education Oriented towards a Non-Discriminatory Treatment of Patients”. The activities of this project were designed as a crescendo. We started with an analysis of the medical students’ training needs on ethics and non-discrimination and continued with the training of these students and the “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu (LBUS) teaching staff in the same area of ethics and non-discrimination. We also organized a workshop with LBUS students in order to develop their transversal skills, we developed scientific documentation materials for those interested in this subject, and finally, we conducted a research on the topic of the LBUS’ students’ attitude towards discrimination. The project does not stop here; it comes with innovative solutions that provide mechanisms for prevention or reduction of discrimination. For this phenomenon to be prevented/reduced, it must be known and evaluated. Thus, an application has been set up, whose structure was based on the mentioned research’s results.

Application description

The research regarding stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination in social psychology began many years ago with scales of social distance measurement and with an analysis, first on the individual and contextual, later on the motivational-cognitive level. Currently, the analysis integrates cognitive and motivational characteristics of interpersonal discrimination. Future prospects suggest that we still have much to do in studying the behaviour, culture and intellect.(1)

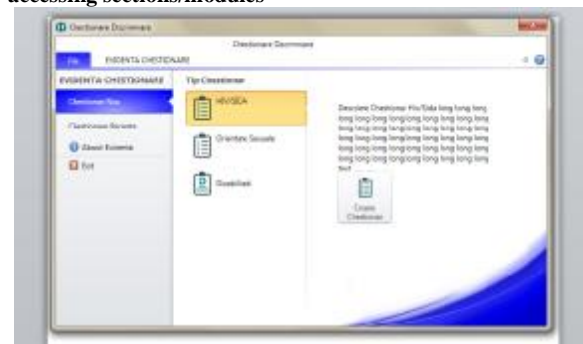
Starting from the premise that attitudes guide information processing and influence behaviour - what people see, hear, think, do (2), that discrimination is a harmful and unjustified denying of equal treatment on people or groups of people (3), and that the choices are not arbitrary (4), an application was built to provide an insight into the extent of discrimination against an individual, a group or a community.

This new research tool developed to assess attitudes of discrimination consists of 2 sub-domains that can be installed on the operating systems Windows 7 and Windows 8. These are the User Domain and the Administration Domain.

Figure no. 1. Application: window of presentation and for opening questionnaires



Figure no. 2. Application: window of presentation and for accessing sections/modules



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The User Domain

This domain retrieves the data entered by the user. It has a simple form that can be installed on any Windows system. The functions of the application are: data collection (in a form which can be selected by the beneficiary), data verification, data encryption (the fields to be checked and encoded are determined by the beneficiary), data export in an encrypted format when saving information (the data encryption methods will be determined by the subcontractor, after obtaining a favourable notification from the beneficiary).

The application has several sections/modules, which can be accessed as needed. They include the main entities subjected to discrimination: HIV/AIDS, different sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity. These modules are: the attitude of discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS, the attitude of discrimination against people with different sexual orientation, the attitude of discrimination towards people with psychiatric illnesses, the attitude of discrimination against persons with disabilities and, last but not least, the attitude of discrimination against the Romani population.

Figure no. 3. Application: window for questionnaires accessing

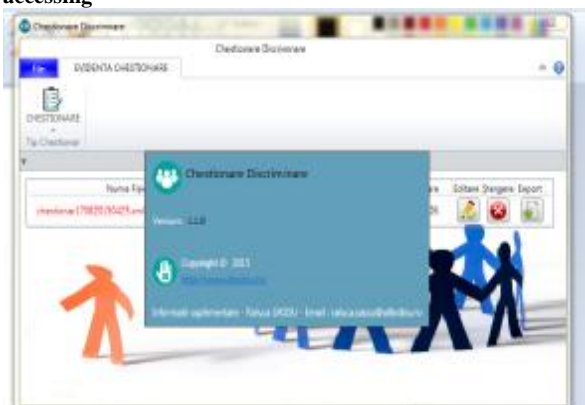


Figure no. 4. Application: window with the fields for questionnaire completion - general data



The build-up of the application's questions/items was based on the scales that were tested within the research that substantiated the application's draft. These included: the scale for the perception of people with HIV/AIDS, the scale for the perception of people with different sexual orientation, the scale for the perception of discrimination of people with mental illnesses and/or disabilities and the scale for the perception of members of the Romani group. Stigma is rooted in common cultural expectations and is reinforced through interpersonal situations; the items of these scales emphasize these phenomena.

Stigma is not only an interpersonal or intrapersonal process, but also a process at the macro level, which increases the possibility of considering the stigma as a dimension of social stratification.(5)

Administration Domain

It aims at managing the obtained data. This domain's functionalities are: registering the encrypted data generated by the User Domain, verification and processing of these data, creating reports (the necessary number of reports will be determined by the beneficiary), the possibility of deleting all data from the database, the possibility of back-up and restoration of the database, access granted only with username and password, the possibility of exporting data (the data and fields to be exported will be established by the beneficiary).

Figure no. 5. Application: window with fields for questionnaire completion - scale



Figure no. 6. Application: window with fields for questionnaire completion - full data verification



There is an urgent need not only for evolution, adoption and development of human rights protection mechanisms, but also for practices of assessment of their effectiveness in terms of individuals, groups and communities worldwide. The described application highlights this fact. By researchers and specialized practitioners working together, "there is a greater chance to investigate relevant phenomena in the field of discrimination, in due time, practical, and deeply rooted in everyday reality".(6) On the one hand, the measurement of individual discrimination leads to significant benefits in terms of individual assessment and provides more information about the respondent(7); on the other hand, it highlights the need to assess the attitude of discrimination in groups, institutions, in the community or society.(8) Ethnic discrimination is a ubiquitous problem (9), and a factor of health

erosion.(10) General scales measuring ethnic discrimination may facilitate the development of studies on discrimination and health among several minority groups simultaneously; also, they permit researching the role of ethnic discrimination in health disparities.(8)

Conclusions:

The described application, provided within the project POSDRU/156/1.2/G/142145 “Medical Higher Education Oriented towards a Non-Discriminatory Treatment of Patients” as an integrated instrument through which the attitude of discrimination against an individual, a group or a community can be assessed, offers an overview over the selective or restrictive nature of the behaviour. This new research tool highlights the knowledge of the applicant in terms of discrimination, as well as the emotional echo of his/her actions and relationships. The use of the application allows comparative assessments and judgments regarding the attitude on discrimination. Moreover, the results obtained from its use can be the starting point of building non-discriminatory strategies. This is important because a cornerstone of quality of life improving programs must also be related to the extension of research aimed at knowing the individual, the group and the organizational interventions that can be effective in reducing the level, determinants and consequences of interpersonal and institutional discrimination.(11) Although people do not have the same interests, expectations, priorities and plans for the future, it is important that the implementation of this new assessment tool to lead to the advance of development and innovation mechanisms focused on values, coordination, consultation and solving the problems of social reality.

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