

## **ADAPTED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS A MEANS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WITH MENTAL RETARDATION**

*Preliminary communication*

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### **Abstract**

*The subjects are 30 parents of children with mental retardation. It was conducted at an educational establishment with boarding education. The boarding accommodation socializes, educates, trains and integrates the children with intellectual disabilities at age from 1-10 grades. The aim of this study is to determine the level of awareness and care of parents about the impact of adapted physical activity in children with mental retardation in the process of their integration into the mainstream education. Depending on the nature of our study and according to the specificities of such scientific and pedagogical studies, we found useful to use the following methods: pedagogical experiment, monitoring and questionnaire, quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey data. All the data in our study show that a significant emphasis on children with mental retardation is needed regarding raising the awareness and improvement the attitude of parents towards them.*

**Keywords:** *physical education, sports activities, parents of children with disabilities, adapted physical activity, mainstream education, pedagogical experiment, method of monitoring, questionnaire, expert assessment*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Physical activity is a factor that affects mainly young generation and is particularly important for children with various disabilities. Sports activities, especially sports for people with intellectual disabilities, consistent with their individual and specific characteristics and forms are perceived as socio-economic and political phenomenon and as well as basic necessity for development and perfection.

Classes in adapted physical activity contribute significantly to accelerating the recreational and integration process of children with disabilities in society.

Global and regional processes in the development of society and its entry into the twenty-first century put before the public, the state and the individual a number of challenges and problems that should be solved in a modern way. One of them is caring for preservation, development and improvement of the human resources.

Physical activity is a factor affecting mainly young generation and being particularly important for children with various disabilities. Their treatment should be based on humanity and understanding of the situation in which they are located leading by the principles that ensure respect for the human rights (Fotev (Фотев), 1992).

Social integration is the strong interdependence and coherence between the elements of the whole. From a sociological perspective it is the process or a fact of individuals inclusion or part of a group in the whole or wider social community (Genov (Генов), 1998). The degree of social integration depends on the magnitude and intensity of the interdependence of the subsystems and components as well as between them and with the emerging social system they belong to (Fotev (Фотев), 2004 13]. It is a measure of internal structure, integrity, variety of a social system. The social system as a person, groups, organizations and institutions have several key functions, namely the leader is

adaptive, followed by personal, social and cultural function (Genov (Генов), 1998; Naumov (Наумов), 1991). The dispute itself as one of the main social institutions in society has a unique nature and perform various functions such as educational, health, social, cultural and recreational (Nikolova (Николова), (2009). The two main social institutions in society education and sports complement each other and synchronize at different levels. According to Durkheim (Дюркем), (1994) a social group is integrated into the extent to which its members hold a total of consciousness, share the same beliefs and convictions, they interact with each other and feel committed to a common goals.

Integrated education is a form of awareness manifestation of the need to adopt these children as part of our society. It must ensure their full participation in our lives and support their realization as complete persons in their chosen professions.

Integrated education and physical education of children with Special Education Needs - SEN is a qualitatively new concept for the organization and implementation of multiple higher goals and objectives of development and the overall formation of these personalities. It's about innovative tools and approaches to work to solve more complex problems on preparation for active participation in public life.

Nowadays practical action is needed for ensure suitable conditions in order to create equal chances for overall activity for disabled children (Group for European... Група за европейски... (2004). This means equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal responsibilities for all members of society as well as a rules for equal participation covering all spheres of the public life. One of the priority values for complete formation is the education and physical activity.

Hypothesis:

- assume that in the course of the study will be registered various issues related to social integration of children with mental retardation to their natural school environment;
- assume that group integration model as the beginning of the process will help to adequate social integration of pupils with SEN.

Objective: to establish the level of awareness and involvement of parents in education, physical education and upbringing of children with mental retardation in the process of their integration into mainstream education.

The tasks:

- to study literature on the considered issues;
- to outline and analyze the needs of children with intellectual disabilities for adapted physical activity and social integration;
- to reveal and analyze the degree of involvement of parents in the overall formation and development of their children, as well as processes the training, education and physical education aimed to integrate them into the ordinary school.

The study focused on issues related to social integration of children with mental retardation to their natural school environment.

## METHODS

The subjects are 30 parents of children with mental retardation. It was conducted at an educational establishment with boarding training. It socializes, educates, trains and integrates children with intellectual disabilities from 1-10 grades.

Depending on the nature of our study and according to the specificities of such scientific and pedagogical studies we found useful to use the following methods:

- pedagogical experiment
- monitoring and survey

Scientific research is conducted in two stages for the period from December 2013. to April 2014.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data from the survey we conducted with parents of children with mental disabilities reveal awareness and attitude of parents towards their mentally retarded children and their systematic participation in the processes of their full formation and development.

Using expert assessment we focused our attention to some key points related to the social integration of children with mental retardation to their natural school environment and the impact of adapted physical activity in the analysis of the results.

We found that 57% of parents of children with SEN (special educational needs) integrated into mainstream schools believe they have had an idea about the nature of mental retardation, which was not with insignificant percentage. In our last group there were parents with low social status or low intelligence. Parents who said they had a partial idea were 33%, which might have been due to the fact that they did not feel sufficiently informed about the whole issue of mental retardation, and in fact were well aware of the damage to their own child.

In many cases the mainstream schools for children with mild mental retardation without diagnosis and special training without assistance of specialists and without the child's condition did not make an impression on their parents or teachers. They have just seen them naughty, more

mischievous than other children. The fact that only 10% of all surveyed parents of the mainstream school said they had no idea of the condition of their children, which actually was a very good result, but we thought more information was needed to reduce the number of ignorant parents and/or parents not interested in the state of their childrens.

The qualitative analysis of the data showed that 67% of parents of integrated students were familiar with the essence of adapted physical activity. This information reflected the adequate socialization in and through the sport, concerned future correctional - educational and educational work of the child, and was an expression of concern by parents.

However, 33% of parents declared that they were familiar with, which was an alarming fact. The students were trained in physical education supported by special educator (resource teacher) with individual curriculum with the necessary care and attention, and with the necessary care by the parents. The results showed it was clear that the parents of SEN children from the mainstream schools needed more extensive information on the nature of the adapted physical activity.

According to the results of the survey, not all teachers and educators conducted home visits. This may be due to just starting in our integrated education in which there are many open questions and still no well-defined rights and obligations. We must not ignore the fact that many parents work from morning till night to be able to support their families. This applies with even greater pressure for parents of children with disabilities because of the significant costs of consultancy and therapeutic services, costly medications for special training and special equipment in cases where it is necessary. Here we disclose a whole group of issues and irrevocable obligations of parents who are spending their time and regardless of their good intentions - prevent the so important contact parent-teacher (tutor). Considering all these facts, we should not blame only the teachers and educators that do not visit the child's home, nor just the parents - for unaccomplished communication.

*Table 1. To whom we turn for information and help when we get stuck in the process of education of our child?*

<i>Answers parents</i>	<i>Percents</i>
Teachers	31%
Educators	11%
Older students	3%
Neighbors	8%
Other	47%

As it is shown in Table 1., the highest percentage is of parents who seek information and assistance from the teachers of their children. This fact proves that the respect for them is still significant, and their advice is considered authoritative. The desire of parents to turn for help leads us to believe that some of them are interested in the status and development of their children.

Many are parents who say they do not seek help from anyone. Therefore, they deal with the difficulties encountered without intent to invest the consequences, act intuitively, without knowing whether their actions will not cause negative consequences for their children. This suggests the existence of a lack of interest, lack of awareness, and perhaps of neglect by the parents. Such a mistake from their side very often could cause improper upbringing of the child, which eventually grew into a negative side of his character.

Many parents do not want to admit, neither to them nor to others, that there is a problem with their child or they cannot deal with it. They hope that during certain time things will settle down and the problems will pass. But thus they only postpone the solution to the future and often the problems went deepen. Other parents do not want to admit they have a child with mental retardation and therefore do not seek help and support from neighbors, relatives and friends. They isolate and hide the child with hope that they will not understand or that the child's condition will improve, and maybe it will even "heal".

We think that if there are more and more accessible information, many parents and society as a whole will be interested and very likely will improve their attitude towards these children.

Table 2. Do you have any idea what benefits enjoy by law children with mental retardation?

Parents answers	Percents
Yes	50%
No	17%
Partial	33%

According to a half of the respondents, this is partly due to the fact that the comprehensive school is trained and disabled children without diagnosis and without their parents knowing about the existence of such issues. Given that the parents assume their child is "normal and healthy" and there is no need to be interested in the facilities for people with disabilities.

Of course, we thought that the big role in this case is the insufficient information, and the relatively large number of parents who have reduced their interest in disabled children. They do not even suspect that it may have a material support for the child. We must hope that the number of person-responsible parents is greater than the number of disinterested parents and that increasing the information that counts will increasingly grow.

Table 3. What are you doing to relief and improve living standards of your child and the whole family?

Answers parents	Percents
Group disability	33%
I dont receive	64%
On holidays	3%
By sponsors	0%

The qualitative analysis of the data suggested that many parents did not receive any additional funds. The rights of public funds on disability have only diagnosed children with over 50% fewer opportunities for social adaptation. Therefore, all children who have mild mental retardation have no access to such benefits. This is the main implication of our results. A high absolute number of parents of children from mainstream schools who say they do not receive any funds. As we mentioned earlier, these schools for integrated education are targeting children with milder disabilities and some without being diagnosed. Another im-

portant reason parents do not receive social funds is their insufficient awareness on this important issue. Many parents do not know they have a legal right to such funds. Extremely large role in enhancing their information have the teachers and educators who work with the child.

Many parents do not claim their rights because of embarrassment and shame. But we believe that with the advancement of integration and raising public awareness of the existence of these people and their problems as well as their acceptance in society, will reduce the number of relatives ashamed of the presence of mentally retarded family-member.

## CONCLUSION

The results generally confirm the hypotheses.

All data in our study show that a significant emphasis on child with mild mental retardation is to raise awareness and improve the attitude of parents towards him. Depending on their educational and social status, they participated actively and systematically in the process of its full formation and development.

Yet, the majority of children with disabilities are not diagnosed on time, thereby valuable time for diagnosis and impact of the omission has been done. In some cases, the blame is within the parents - they do not want their child to be diagnosed and be "labeled".

An integrated and interdisciplinary approach at all levels for adequate socialization of students in mainstream schools has been adopted. Also, we must actively work to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices in society towards children with mental retardation, children who have difficulties to overcome the social barriers. In other words, no disability is important, and important is the reaction to it.

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