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# Psychosocial rehabilitation of disability

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**Abstract:** *Introduction:* Disability may be a consequence of deformations or developmental failures or the result of functional damages or traumatic effects of the posture or motion systems. There are also "social factors" that contribute to its definition, as the everyday life of the disabled is getting worst due mainly to the existing situation. The integration of these persons into the society should be a major objective of the health care sector. *Aim:* This retrospective study examines the contribution of psychosocial support for people with disabilities in the restoration and promotion of their health. It strives to contribute to their socialization and their acceptance by the community in which they live and work. *Material and Method:* An extensive review of the recent Greek and International literature was conducted in electronic databases (Pubmed, Google scholar, Scopus) and in scientific journals. *Results:* The concept of "autonomous living" is a key element for the achievement of the full participation of people with disabilities in real life. The concept of adaptation, which emphasizes the elimination of indirect barriers that appear in activities of everyday life and the principle of equality which is based on the dynamic of equal opportunities, are also vital components of the psychosocial rehabilitation of the disabled. Equalization involves the procedure and the steps needed for the equalization of opportunities for individuals and groups, for the employment and social protection. The equal inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in cultural activities as well as relief and support services should be available to families who have a disabled person. The consideration of the issues concerning people with disabilities should not be separate from the policy planning mechanism, but as an integral part of it. Equal opportunities are not a formulation which can be applied everywhere in the same way. They are a series of principles that each country might apply its own way and within its own policy. *Conclusions:* The recognition that the environment itself can contribute to or enhance the nature or the intensity of the effects of a disability, is a challenge for today's society that has the responsibility to reduce and where possible to remedy the consequences of the disability.

**Keywords:** Disability, Psychosocial Support, Rehabilitation

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## 1. Introduction

Disability is one of the most debated and continuously current issues of the society worldwide. This is the reason why its conceptual definition varies a lot among different authors. Disability is defined as the loss of health due to damage or disorder, inherent or acquired deficiency of the bodily, mental, or spiritual functions of the organism [1]. It is also referred to as every damage or ellipticity that occurs in the physical, mental or psychological functions of the human body, and as a result the person is not able to work, to self-handle or to communicate with its environment [2]. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) defines disability as an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions [3]. Disabilities can include, for instance, having difficulty

seeing, hearing, having speech understood, walking, bathing, dressing, eating, preparing meals, going outside the home, or doing housework, having Alzheimer's, dementia, autism, cerebral palsy, or dyslexia, and being frequently depressed or anxious [4].

Based on the evidence we have so far, people with disabilities constitute a very large minority that consists of over a billion people, about 15% of the world's population [3]. According to WHO (2014) between 110 million (2.2%) and 190 million (3.8%) adults have significant difficulties in functioning. Furthermore, the rates of disability are increasing due to ageing populations and an increase in chronic health conditions, among other causes [3].

According to the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, living with disability is a situation characterized by significant limitations both in

intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills [5]. Many scientists however, neglect to emphasize the "social factors" that contribute to the determination of the term "disability". The disability discourse involves a contest between a biological and social understanding of the term. This makes disability into a flexible and heterogeneous concept, a term difficult to give a specified and limited meaning [6]. The disability cannot be considered as a naturally occurring phenomenon. It cannot be regarded as simply a medical problem solvable by medical intervention. Disability becomes apparent and begins to exist as an entity just when some features or typical manifestations of a person's features can be compared to the individual perceptions about the minimum acceptable level of the subjective and social skills. When a person, based on his/her characteristics, does not meet the above concepts, the disability becomes obvious, and just from that moment exists as a social phenomenon. It is an equal rights/opportunities issue as fundamental to contemporary society as class, race, gender and sexuality [7].

The social model of disability is, firstly, a focus on environmental and social barriers that exclude people with perceived impairments from mainstream society and it also makes a distinction between impairment and disability. The first refers to biological characteristics of the body and the mind and the latter to society's failure to address the needs of the disabled persons [8]. People with disabilities have in general poorer health, lower education achievements, fewer economic opportunities than people without disabilities. They have less access to health care services and therefore experience unmet health care needs [3]. Several attempts are being made in order to meet the needs of people with disabilities. The healthcare sector, a key sector for the care and treatment of people with disabilities, contributes a lot to the integration of people with disabilities into the society [9, 10].

## 2. Promoting Psychosocial Rehabilitation

The perception that the people with disabilities, as members of their societies, should exercise the same rights and obligations as all the other citizens, is well incorporated into the "Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities", which were formulated by the United Nations General Assembly on December 20th, in 1993. These rules concerning persons of disabilities consist of four chapters - preconditions for equal participation, target areas for equal participation, implementation measures, and the monitoring mechanism - and cover areas such as medical care, rehabilitation, support services and education and are aimed to promote the integration of disabled people in society. The Rules also stress the duties of the state regarding preconditions for equal participation, which include the responsibilities of public authorities, media and the private sector [11, 12].

Greece by Law 2430/1996 accepted the Standard Rules of the UN, expressing thereby its strong political commitment to take action for the equalization of opportunities for

persons with disabilities. The discrimination and the exclusion experienced by people with disabilities in all aspects of life, led to the recognition that a lot of things have to be done to ensure for these people their equal participation in society. This is something that can only be accomplished through equalization and integration processes, which will lead to a revision of the unequal existing social structures [13].

In the past, "integration" was the concept of individual's adaptation into the society and it was not associated with the promotion of social changes that would set the conditions for it. Welfare policies usually mean income maintenance and remote services in institutions or in the community, leading to an increase of the dependency and to the restriction of equal participation of people with disabilities in society. The concept of "autonomous living", which was developed in recent years, is a key element for the achievement of the full participation of people with disabilities in real life. The goal of autonomous living is to allow individuals with disabilities to achieve the greatest degree of economic and social integration, independence and acquisition of equal rights with non-disabled peers. A very important aspect of the autonomous living is the Services of Personal Assistants, where people with disabilities can hire or dismiss assistants who can do what they themselves cannot do alone. Certain factors, namely perceived availability of a confidant, satisfaction with support, sense of control, and self-esteem may moderate the effects of disability [14, 15].

The principle of independent living is closely related to the concept of adaptation, which emphasizes the elimination of indirect barriers that appear to the participation of people with disabilities in activities of everyday life. This concept includes practices such as changing working hours, availability of sign language interpreters for deaf and readers for the blind, availability of accessible buildings, modification of the existing infrastructure as a means to ensure equal participation for people with disabilities and connection of their specific needs with the programs and activities of the society. The principle of equality is based on the dynamic of equal opportunities. It involves the procedure and the steps needed for the equalization of opportunities for individuals and groups, for the employment and social protection. Equalization of opportunities means structural changes, encouragement of people for greater participation, confrontation of discrimination at various levels and changes in social attitudes [16, 30].

There is a gap between equality and its implementation. The challenge now is to turn the equal participation and equal opportunities from simple principles into reality that implies changes in the lives of people with disabilities. This whole process can be ascribed to the term «mainstreaming». This means configuration of a policy that facilitates the full participation and involvement of people with disabilities in economic, social and other processes, while personal choice is respected. It also means, the consideration of the issues concerning people with disabilities should not be separate from the policy planning mechanism, but as an integral part

of it. The equalization of opportunities and its achievement is more complex than it seems. Fulfillment of the emerging global commitment to equalizing opportunities for disabled people requires an expansion of disability policies and strategies to include not only traditional rehabilitation and anti-discrimination measures, but also affirmative strategies to prevent and remove social, economic and environmental barriers [16, 17, 18].

Paradoxically, the disparity may stem both from the fact that some people are treated differently than others, and also from the opposite. Discrimination includes an arbitrary denial and limitation of human rights that arise, directly or indirectly, from the same or different treatment. Speaking about equal enjoyment of human rights and non-discrimination is not enough. The preferential treatment and the selective rights are often necessary to overcome discrimination standards and individuals with disabilities to obtain an equal footing with that of the majority of population. This means that sometimes, instead of seeking to ensure equal treatment, we should aim to the equalization of the outcomes [19]. Equal opportunities are not a formulation which can be applied everywhere in the same way. They are a series of principles that each country might apply its own way and within its own policy. In this sense, the Standard Rules are not binding setting a strict framework for their implementation. They work more as an instrument that can be used to assess existing policies and promote practices that will contribute to the development of a membership strategy [20].

The current sociopolitical data that define the elements of the political and social behavior of individuals, groups and institutions, require the provision of the fullest possible objective and reliable approach, in order for everyone to be able to understand all those parameters that compose and influence the framework and the content of communication and relationships of the people with disabilities with the society as an institutional organization and as a set of citizens [10]. A basic assumption is that the creation, the development, the cultivation and the strengthening of prejudices and stereotypes concern primarily of social, political, economic mechanisms, which are able to produce and reproduce prejudices and stereotypes. Socialization mechanisms, institutionalized or not, state or more widely social, can according to their content and the direction of their intervention to produce, enhance, maintain, or vice versa to weaken and eliminate any social behaviors expressing or resulting from social prejudice or stereotypes [2].

In the above mentioned socialization mechanisms many bodies could be included, such as the mass Media and Communication, the Department of Education, the Parliament and the political parties, and also the specific legislation concerning the orientation and content of the welfare and social state. An expression or manifestation of this attitude should be the adopted legislation that identifies the social and political ethos and style, the practice, mainly the philosophy of the government and of the stakeholders towards these social minorities. The adopted policy is considered that affects in a greater or lesser extent, the social

behavior. The need for institutional recognition of people with disabilities as social minorities should be the main principle in this case. The provision and the management of equality and equal participation of these groups in social and economic life of the country could then be feasible for the State and the society [21].

### **3. Measures regarding the Equal Treatment of Persons with Disabilities**

The standard rule for equal participation and equal opportunities of people with disabilities states that the term "equalization of opportunities" means the process through the which the different social systems and the environment, such as services, activities, information and documentation are being available to all, especially to people with disabilities [9]. The principle of equal rights expresses the concept that the needs of each individual and of all the persons as a whole are of equal importance. These needs should be the basis of societal programming and all the human forces must be used in a manner to ensure that each person has the same opportunities to participation [20].

In this way, States should ensure the provision of information, by the competent authorities, to people with disabilities, their families, the specialized professionals and the general public about the available programs and services. This information should be given to persons with disabilities in a format that ensures the access for all the individuals [22]. Moreover, States should take initiative and support information campaigns for people with disabilities and should also adopt relative policies that carry the message that people with disabilities are citizens with equal rights and obligations as everyone else. This justifies taking measures to remove all obstacles that stand in their full participation.

Another role of the State is to encourage the presentation of people with disabilities by the media in a positive way. In this issue, States should take into account the consultations of the organizations consisted of persons with disabilities. Public education programs should be also guided, in every respect, from the principle of full participation and equality [21]. It is also important that people with disabilities, their families and their organizations are invited by the governments to participate in the public education programs related to disability issues. High degree of importance is the encouragement of the State to companies of the private sector to take into account issues related to disability in all their activities [20].

The promotion of programs aiming at the enlargement of information regarding the disabled people's rights and opportunities, are also subject to the duties of the State. The sense of self-determination and empowerment will help these people to take advantage of the opportunities provided to them. Updating should be an important part of the education of children with disabilities and an integral part of the rehabilitation programs. It is also essential, updating to be included in the training programs of the teachers and other

professionals. Disabled people should help each other in the issue of updating, through the activities of their organizations. In Greece, at the beginning of 2001 the Guide of the Citizens with Disabilities was published by the General Secretariat of Public Administration, which is frequently updated. The websites of ministries provide information on issues related to people with disabilities and there is also interconnection with other information nodes.

In connection with cultural data, there is no any difference between the individuals of any social group. Thus, the States should arrange for the equal inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in cultural activities. Creativity, artistic and intellectual potential are elements of people with disabilities. This is the reason why the States should ensure that these people are able to use these elements not only for their own benefit, but for the enrichment of their community, whether it is an urban or rural area [25]. Another important factor for which the State should take care is the accessibility and availability of places and services of cultural activities, in order the needs of these people to be covered.

#### 4. Education of Persons with Disabilities

Regarding the educational process, it is mentioned in the Standard Rules that "States should recognize the principle of equal opportunity in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education for children, youth and adults with disabilities, into a single scale." It should be ensured that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system [12, 22].

The general educational authorities should be responsible for the education of persons with disabilities in embedded structures. The education of persons with disabilities should be an integral part not only of the national educational system, but also of the process of curriculum and the organization of the schools. People who have special educational needs should receive special education which aims at:

- a) The development of their personality
- b) The improvement of their skills and competencies
- c) The professional training and their participation in the production process
- d) The mutual acceptance by the community and the equal social development.

The education in ordinary schools presupposes the provision of interpretation services and other appropriate support services. Adequate access and also support services designed to meet the needs of persons with different disabilities, should also be provided [24].

In order the provision of education to people with disabilities in a general educational system, to be maximally facilitated, the States should have a clear policy which should be accepted by the school and by the wider society. It is important to have a flexible schedule, with the possibility of additions and adjustments and finally with the provision of qualitative teaching and also with an ongoing training and support to the teachers. The knowledge and the perceptions of teachers regarding the disabilities issues are particularly

important for the disabled children, because a significant part of their time and activities is spent out in the school [26]. The best expertise training and continuing education of the teachers and other professionals in matters not only related to disabilities, but also relating to the proper technique of communication with these persons, will enable them to respond adequately and humanely to their expectations [27].

In states where the education is compulsory, it should be provided to all boys and girls, with any kind and every degree of disability, even the most serious one. Particular attention should be given to very young children with disabilities, to preschoolers with special needs and to adults with disabilities, especially to women. Parent groups and organizations of persons with disabilities should be involved in all the levels of the educational process [10].

#### 5. Family Education

As regards to family life and personal integrity of persons with disabilities, the States should promote the full participation of persons with disabilities in family life. They should promote their right to personal integrity and ensure that laws do not discriminate against people with disabilities in terms of their sexual relationships, marriage, motherhood and fatherhood [9]. In particular, the opportunity to live with their families should be given to people with disabilities. The States should encourage the inclusion of appropriate standards regarding the disability and its impact on family life, within the family counseling services. Relief and Support Services should be available to families who have a disabled person. Individuals wishing to adopt or to be the foster parents of a child or adult with disabilities should be facilitated by the States in any way [13].

Additionally, people with disabilities should not be deprived of opportunities to experience their sexuality, to have sexual relationships and feel the experience of the motherhood and fatherhood. Considering the difficulties they face to get married and start a family, the States should encourage the creation of relating consulting services. People with disabilities should have the same access as all the others, to family planning methods and to information regarding the sexual function of the body, which should be given to them, on an appropriate form [16]. Another task of the State bodies should be the promotion of measures related to the change of negative attitudes which still prevail in the society regarding the marriage, sexuality and motherhood or parenthood of people with disabilities, especially for the girls and women with disabilities. The United Nations Convention is an important roadmap for change, which can be used to eliminate the prejudice and discrimination experienced by people with disabilities. The media should also be encouraged to play an important role in removing such negative attitudes [17, 28].

Persons with disabilities and especially the children are particularly vulnerable to maltreatment at the hands of their family, into the community or into the institutes. As they are more likely to be victims of violence than are their peers who

are not disabled, they should be fully informed about taking precautions against sexual or other forms of abuse. They have to be sufficiently educated about the ways by which they can avoid the maltreatment, they have to be able to recognize when maltreatment has occurred and to report it. [29]

## 6. Conclusion

A disability indicates the presence of a failure that may result from a reduced or impaired physical or mental function, which usually leads to an imbalance between the individual and the environment. The recognition that the environment itself can contribute to or enhance the nature or the intensity of the effects of a disability, is a challenge for today's society that has the responsibility to reduce and where possible to remedy the consequences of the disability. This can be achieved by a suitable environment configuration and by the provision of the appropriate technical aids, in order the specific needs of the individual to be covered.

Rehabilitation is now seen as a process in which persons with disabilities or their representatives make decisions about the services they use and any decision about themselves contains their informed consent. So, all the professionals who take part in the rehabilitation process have to inform the persons with disabilities appropriately in order to be able to participate equally to social life. The state bodies have also the responsibility to provide specific measures in order to facilitate the process of rehabilitation for the persons with disabilities.

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