

Evaluation of the Journal on Developmental Disabilities

Abstract

The Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities (OADD) has published the Journal on Developmental Disabilities (JoDD) since 1992. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the JoDD by conducting a readership survey. PhpESP (Easy survey package) was used to design, create, and deploy a web-based survey to staff working at Surrey Place Centre; OADD board members; authors who published manuscripts in JoDD; members of the OADD Research Special Interest Group; and, to general members of OADD. Eighty-seven of 667 questionnaires were received, giving a response rate of 13.0%. The results indicated that OADD members are regular readers of JoDD; the majority of the readers read JoDD on-line; the content of the JoDD is appropriate; the quality and format of JoDD are acceptable; and, manuscript submission and processing usually are being carried out efficiently. Nevertheless, there are some areas of the JoDD that could be improved.

The *Journal on Developmental Disabilities* (JoDD) is a publication of the Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities (OADD). JoDD was established in 1992. Currently, JoDD is available in hard copy and, since 1995, it has also been freely available online on the OADD website (OADD Journal on Developmental Disabilities, 2005). In 2005, the Developmental Services Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) provided a grant to enable OADD to produce two special issues of JoDD. The first special issue was a clinician's guide for physical health issues of older persons with Down syndrome (Wallace & Dalton, 2006). The second consisted of reprints of outstanding articles from issues of JoDD published since its inception to honour the 20th anniversary of OADD (OADD 20th Anniversary Issue, 2006). Other objectives of the grant were to evaluate these two special issues as well as a regular issue of JoDD with

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a special focus on Down syndrome (Down Syndrome, 2005), and the effectiveness and operation of JoDD.

In order to evaluate the operation of JoDD, an online survey was placed on the journal site of the OADD website (OADD Journal on Developmental Disabilities Reader's Survey -2006 (2005)). However, as of January, 2006, only 19 persons had responded. Thus, in order to obtain representative information, the editorial committee of JoDD decided to carry out a targeted, expanded survey.

Methodology

Research Design

The study was approved by the Ethics Research Board, University of Toronto, Mississauga. Development of the expanded survey was based, in part, upon content of the Reader's Survey, and also upon information from readership surveys conducted by other organizations.

Mail surveys have been a traditional method of conducting research studies. However, with the growth of the internet, many researchers are switching to web-based surveys (WBS). There are many advantages of WBS over paper surveys (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003). For example, WBS are less expensive in the long run (Sax et al.) and have a shorter turnaround time compared to mail surveys (Deutskens, Ruyter, Wetzels, & Oosterveld, 2004). Consequently, a WBS was used for the present study.

PhpESP (Easy Survey Package) is an open source software package that is used to create, deploy, and manage WBS (University of Guelph, n.d.). It is freely available at the University of Toronto. It is easy to use and is completed anonymously (University of Guelph).

Recruitment of Participants

In March, 2007, a recruitment email was sent out to: staff working at Surrey Place Centre (N = 316); OADD board members (N = 15); first authors of papers published in JoDD (N = 71); members of the OADD Research Special Interest Group (N =100); and, to general members of OADD (N =175). Respondents were asked to complete an online survey but were given the opportunity to take the survey in hard copy or by a telephone interview. Of those who participated in the study, all took the online survey.

Research has shown that reminders increase the response rate of WBS (Sheehan & Hoy, 1999; Sheehan & McMillan, 1999). Thus, a reminder was sent out four times at weekly intervals to individuals in the above groups.

An incentive was provided to prospective respondents for participation in the study. They were given the opportunity after completion of the survey to enter themselves into a draw by providing a contact telephone number for a chance to win one of five copies of the OADD textbook: *Developmental Disabilities in Ontario* (Brown & Percy, 2003). There were two reasons for an incentive. The first was to thank the participants for responding to the survey. The second was to increase the response rate of our survey. Some research studies have indicated that providing an incentive increases the response rate of WBS (Bosnjak & Tuten, 2003; Deutskens et al., 2004).

Demographics of Sample

Of 667 individuals who were contacted, 87 completed the survey giving a response rate of 13.0%. The majority of the respondents were female (66.7%). The highest response rate was from those between the ages of 26-45 (56.7%). The majority (91.0%) of the respondents had an undergraduate degree,

while 35.0% had a doctoral degree. Of the respondents, 35.0% were professionals working in the developmental disability field, 13.3% were researchers in the developmental disability field, 12.0% were first authors of articles published or to be published in JoDD, 10.0% were students, and 3.0% were general members of the OADD. The majority of the respondents lived in Canada (96.7%).

Results

Evaluation of the Objectives

1. *To determine if JoDD was being read by the audience for whom it was intended.* Members of OADD (42.9%) were found to be more likely to read the JoDD regularly than any other group. Individuals who submitted manuscript(s) to JoDD (55.6%), professionals working in the developmental disability field (34%), and researchers in the developmental disability field (33.3%) were more likely to have read JoDD occasionally. Students in the developmental disability field (75.0%) were more likely to read the JoDD when they needed to research something.

2. *To determine if online or hard copies of articles in the JoDD were being used.* The majority of the respondents read JoDD articles on-line (38.6%). Some participants borrowed copies of the JoDD from a library (24.6%) or read printed articles downloaded from the OADD website (17.5%). Only a few of the respondents borrowed copies from other people (3.5%) or bought copies from OADD (3.5%). To summarize, approximately 56.1% (38.6% + 17.5%) of the participants read JoDD articles from an electronic source. However, 31.6% (24.6% + 3.5% + 3.5%) of the participants read JoDD articles from an original hard-copy source. The majority of respondents (90.5%) indicated that early JoDD issues available only in hard-copy should be made available online.

3. *To determine if the JoDD content was appropriate and if there were particular areas that needed to be addressed.* Some of the respondents said that the content of the JoDD was appropriate and that nothing needed to be addressed. However, others said that there was a need to cover other issues. For example, respondents were interested in reading articles on the following topics: research and service models, Aboriginal issues, family dynamics, accessibility, dignity issues around personal care, adult issues in autism, consent issues, research in the area of quality of life, socio-political issues, and training issues for professionals working in field. More than half the respondents (59.0%) wanted an annual issue that included the proceedings of the annual OADD conference.

4. *To evaluate the quality of the articles in the JoDD and its format.* The majority of the participants (51.9%) rated JoDD as being a good source of information. A large percentage of the participants (29.6%) said that the JoDD was an excellent source of information. However, a small percentage of respondents mentioned that the JoDD was either a fair (16.7%) or poor (1.9%) source of information. The results also indicated that a considerable percentage of participants had not read the special issues being evaluated. Reading rates for the Down Syndrome Issue, the Down Syndrome Supplement 1 Issue, and the Anniversary Issue were 55.2%, 62.1% and 50.8%, respectively. Those who had read these three issues reported the information content, respectively, to be excellent (34.6%, 40.9%, 30%) or good (61.5%, 59.1%, 63.3%).

Most of the respondents said that the format was "fine as [it] is." The majority characterized the layout of the journal as being good. One respondent described the JoDD as having a "clean layout and is easy to read both online and in hard copy". However, others mentioned that the font size of JoDD was "too small." One

mentioned that it was difficult to read articles after making a photocopy. One respondent also suggested that the font size should be increased for the tables.

5. *To determine if manuscript submission and processing are being carried out efficiently.* Even though only 12.1% of those who participated in the study were individuals who had submitted manuscript(s) to the JoDD, 31 of the respondents (55.4%) replied to the question on manuscript submission and processing. Many of them (42.9%) said that manuscript submission and processing were being carried out effectively. For example, one of the respondents said that “my submission was handled well.” However, a small percentage of the respondents (3.6%) mentioned that submission and processing were not being carried out effectively. For example, submission and processing for JoDD “takes longer than average” compared to other journals, and the “turn around time for reviews of manuscripts” needs to be improved.

Other Issues

A substantial percentage of respondents (49.3%) indicated that JoDD should be published four times a year instead of two. Almost half of the respondents (49.0%) indicated that a survey of JoDD should be conducted annually, although a few commented that a survey every two or three years would be adequate. Only 15 respondents provided additional comments; of these, eight provided positive comments (e.g., “overall excellent source of local initiatives and opportunities for collaboration amongst professionals”). Comments for improving JoDD included: clarification of the editorial structure of JoDD; inclusion of articles in French; encouragement of criticism in review articles; explanation of specialized terms; sending email notification of new articles in press and new published issues.

Discussion

One limitation of the study was the relatively low response rate. A review of the literature suggests that response rates of WBS can be increased by sending a pre-notification email or an advance letter of the upcoming survey (Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000; Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levince, 2004). A personalized invitation to potential participants also has been shown to increase the response rate for WBS (Heerwegh, 2005; Joinson & Reips, 2007). Future WBS should take these strategies into consideration.

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