MOTIVATION AND ROLE OF FAMILY IN THE LIFE OF CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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Abstract

Family is the element which can significantly affect the development of the potential of a child with intellectual disabilities, by monitoring both his/her attitude and his/her social-economic statute. The child with intellectual disabilities must be acknowledged and accepted as active member of the family in order to fully function within the family. Along with the other family members, the child must participate with equal rights in the decision-making process, receive responsibilities for tasks allocated to him/her, discover and maintain the family traditions and be encouraged to adopt positive attitudes to world and other people, susceptible to being benefits to him/her as well as to his/her family. This paper aims to implement a questionnaire addressed to parents in order to assess the efficiency of Young Athletes Programme and the involvement/support level, by the family, of the child with Down syndrome.

Keywords: intellectual disabilities, family, involvement/support

JEL classification: I19, I21

1. Introduction

Every person with intellectual disabilities, regardless of the level of the affection, holds a potential which develops; the values of this potential depends on the severity of the disability. A key role in the capitalization of the possibilities of such persons plays the social resources, starting with the close and extended family environment, group of friends, school, community and finally, last but not least, the society.

To fully function within the family, a child with intellectual disabilities must be acknowledged and accepted as active member of the family. Along with the other family members, the child must participate to activities susceptible to bring benefits both to him/her and to his/her family, participate with equal rights in the decision-making process and receive responsibilities for tasks allocated to him/her, discover and maintain the family traditions and be encouraged to adopt positive attitudes to world and other people. The level of intellectually disabled child acceptance within the family depends on factors as the affective balance level of parents, emotional atmosphere at home, parental attitudes, social-economic status of the family, including level of education of the parents, family structure,
age of parents, as well as attitude of the community to the family having a child with intellectual disability.

The acceptance of the child without giving him/her responsibilities or having expectations related to him/her does not ensure opportunities for his/her full development and decrease of his/her level of dependence on the persons around hi/her, but to the contrary, favors the maintenance/strengthening of a attitude of dependence.

If there is no acceptance, by the family, and the family requirements/expectations are too high, the child with intellectual disabilities shall experience failures able to generate a low self-esteem and action effectiveness, as well as a negative impact on the emotional condition of the child.

The worst scenario for the child development is when the family does not show acceptance and has not expectations related to the child, in such case the child with intellectual disabilities not having any chance to progress in his/her development, following to face major integration challenges.

In such conditions, the experts identified the following qualities of the parents’ attitudes which should contribute to the development of the children with intellectual disabilities:  

- Acceptance of the child, acknowledgment of his/her needs and satisfying such needs at the maximum level possible;
- Determination of some requirements/responsibilities for the child, favoring his/her abilities and needs;
- Cooperation with the child, showed by expressing interest for the child needs and collaboration to satisfy such needs;
- Giving freedom to the child, which mainly means to increase gradually his/her independence, without risking the split of the social environment;
- Acknowledgement of the child rights, expressed by a positive attitude of parents, by the attempt of parents to look for the child’s opinions and to encourage him/her in having opinions, by making the child accountable for his/her actions.

The emotional support offered by the parents has an irrefutable role, the family support being a key factor in the motivation of children with disabilities to engage in different activities intended to favor their biological, psychic and social development.

The presence of parents during the sporting competitions ensures not only the increase of child participation in such activities but also the increase of the

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child satisfaction level and inner motivation, essential for the child involvement or perception of own skills. The studies of Eccles and Harold (1991) show that subjects with intellectual disabilities, noticing the encouragement of their parents to participate in sporting activities, have the bent to examine/assess their skills better than children of whose parents do not value the sporting activity.

2. Assumption

The family holds a crucial role in the maximum capitalization of the potential for biological, psychic and social development of the child, despite his/her disability.

3. Research Methods

For a good development of the research, the following research methods are used: bibliographical study method, observation method, questionnaire investigation method, mathematical statistics method.

4. Experiment Content

The research was carried out on a sample of 19 parents whose children are diagnosed with Down syndrome, with ages between 3 and 8 years old, participants in activities of psychic-motoric stimulation organized by the Romanian “Olympics” Special Foundation, through the Young Athletes Programme.

To assess the efficiency of Young Athletes Programme and the level of involvement/support showed by family to a child with Down syndrome, a questionnaire for opinion poll was implemented, which was prepared by the organizers of this project and applied in 17 countries across the world. In Romania, the questionnaire was applied to a number of 19 subjects.

5. Results

The first category of questions referred to athlete, whether he/she shows changes in his/her behavior at the level of self-serving skills, entertainment or relaxing activities, interaction with the other family/group members, the second category of questions referred to aspects related to the parents of the child with disability and the family, while the third question referred to the young athletes behavior at home.

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Questions addressed to the parents of the child with disability on the family

**T1. Through Young Athletes Programme, do you establish relationship with other families having children with disabilities?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base: all respondents</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 Through the Young Athletes Programme, do you establish relationship with other families having children with disabilities?

Respondents from Item no 1 considered in proportion of 92% that they have established new relationships with other families having children with disabilities. A percentage of 8% of the respondents state that they do not establish new acquaintances with other families having children with disabilities.

**T2. Through the Young Athletes Programme, do you discover new resources for your child or family?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes many</th>
<th>Yes some</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base: all respondents</td>
<td>N=13</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Through the Young Athletes Programme, do you discover new resources for your child or family?

From those who replied to Item no 2, 92% found more or less resources, while 8% did not find resources.

**T3. Does your family become more linked through the Young Athletes Programme?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes, a little</th>
<th>Yes, a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base: all respondents</td>
<td>N=13</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Figure 3 Does your family become more linked through the Young Athletes Programme?
On Item 3 concerning the strengthening of the cohesion among family members, 92% of the respondents declare that it raised a lot (46%), or a little (46%), while 8% denied an increase of the cohesion level within the family.

**Figure 4** Does your family spend more time together through the Young Athletes Programme?

With regard to the time spent together (Item no 4), 92% declare to spend more (31%) or less time (61%) together, while 8% consider the time spent together within the family is of same value as before the participation in the Programme.

**Figure 5** Does your family engage in more activities together through the Young Athletes Programme?

The activities carried out together within the family are a lot more numerous than before, as declared 23% of the respondents, a little more numerous than before in the opinion of 69% of the respondents, while 8% refuse to give a reply.

**Figure 6** Do you feel more linked to other families pursuant the Young Athletes Programme?
Following the implementation of the Programme, 92% of the respondents to Item no 6 confirmed the advent of some relationship among the families of athletes participants in Programme (38%: a lot of relations, 54%: a little more relations), while 8% did not notice any improvement in the relations with other families.

**Figure 7** Do you have a higher level of acceptance towards the persons with disabilities pursuant the Young Athletes Programme?

Among respondents to Item no 7, the level of acceptance towards other persons with disabilities raised a lot (77%) or a little (15 %), while 8 % did not answer.

6. Conclusions related to the opinion poll

The systematic participation of children with Down syndrome in motric activities was ensured especially by their parents but also by other members of the family, usually grand-parents.

At the end of the 3-months period of activity, parents filled-in the opinion questionnaire and their replies highlighted the following aspects:

- children are more participative within the family, involving in new activities, by their own or along with their brothers/sisters or parents;
- children are more attentive and can focused for a longer period of time;
- children are more cooperating with the other family members but also with the other children of the working group;
- children practice home, alone or with other family members, the motric structures showed/learnt within the Young Athletes Programme;
- the motric activities of the Young Athletes Programme offered to children and to their parent a new experience, intended to capitalize the biological-psychic-social and motric potential of each and every child;
• parents and extended family accept easier the disability of the child and try to stimulate him/her and to give him/her accountability to the extent possible;
• children with Down syndrome are encouraged to practice sports and even to participate in competing activities.

REFERENCES