



Special Olympics

Changing Attitudes Changing the World

Attitudes of the Public in South Africa Toward People with Intellectual Disabilities



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Overview

Attitudes affect how we think about other people and act toward them, and though attitudes are not something one can touch, they do have implications that are noticeable and important. Attitudes play an important role in the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities because attitudes influence services available and how policies are implemented to support individuals with intellectual disabilities. More importantly, the attitudes and expectations of the public in part determine the degree to which people with intellectual disabilities are permitted and able to live, work and go to school with their peers without intellectual disabilities.

Overcoming negative attitudes is a challenge in every country around the world, from the most developed to the developing, including South Africa. In South Africa, there are an estimated 2 million people with a disability, and over 200,000 South Africans (0.5 percent of the total population) are identified as having an intellectual disability (South Africa Census, 2004). It can be assumed that these numbers are an underestimation. If all individuals with IQs under 70 were recognized and included in these numbers, the population with intellectual disabilities would represent closer to 2 percent of the total population. Over the past decade, the country has made great efforts in recognizing the rights of all its citizens, including those with disabilities. Yet, South Africans with intellectual disabilities still confront major barriers to equality of rights. One significant barrier is the public's misunderstanding and misperceptions of this population, as suggested in a recent governmental white paper (Integrated National Disability Strategy, Chapter 1; 1997).

Special Olympics South Africa is one of a handful of national service agencies that provides services to people with intellectual disabilities. For over a decade, Special Olympics in South Africa has organized sports training and competition, reaching over 4,000 athletes by the time this survey was conducted in 2004 (by the end of 2005, there were more than 15,000 athletes in South Africa). As part of their strategic plan to expand their program and increase the number of athletes, Special Olympics South Africa sought to determine what the public understands of Special Olympics, and their attitudes toward the people Special Olympics serves. The hope was that by understanding public awareness and attitudes, Special Olympics South Africa would be seen as a leader for addressing the quality of life of individuals

with intellectual disabilities and would be better equipped to make specific plans for the future. Therefore, Special Olympics South Africa requested Special Olympics, Inc., to commission a research team from the University of Massachusetts Boston to survey the public on their knowledge of Special Olympics, their perceptions of people with intellectual disabilities and their beliefs about inclusion, using the Multinational Survey of Public Attitudes toward Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (2002). By using the Multinational Survey of Public Attitudes, South Africa would be placed within the context of the global picture, as the Multinational Survey of Public Attitudes has been carried out in 10 countries. The research team from the University of Massachusetts Boston consisted of the Center for Social Development and Education/Special Olympics Regional Collaborating Center, the Center for Survey Research and the Gallup organization.

The UMass Boston research team, starting in August of 2004 and continuing for several weeks, surveyed over 800 adults, representing all major cities and randomly selected rural townships from all provinces in South Africa. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with adults over 18 who were recruited in markets, parks and other public places. To identify the public's understanding of Special Olympics South Africa, additional questions specific to the Special Olympics organization were appended to the Multinational Survey of Attitudes.

In the following pages, the results of the survey are presented in five sections: 1) Public awareness and understanding of Special Olympics; 2) Public exposure to and understanding of people with intellectual disabilities; 3) Public beliefs about inclusion; 4) Public beliefs about the barriers to inclusion; and, 5) Summary and recommendations. The discussion of the results is organized to place South Africa within the results of the Multinational Survey of Public Attitudes.

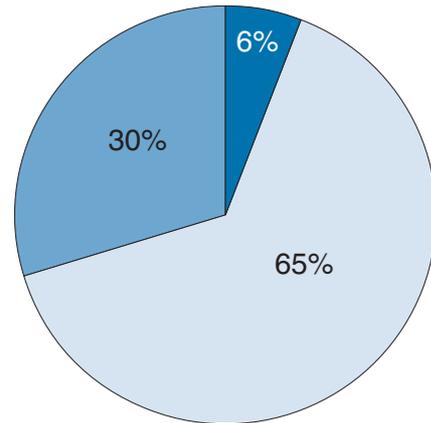
Public Awareness and Understanding of Special Olympics

Given that one of the primary goals of Special Olympics is to increase both the number of participating athletes and expand its volunteer base, it is important to determine how well the public understands the purpose and activities of Special Olympics. Therefore, the public in South Africa was asked a series of questions regarding the extent to which they know about Special

Olympics activities and their level of involvement and interest in Special Olympics programs.

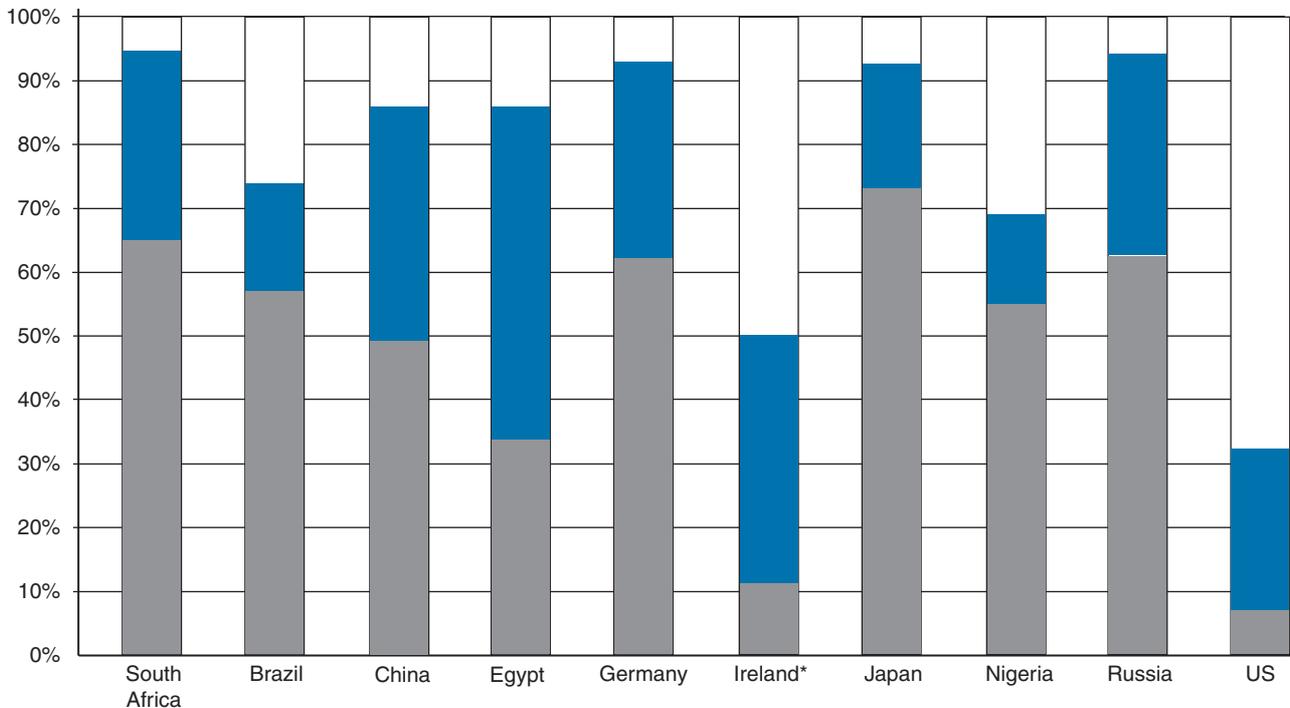
The most important finding is that the majority of the public in South Africa is not aware of Special Olympics. As can be seen in Chart 1, 65 percent of the public in South Africa have no knowledge of Special Olympics, meaning they have never read anything, seen anything or heard anything about the program. Of the remaining 35 percent who have heard about Special Olympics, most have just basic awareness of Special Olympics, and only a small group (6 percent) report having some involvement in the program, either as a volunteer or knowing an athlete. This lack of awareness and low involvement is similar to all other countries, with the exception of the United States and Ireland (the host of the 2003 Special Olympics World Summer Games), as is shown in Chart 2.

Chart 1: Is the Public Aware of Special Olympics in South Africa?



■ No SO Awareness ■ SO Awareness ■ SO Involvement

Chart 2: How Does South Africa Compare in Awareness of and Involvement in Special Olympics?



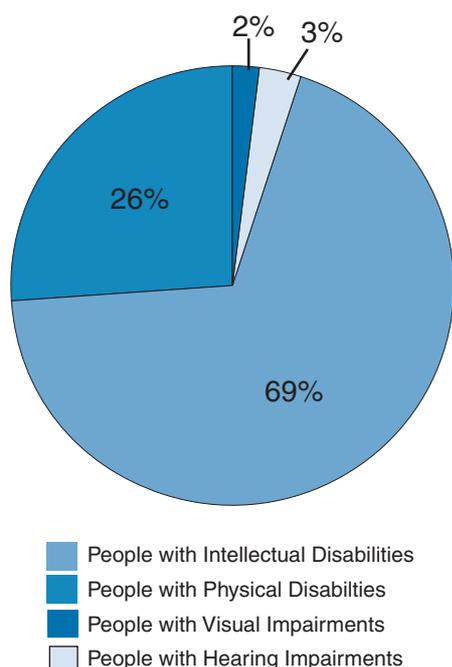
■ No SO Awareness ■ SO Awareness □ SO Involvement

*Note: Northern Ireland is combined with the Republic of Ireland.

Documenting the public’s awareness of Special Olympics has little meaning without also knowing the *accuracy* of this knowledge. To truly grasp what the South African public knows about Special Olympics, additional questions were asked of only the public *who had heard* of Special Olympics. Specifically, questions were asked about the types of activities Special Olympics engages in and about who they serve. In addition, they were asked about how they learned of Special Olympics.

It is encouraging to note that the majority (69 percent) of those who had heard of Special Olympics accurately reported that Special Olympics serves people with intellectual disabilities (21 percent of the total population surveyed). And, of those who are aware of Special Olympics, over half (57 percent) expressed an interest in volunteering at an event in their area. However, there is a significant percentage of the public (31 percent) that have heard of Special Olympics but incorrectly believe the organization serves people with physical or sensorial disabilities (see Chart 3*). This misunderstanding about who is involved in Special Olympics may represent the public’s confusion as to the differences between Special Olympics and Paralympics. This confusion may have influenced the public’s reported interest in volunteering.

Chart 3: Who Participates in Special Olympics?*



Another significant finding is that those who report knowing about Special Olympics clearly misunderstand the type of sports activities Special Olympics offers. The majority of those who have heard of Special Olympics believe that Special Olympics provides sports training and competition for people with intellectual disabilities, however, they also believe that this sports training is part of the regular Olympics. *Only 5 percent of those who have heard of Special Olympics understand that Special Olympics provides sports training and competition for people with intellectual disabilities, separate from the regular Olympics* (See Chart 4*). The public also believes that Special Olympics engages in a number of social justice services, such as providing housing and health care for people with intellectual disabilities, and supporting families of people with intellectual disabilities (See Chart 5*).

Of the 35 percent who have heard of Special Olympics, over half had heard or read something about Special Olympics within six months of their interview. Further, the majority (75 percent) reported getting information about Special Olympics from television and newspapers. Poster campaigns and local Special Olympics events were among the lowest reported sources of information for the public. However, given the amount of misunderstanding about Special Olympics, interpretation of these results should be carried out with caution.

An important finding about the public’s awareness of Special Olympics is that there are minimal differences between categories of the public. There are no differences in levels of awareness between males and females. While the difference is small, in terms of race, white South Africans tend to be more aware of Special Olympics than black South Africans. However, both groups have misunderstandings about the type of activities Special Olympics engages in. Finally, as in the other countries surveyed, education level seems to play a role in public’s level of awareness, where those who at minimum graduated high school are more aware of Special Olympics than those with no schooling or only compulsory level education.

Chart 4: What Type of Sports Training is Offered by Special Olympics?*

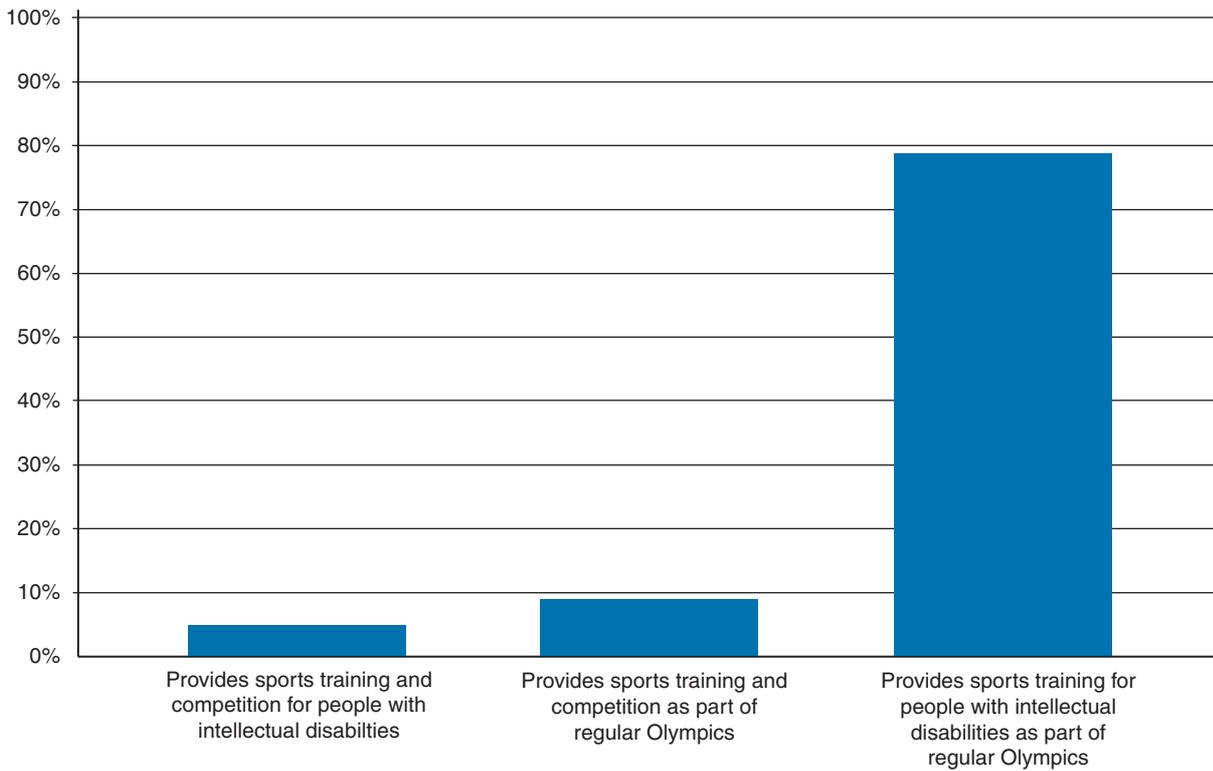
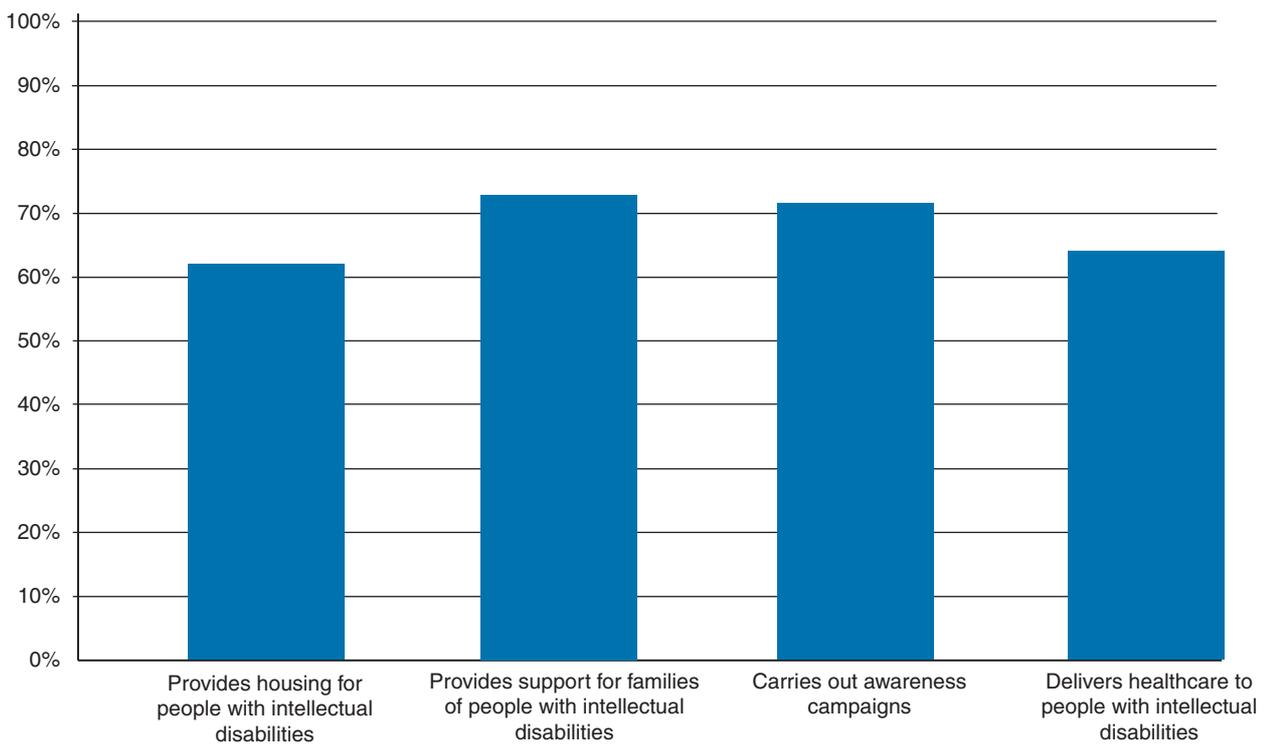


Chart 5: What Activities Does Special Olympics Organize?*



*Charts 3-5 present data for the public **who have heard of Special Olympics**

Public's Exposure To and Understanding of People with Intellectual Disabilities

It is evident that the public in South Africa have little awareness of Special Olympics, and even those who say they are aware of Special Olympics have misunderstandings as to its purpose and its autonomy from the regular Olympics. However, this does not in turn mean that the South African public has not been exposed to people with intellectual disabilities. In fact, the majority of the public in South Africa know someone with an intellectual disability. Over 70 percent of the public have some level of contact with people with intellectual disabilities, with 23 percent reporting that they have seen people with intellectual disabilities in public places. A significant percent of the public (34 percent) also acknowledge that they know someone with an intellectual disability other than a family member. This is important because it indicates that the public is aware of people with disabilities in their everyday surroundings. In addition, 15 percent of the public report having a family member with intellectual disabilities. South Africa is quite similar to other countries in terms of their

overall exposure to people with intellectual disabilities, in particular in the non-family contact (see Chart 6). However, it is possible to assume that due to the low visibility of people with intellectual disabilities in the general population (as suggested by the Census), that the public is more aware of those who are moderately to severely impaired, as this group is more visible in society.

To understand how contact and exposure have influenced the public's perceptions of people with intellectual disabilities, the public was asked questions about the activities and skills they believe individuals with intellectual disabilities are able carry out. Overall, the South African public significantly underestimates what individuals with intellectual disabilities can do, and sees individuals with intellectual disabilities as being moderately to severely impaired, again similar to other countries (for example, Nigeria, Egypt, etc.). That is, the public in South Africa see individuals with intellectual disabilities as being limited in their ability to perform self-help tasks, interact with other people, and even engage in athletic activity.

Chart 6: What is the Public's Level of Contact with People with Intellectual Disabilities?

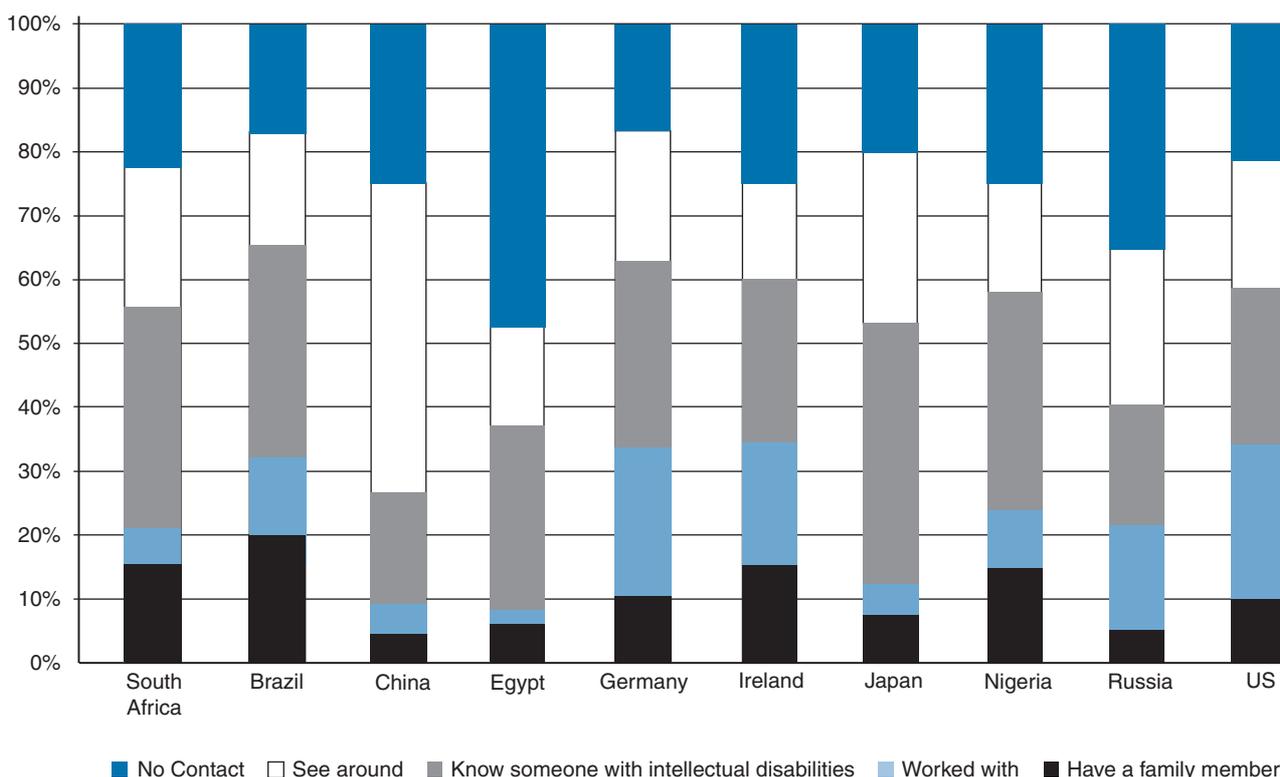


Chart 7: What are the Public’s Perceptions of the Capabilities of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities?

Tasks	Percentage of South Africans who said “Yes”
Sustain friendships	62%
Wash and dress	59%
Engage in simple conversation	55%
Tell time	53%
Prepare food	53%
Follow directions	50%
Describe symptoms to doctor	47%
Act appropriately	45%
Use public transportation	44%
Get married	42%
Understanding news event	42%
Handle money	36%
Raise children	27%
Handle emergencies	25%

In terms of self-help skills and interacting with other people, the South African public underestimates the ability of individuals with intellectual disabilities to perform simple activities like washing and dressing, telling time or engaging in a simple conversation. Two-thirds or less of the public believe that individuals with intellectual disabilities can engage in these activities. Further, and not surprisingly, most of the South African public do not see individuals with intellectual disabilities as being able to carry out more complex activities such as understanding a national news event or handling emergencies (see Chart 7). In actuality, the vast majority of people with intellectual disabilities are mildly impaired, and are able to carry out almost all self-help skills, interpersonal skills and even some complex independent living skills.

In comparison to other countries, the South African public’s perceptions of capabilities are lower than the publics from the United States and several European countries, particularly on the simple skills. In countries like the United States, Ireland, Russia and Germany, more than 80 percent of the public believes that people with intellectual disabilities are capable of tasks such as engaging in simple conversations, washing and dressing themselves and even sustaining friendships. In none of the countries, however, including South Africa, does the public believe that people with intellectual disabilities have the complex skills to live independently (see Chart 8).

To further understand the public's image of people with intellectual disabilities, specifically in how it relates to Special Olympics' mission of sports training and competition, the public was asked about how capable individuals with intellectual disabilities are in playing on sports teams with and without individuals with intellectual disabilities. Less than half of the South African public (44 percent) believes that people with intellectual disabilities can play sports on a team with other people with intellectual disabilities, and just over 20 percent of the South African public believes that people with intellectual disabilities can play sports on a team with players who do not have intellectual disabilities. When compared to countries like the United States, Germany and Ireland, where over 50 percent of the public believe that people with intellectual disabilities are very capable

of playing sports with other people with intellectual disabilities, and to other countries where very few believe people with intellectual disabilities are capable of playing sports, South Africa falls somewhere in the middle. However, when thinking about whether individuals with intellectual disabilities can play sports on a team with players without intellectual disabilities, South Africa is one of the more positive countries. The public in only one other country (Germany), believed more strongly that people with intellectual disabilities were very capable of playing sports on a team with players who do not have intellectual disabilities (see Chart 9). One possible explanation for why the public in South Africa is more positive than most countries may be because, as suggested above, the public is confusing Special Olympics with the regular Olympics.

Chart 8: How Do the South African Public's Perceptions Compare to Other Countries?

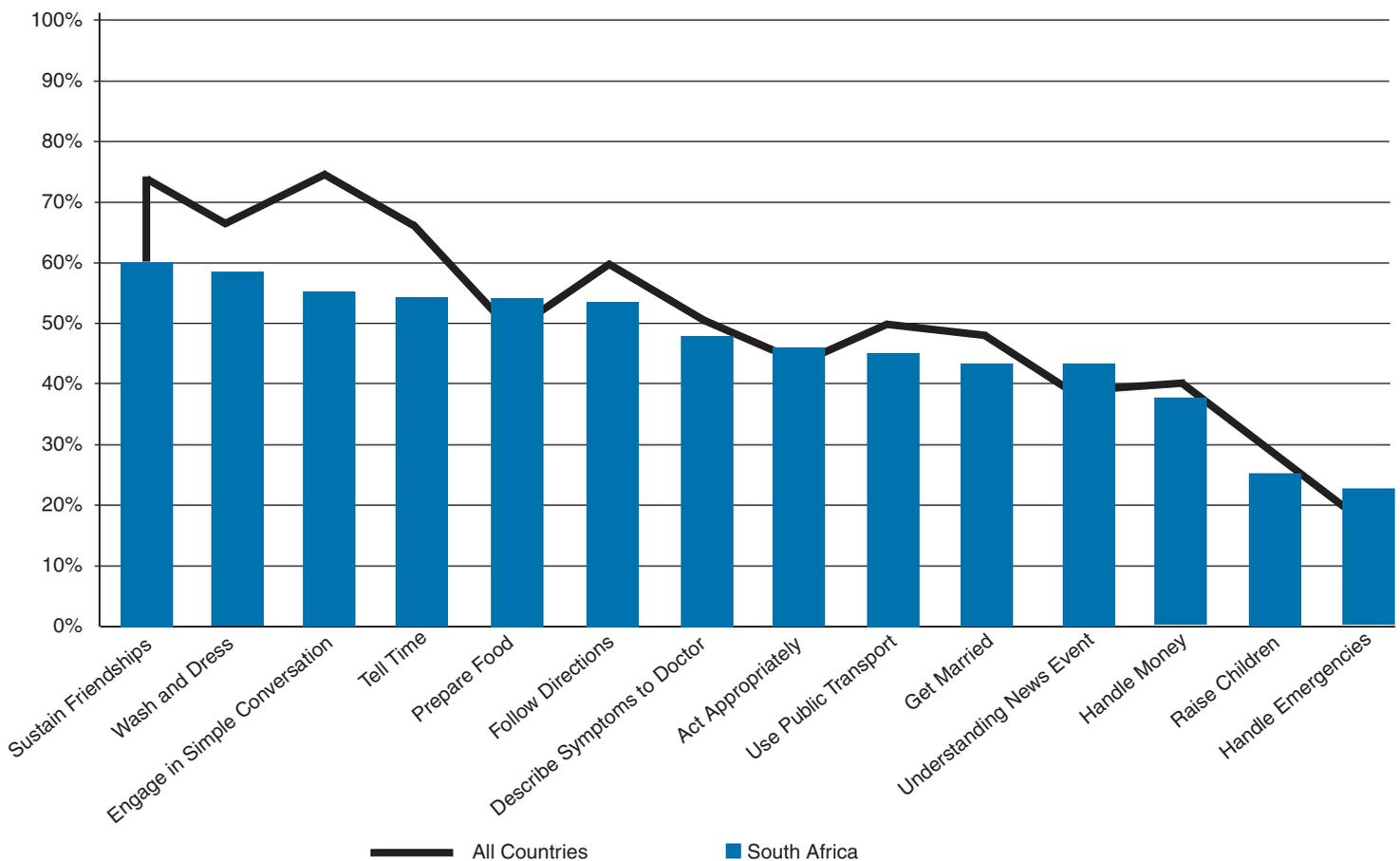
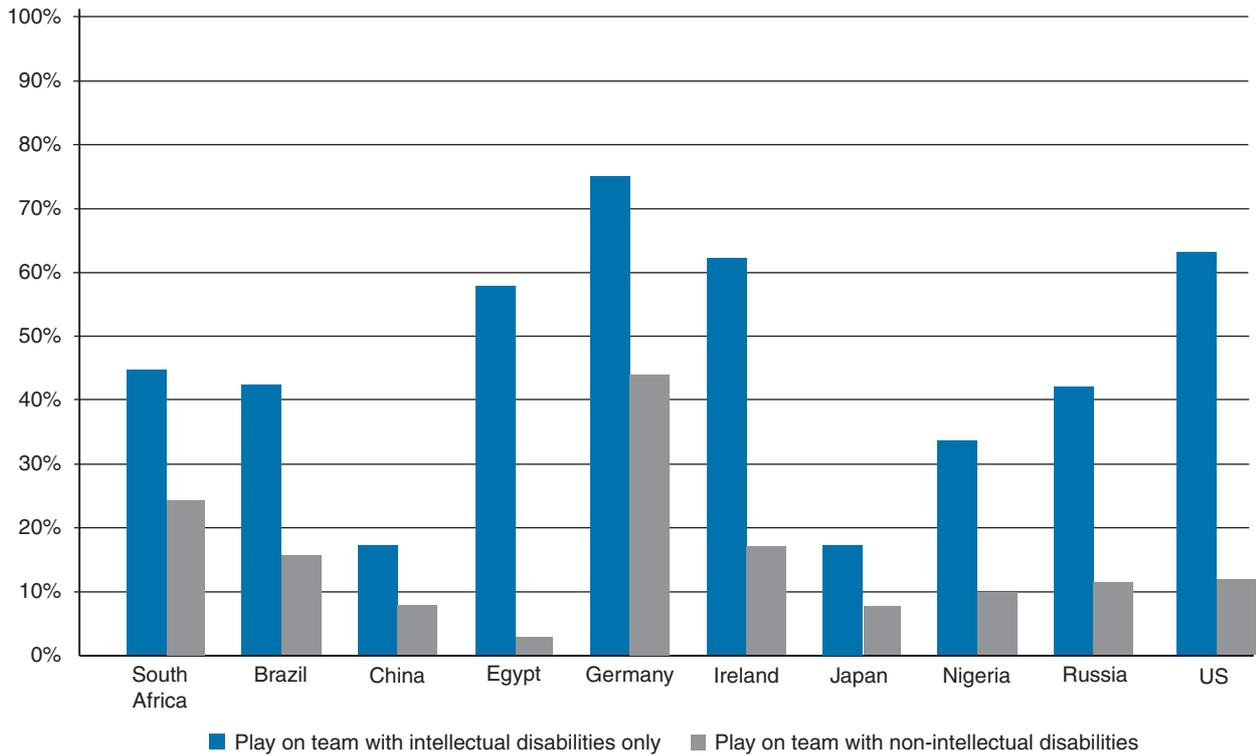


Chart 9: Can People with Intellectual Disabilities Play on Sports Teams?



Public Beliefs About Inclusion

Previously it was reported that the public underestimates the ability of people with intellectual disabilities to carry out independent living skills. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of the public in South Africa also believes that people with intellectual disabilities should not be included with the rest of society. Specifically, most of the South African public believes that people with intellectual disabilities should live within the care of their families, should work in separate sheltered workshops and attend special schools (see Charts 10, 11 and 12). The beliefs about where people with intellectual disabilities should live, work and go to school are similar to views held by the public in several other countries. Most likely these situations are the current practices and therefore the “best option” in South Africa, and so the public is reflecting what they see around them. Another possible reason for the public’s beliefs about not including people with intellectual disabilities into society could be their recognition that there is a lack of resources available to people with intellectual disabilities, as will be discussed in a subsequent section.

“ Less than half of the South African public believes that people with intellectual disabilities can play sports on a team with other people with intellectual disabilities.”

In South Africa, most of the public (57 percent) believes that people with intellectual disabilities should live with the family. Again, this belief reflects what the public may see as the “best available option.” In addition, this belief could be an indication of the strong cultural expectation of family role and the importance of the family, particularly in the care of people with disabilities. With the exception of Ireland and the United States, South Africa and all the other countries believe that people with intellectual disabilities should live with their families. Another interesting result is that 17 percent of the South African public believe that institutions are the best place for individuals with intellectual disabilities to live. This belief is similar to the publics of Egypt, Nigeria and China, where institutions are still in practice. In the remaining countries, the belief that people with intellectual disabilities should reside in institutions is less than 10 percent.

The majority of the public in South Africa (50 percent) also believes that people with intellectual disabilities are best employed in special workshops. An additional 14 percent of the public do not believe people with intellectual disabilities should have any job. This belief that people with intellectual disabilities should either not work or work in sheltered workshops could be a reflection on the current economic situation in South Africa, in which there is high unemployment and little job opportunities for many of the population (South Africa Statistics on Labor). The remaining third of the public in South Africa believe that people with intellectual disabilities are best employed in integrated environments, doing either unskilled or skilled labor. This belief about working in the community puts the South Africa public in the middle, more inclusive than countries like China and Egypt, but less inclusive than countries like Germany, Japan and the United States.

Chart 10: Public’s Beliefs About Inclusion—Where Should People with Intellectual Disabilities Live?

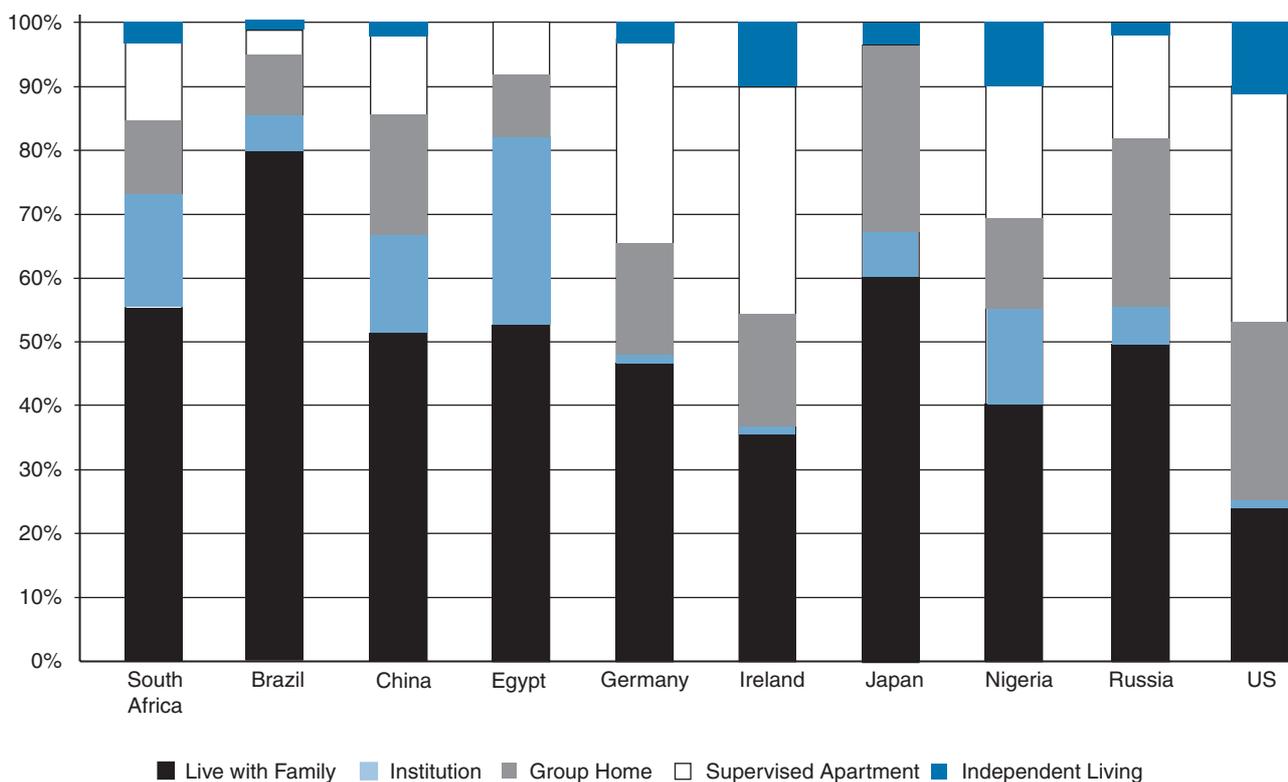
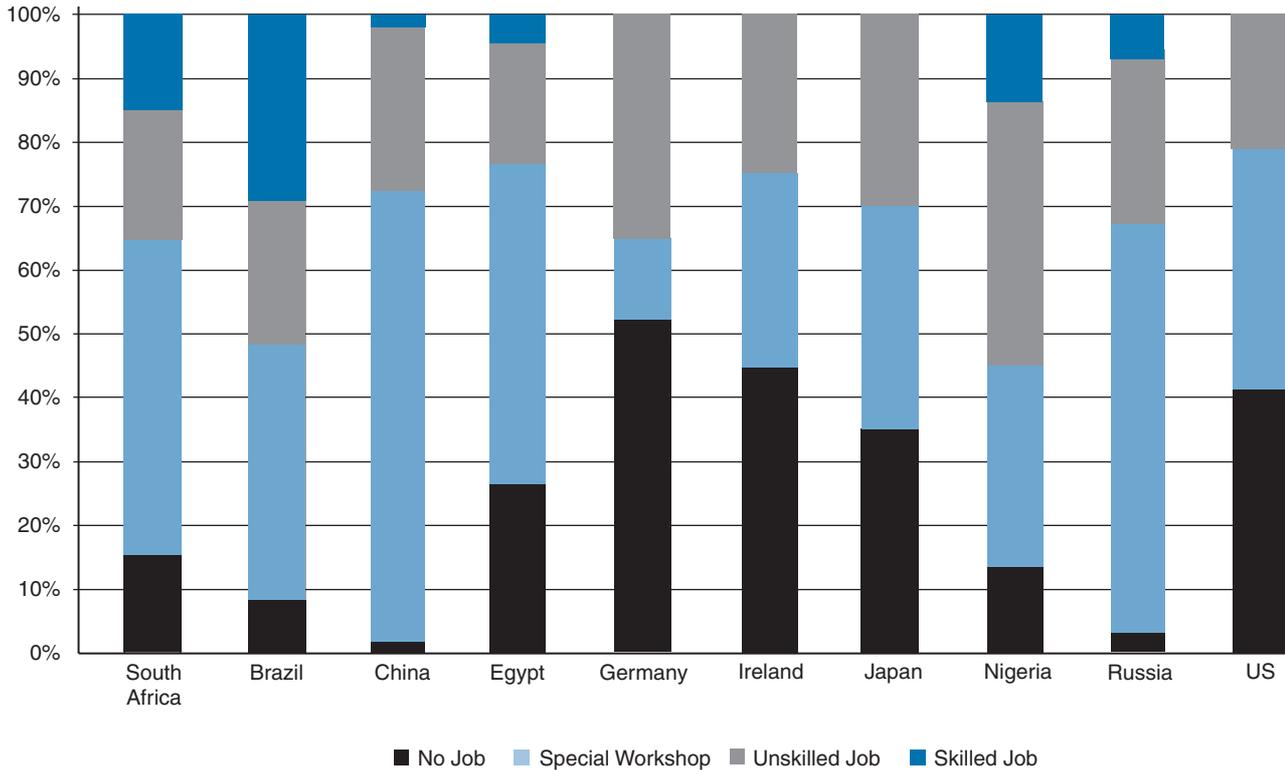


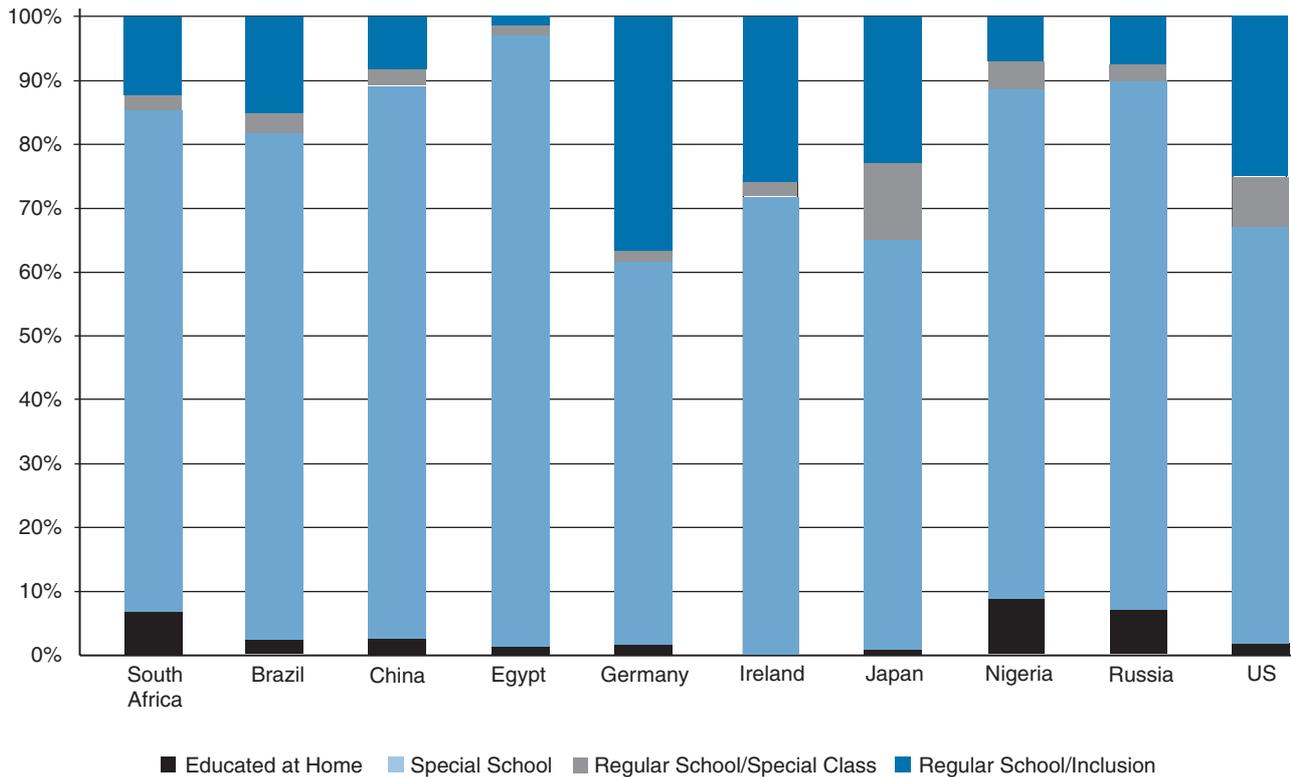
Chart 11: Public's Beliefs About Inclusion—Where Should People with Disabilities Work?



“The majority of the public in South Africa believes that people with intellectual disabilities are best employed in special workshops.”

In regard to education, the overwhelming majority of the South African public (77 percent) believes that children with intellectual disabilities are best educated in special schools. As suggested above, this belief could be a reflection of what is currently available, or it could be related to their belief that regular schools are not equipped to handle students with special learning needs. (Note: this explanation relates to findings on the public's beliefs about the obstacles to inclusion which will be discussed in a subsequent section.) While the idea of inclusion and accessible education is supported by all countries (e.g., UNESCO, EDUCATION FOR ALL, etc.), South Africa is no different than other countries, as the public worldwide believes that people with intellectual disabilities are best educated in special schools. In fact, the South African public is not that different from the United States, where inclusion legislation and policies have been in place for many years.

Chart 12: Public's Beliefs About Inclusion—Where Should Children with Intellectual Disabilities Attend School?



“ South Africa is no different than other countries, as the public worldwide believes that people with intellectual disabilities are best educated in special schools.”

Chart 13: What Does the Public Expect Will Happen if Inclusion Were to Occur in the Workplace?

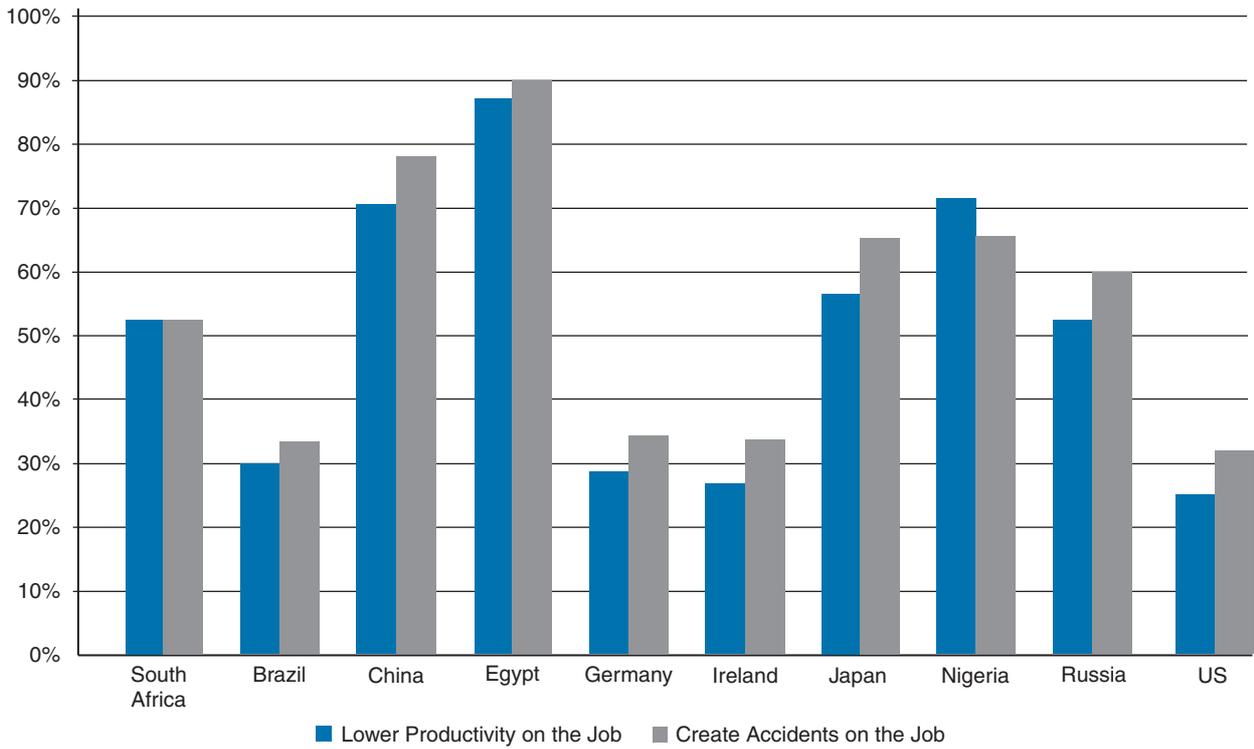
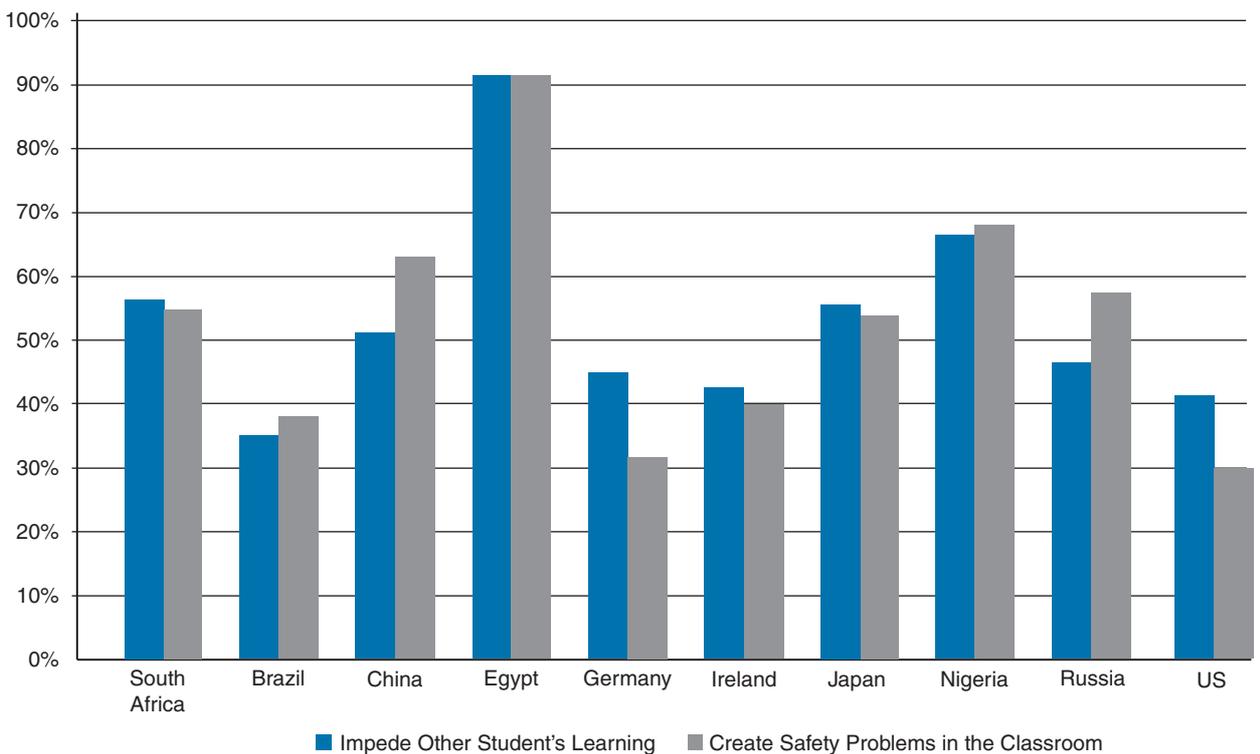


Chart 14: What Does the Public Expect Will Happen if Inclusion Were to Occur in the Classroom?



“ The public’s beliefs that people with intellectual disabilities should not be included into society are magnified by their expectations that there will be negative consequences if inclusion were to happen.”

Public Beliefs About the Barriers to Inclusion

It is clear that the South African public views people with intellectual disabilities as lacking competence, even when it comes to the most basic living skills, and that they believe that people with intellectual disabilities should live, work and go to school in separate environments from the rest of society. The questions that remain are: Why does the public believe that people with intellectual disabilities should not be included into society and what does the public believe is preventing inclusion from happening? Overall, the public sees two types of barriers to inclusion. First, because they perceive individuals with intellectual disabilities as lacking the necessary skills to work in competitive employment and learn in a regular classroom, they expect that inclusion will have negative consequences on the environment. Second, they also believe that there are external obstacles, such as a lack of services, which prevent inclusion from happening.

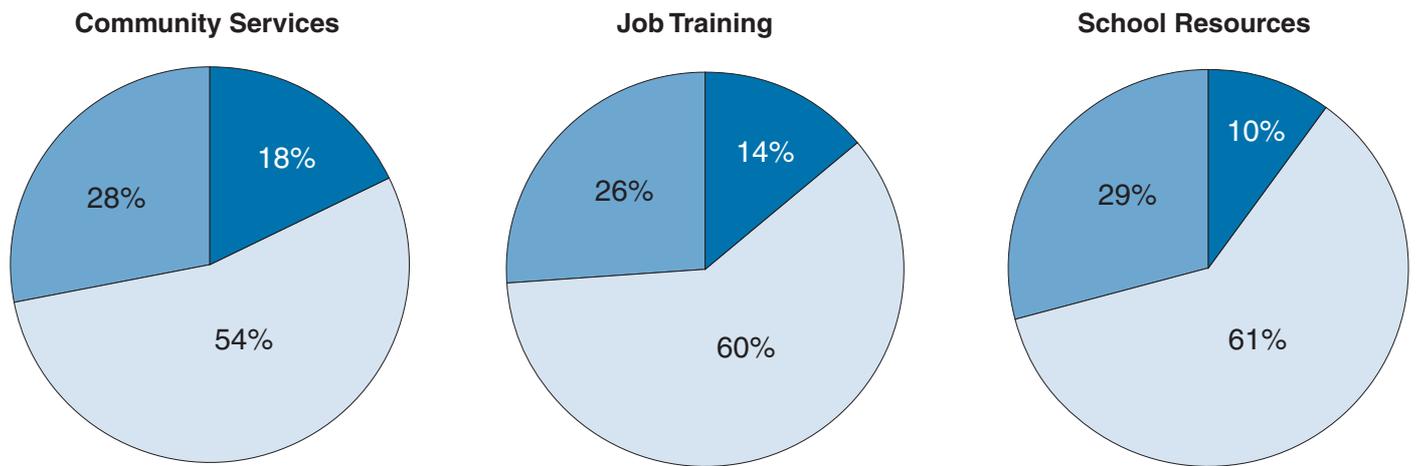
The public’s beliefs that people with intellectual disabilities should not be included into society are magnified by their expectations that there will be negative consequences if inclusion were to happen. More than half of the public in South Africa expects that if inclusion occurred, it would disrupt the workplace and the classroom (see Charts 13 and 14). Over 50 percent of the public believe that having a person with intellectual disabilities on the job would lower the productivity of other workers and create safety problems for the individual and for others. Similarly, 50 percent of the public also believe that including a child with intellectual disabilities in the regular classroom will negatively impede the learning of other students and create discipline problems. Most of the public in the other countries reflect similar expectations about the potential negative consequences of inclusion (exceptions include Brazil, Germany, Ireland and the United States).

One potential reason for why the public expects negative consequences to inclusion is because they do not believe that there are resources available to provide the supports necessary for success in inclusive workplaces or schools. Over half of the public in South Africa recognize there is a lack of services in the community, employment sector and in schools, and that this lack of resources and services is a major obstacle to including people with intellectual disabilities into society (see Chart 15). In education, for instance, 61 percent of the public believe that regular schools do not have the proper resources to teach students with special learning needs, and 49 percent of the public also believe that teachers are not adequately prepared. Interestingly, only a third of the public believe that other people’s negative attitudes and expectations act as a major barrier to including people with intellectual disabilities (see Chart 16). The inability of the public to recognize negative attitudes as a major barrier suggests that the public is neither aware of their own misperceptions nor the consequences of these misperceptions.

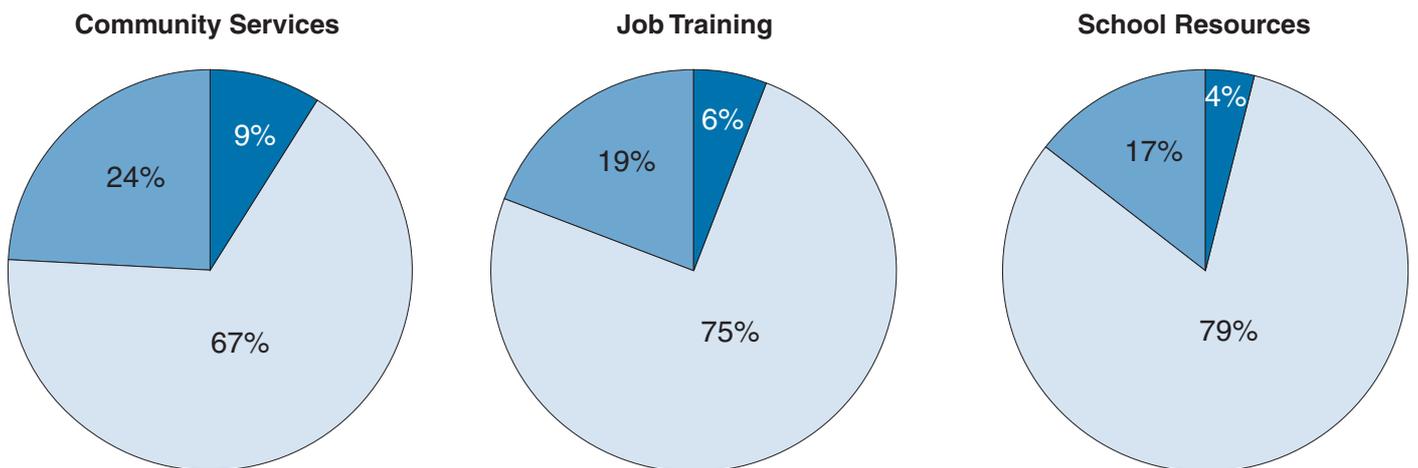
It is important to point out that when comparing the South African public’s beliefs about these major obstacles to publics in the other countries, South Africa is on the low end. For example, the public in South Africa does not believe the lack of services is as much of an obstacle in the community, workplace and school as the publics in the other countries. This difference may reflect the limited social services available for the country of South Africa as a whole. In addition, while over two-thirds of the other countries saw the negative attitudes of others as a barrier to inclusion, less than half of the public of South Africa saw negative attitudes as a barrier. Here again, South Africa is more similar to countries like China and Nigeria and less like Germany, Ireland and the United States.

**Chart 15: What are the Perceived Major Obstacles to Inclusion?
Community Services, Job Training and School Resources.**

South Africa:



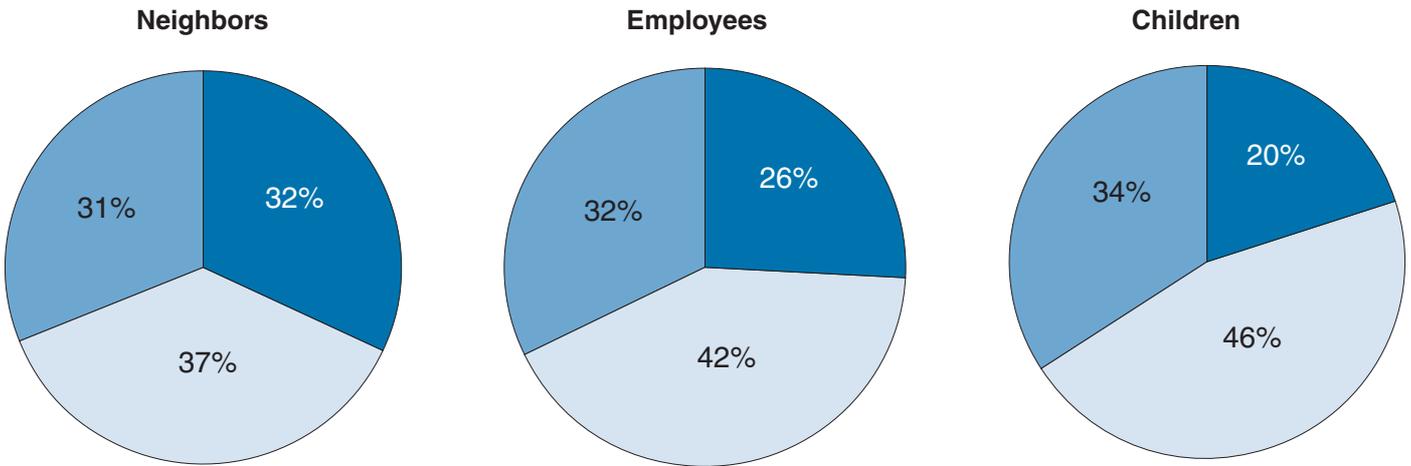
All Other Countries:



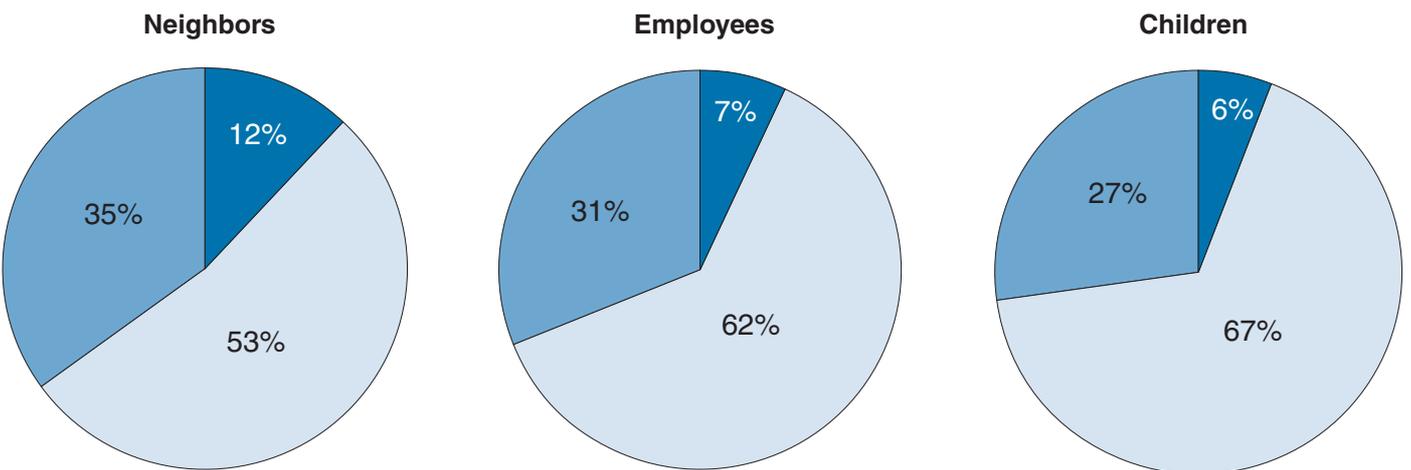
Major Obstacle
 Minor Obstacle
 No Obstacle

**Chart 16: What are the Perceived Major Obstacles to Inclusion?
Negative Attitudes of Neighbors, Employees, Children.**

South Africa:



All Other Countries:



Major Obstacle
 Minor Obstacle
 No Obstacle

Summary and Recommendations

There are a number of important and relevant findings from this study, all of which have valuable implications for Special Olympics South Africa. The first and probably most striking set of findings is the lack of awareness among the public about Special Olympics in South Africa. Less than 40 percent of the public reported knowing about Special Olympics. And yet, even those who say they have heard of Special Olympics often misunderstand its purpose and activities. There is also obvious confusion among the public between Special Olympics and Paralympics and about what activities Special Olympics offers. The results also suggest that the public obtains most of its information about Special Olympics from the television and from newspapers or magazines, but it is not clear that what they are seeing and reading is actually about Special Olympics (and not the Olympics).

As it has been noted, the public underestimates the competence of people with intellectual disabilities. While the majority of the public report knowing someone with intellectual disabilities, we do not know the quality of the contact, or the level of impairment of the person they encountered. Because the public underestimates what people with intellectual disabilities can do, the assumption can be made that their exposure has been primarily with people with moderate to severe impairment. It is also possible that that public's underestimation is the result of how people with intellectual disabilities are portrayed or described in the media.

The public in South Africa does not believe that inclusion is a possibility. The majority of the public believes that people with intellectual disabilities should reside with the family, work in separate workshops and attend special schools. There are a number of possible explanations for this belief. First, the public may believe that these are the "best available options" for people with intellectual disabilities. Second and quite related, the public may believe that independent living situations, competitive workplaces and regular schools do not have the proper resources to support inclusion. Third, the public expects that including a person with intellectual disabilities in the workplace or regular school will have negative consequences because the public does not see people with intellectual disabilities as having the skills necessary to live, work in skilled jobs and go to school beside their

peers. In short, they do not see people with intellectual disabilities as competent enough to be part of society.

Supporting inclusion and disseminating information that dispels the misperceptions of people with intellectual disabilities are important endeavors for Special Olympics South Africa, particularly in light of these findings. The process of including people with intellectual disabilities into society is a long and arduous process. As an example, the public in United States is more accepting of inclusion in the community and in the workplace than many other countries. Yet, despite years of policies and advocacy for inclusion in schools, similar gains have not been made in terms of beliefs about educational inclusion.

It is evident that the public in South Africa needs to be educated about the capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities and about Special Olympics. The public also needs information that will help them revise the negative image they hold of people with intellectual disabilities. The public would also benefit from learning about the value of Special Olympics for athletes, families and even the greater community. Therefore, Special Olympics South Africa could engage in a broader communication/awareness campaign that focuses on informing the public about Special Olympics and the athletes they serve. Because the public gathers most of its information from television, newspapers and magazines, these media sources seem an obvious medium to employ.

The first step in such an awareness effort is to clearly inform the public about Special Olympics. In this communication it is paramount that a clear delineation be made between Special Olympics, Paralympics and the Olympics. This awareness effort could include information on who is involved in Special Olympics (athletes, volunteers, coaches, families), the types of activities the programs engage in, the mission and goals of Special Olympics South Africa, and current achievements. As the public learns about Special Olympics and its constituents, it is important that the public in South Africa also have more opportunities to witness the capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities. The public needs to be educated as to what individuals with intellectual disabilities can and cannot do, and that there is great variability that exists among people with intellectual disabilities. Further, it needs to be made clear that not all people with intellectual disabilities fall into the moderate to severely disabled category.

Therefore, as a second step, Special Olympics South Africa can break down the existing stereotypes of people with intellectual disabilities by highlighting the competence of their athletes on and off the playing field. Sport provides an excellent venue for people with intellectual disabilities to demonstrate their capabilities as well as their weaknesses. Moreover, the Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997) recognizes that sports for people with disabilities is “one of the vital components in integrating people with disabilities into society.” This statement aligns closely to the vision of Special Olympics – that is, to empower athletes to become active members of their community through sports.

As a third step, Special Olympics South Africa can support inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities by educating the public about people with ID (for example, dispelling the misperception that people with intellectual disabilities may cause safety issues to society). It is not expected that Special Olympics is in a position to break down the physical barriers to inclusion that exist in South Africa. Special Olympics can, however, serve as a source of information and as a voice for individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families.

The family is an important and critical stakeholder in an awareness campaign. Special Olympics needs to provide more support for the family because, currently, they shoulder much of the responsibility for the care of people with intellectual disabilities in South African society. Programs like the Family Support Network are an important tool to help families feel supported and, in turn, empowered. In addition, Special Olympics can also educate families about their children’s potential because it is largely the family that is responsible for the degree to which their children are exposed to the community. As families become more knowledgeable about the capabilities of their children with intellectual disabilities they will also begin to expect more from the community. Special Olympics can support them in their new role as advocate for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities in the community.

With regard to the workplace, Special Olympics can continue to build better connections with the business sector. While Special Olympics is not equipped to provide job training or job placement for people with intellectual disabilities, by connecting with the business sector, they can recruit new volunteers and provide information to

employers and employees to help dispel the public’s misunderstanding about whether or not people with intellectual disabilities can work. In addition, Special Olympics can also seek out networks or collaborate with service organizations that provide job training programs. By linking with such organizations, Special Olympics could become involved, even at an intermediary level, in preparing individuals with intellectual disabilities for the workforce. It also needs to be pointed out that the skills that people with intellectual disabilities learn in sports training and sports competition, such as teamwork, following rules and channeling effort, are translatable to the workplace.

“Special Olympics can educate families about their children’s potential because it is largely the family that is responsible for the degree to which their children are exposed to the community.”

With regard to the school, Special Olympics can help children and teachers learn more about intellectual disabilities and about differences. Special Olympics South Africa can be involved in this area by doing what it does best – demonstrating the athletic ability and determination of its athletes, and emphasizing one of the guiding principals of Special Olympics, which is to come together on the commonality of sport. The Special Olympics SO Get Into It® program could be a useful tool for helping the youth of South Africa better understand and accept people who are different in their community. The program promotes better understanding and acceptance of individuals with intellectual disabilities and

aims to increase participation and involvement in Special Olympics, potentially increasing interest in volunteering.

By connecting with the workplace and schools, Special Olympics can increase its opportunities for growth, particularly in increasing awareness and recruiting volunteers. Unified Sports® is another good strategy for promoting change in attitudes about inclusion and change in knowledge about the capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities. Not only is the program a useful tool for building the constituent base, but also a recent evaluation of the Unified Sports program in the United States (Siperstein, Hardman, Wappett & Clary, 2001) suggests that the program improves the self-esteem and confidence of people with intellectual disabilities. Further, people without intellectual disabilities come away from the experience with a positive view of their teammates along with a better understanding of intellectual disabilities. Building the self-esteem and confidence of its athletes, and providing partners without intellectual disabilities a structured environment to witness athletes' competence can go a long way in effecting a positive change in attitudes and create a more accepting environment.

The results of this survey provide a snapshot as to the public's current understanding of Special Olympics South Africa and their attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities. As Special Olympics expands and grows throughout the communities in South Africa, it has the opportunity to influence the public's attitudes and acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities. At present, Special Olympics needs to play a larger role in garnering media coverage for events. It is also important that they acquire corporate sponsorship and involvement as a way to reach out to the community and become more visible. In doing so, Special Olympics can succeed in getting their message heard and become a leader in the movement toward greater respect, dignity and value for people with intellectual disabilities at all ages.

Special Olympics and its Research Mission

Special Olympics is the worldwide leader in providing high-quality sports training and competition opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, offering 2.25 million athletes from more than 150 countries the opportunity to participate in 30 Olympic-type summer and winter sports. Special Olympics Programs also promote social competence and self-esteem, acceptance and improved health outcomes. More recently, Special Olympics has emerged as a global leader in cutting-edge research and evaluation to promote better understanding of issues surrounding intellectual disabilities. Research projects commissioned by Special Olympics are designed to provide high-level, externally validated scientific data to:

- Guide improvements in Special Olympics programs and practices;
- Inform audiences about the unmet needs of people with intellectual disabilities worldwide; and
- Inform the public about the competence, value and contributions of people with intellectual disabilities to the world community.

References for further information

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