Importance of Diversity: Understanding Individuals with Cerebral Palsy

Like many disorders, cerebral palsy is often misunderstood by the general public. In 2002, Feldman-Winter et al. analyzed the public perceptions of cerebral palsy by distributing a survey to one hundred randomly-selected adults. The authors identified that many participants answered the questions inaccurately, indicating that the characteristics and causes of CP may not be fully understood by the public. To this author's knowledge from completed research, there have been no other surveys of this kind conducted in the U.S. since 2002. To identify if perceptions have changed since then, this study analyzed college students’ knowledge of CP through an online survey. The twenty-question survey was distributed to 1,500 randomly selected Ithaca College student emails. The survey provided statements addressing the etiology, characteristics, and outcomes of CP, and asked participants to identify how strongly they agreed with the listed statements. A total of 164 students responded to the survey. All five schools at Ithaca College were represented in the participant pool. All but one participant responded that they have heard of CP, but only 48% of individuals knew someone with CP. Even though some participants did not have direct experience with individuals with CP, approximately two-thirds of the total respondents agreed that they knew what CP was. It is hypothesized that participants will perform better than participants in the Feldman-Winter et al. study. However, we predict that the general IC student body may not have a complete understanding of CP and may need to learn more accurate information about this diverse group of individuals, including how individuals with CP communicate verbally and non-verbally.