

## **The Impact of Physical Activity on Socializing Mentally Handicapped Children**

Dr. Savaş Duman<sup>1</sup> Hatice Dilhun Sukan<sup>2</sup> Dr. Merve Ceylan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Manager, Youth and Sports Provincial Directorate, Manisa, Turkey

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Muğla Sıtkı Koçma University, Muğla, turkey

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**Abstract:** *This research is conducted to determine socialization of individuals with moderate mental retardation by physical activity. In order to meet the needs of physical activity of individuals with mental retardation, programs including work and play are being prepared today. These games and practices are aimed on their abilities, limitations and interests. A well-planned program of physical activity can have a positive contribution to all areas of development on children with mental disabilities. In this study, which proceeds on the basis of The Focus Group Interview (FGI), a part of qualitative research strategy, 19 parents with disabled kids were interviewed. Children of parents who participated in the study have moderate mental retardation (MR) and they have been playing basketball for two days a week, swimming for one day a weekend short walking at least three times a week on a regular basis for the last two years. The study was made by Maximum Diversity Sampling as a sampling method and interview form was used as a data collection means. Verbal explanations given by parents to open-ended questions were analyzed through content analysis. Main themes of each research question were chosen by comparing a pre determined part of the creation of common themes. As a result, parents who are suffering from hyperactive or inactive children, tell that they observe a significant change in their children after doing sports. Parents who see this positive change become happy and therefore they have spare time for themselves while their kids are doing sports. Both parents and children defined the positive changes at home and social life along with sports as happiness and calmness. Parents state that they feel their kid's sense of achievement, improved ability to make an action and communications skills. They also observe the fact that they gain acceptance in the community.*

**Keywords:** *individuals with mental disabilities, physical activity, socialization*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

It is a known fact that sports area tool to support muscles and nervous system, physiological and metabolic development, mental and physical reactions. It is emphasized that physical activity has a sort of improvement property (Beasley, 1982). Participation of sporting activities could create a great benefit in large areas such as strengthening muscles, coordination development, balance development, posture control growth, flexibility and respiratory-circulatory system development. Today, physical education programs based on games and work-outs are organized in order to meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities according to their capabilities, limitations and interests in sports. A well-planned program of physical activity brings positive contribution to children with intellectual disabilities by all means of development. Physical activity leads people with disabilities to formation of social relationships. Unfortunately, permanent disabilities cause introversion and social isolation in lives.

In addition, psychological reactions of individuals may increase if they feel that the care takers feel ashamed of them because of their wrong behaviour. Contributing to any physical activity would help those who have become newly disabled gaining back the self esteem by adapting to social life with positive mental attitudes. Positive effects of sports covers disabled individuals; their physical and mental development enables them to establish better relations (Savucu 2006). Sports are considered as social activities that allows individuals to get more socialized and participate in the social environment. Considering that sports have always been a collective activity in modern society; individuals who are interested in sports may often fall into different social relations through sports activities (Duman, 2011). Disabled individuals begin to see life and establish social contact with people by doing sports too. Researchs shows that inactive people with intellectual disabilities are more exposed to various diseases due to being deprived from physical activity. These type of individuals often face loose muscles structure, mental retardation and loss in motor development (especially heart and respiratory problems, fatty blood vessel, bone deformation) with increasing age. This anomalous situation could limit the physical capacity of people with disabilities. It was discovered that the individuals with mental disabilities have higher rates in obesity compared to those who are non-disabled. The reasons behind it is mostly improper eating habits and inactivity. It can be said that regular activities, group exercises and team games benefits people with intellectual disabilities, physically and mentally as well as socially and spiritually. According to their families,

those individuals are more compatible and understood in order to gain place in society this way. Sports helps disabled individuals to meet both other disabled and non-disabled individuals. Therefore, it plays a very important role in 'adaptation' which special education aims to gain. (Savucu and Biçer, 2009).

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Focus of the study was families with mentally handicapped children based in Muğla who are engaged in organized sports exercises. The sample was a group with average mental retardation, who are doing regular exercise. The additional criterias were age and gender. Groups participating in the conversation consists of three parents. Pre-meeting was made with 3 groups, main meeting was with 4 groups. In total there were 9 groups of 10 people. Interviews were conducted face to face.

### **Collection and Evaluation of Data**

The 30 questions we have predetermined as the subject of research has been reduced to 17 questions after collection of data and evaluation of expert opinions. Validity of the question were tested with the preliminary group. Questions were posed to participants according to the development of the conversation and all answers were recorded with a voice recorder. The main study began after the pilot study was approved by the experts. All recorded interviews were listened again while taking notes. Digitization is not a preferred and appropriate method in the analysis of focus group discussions.

There is no generalization concerns in focus group discussions since it is not necessary to quantify the qualitative data collection methods.(Fern, 2001).For that reason, frequency or statistical tests nor tables are required while calculating the results. Therefore it results while so, the frequency or statistical tests are not necessary or table. Moreover, the results should not be quantified (Suler, 1995). Evaluation of individuals' thoughts should be more important than the numeric data. Moreover, contrary to the assertions of researchers; presenting the differences occurred in the study is also very important, as in all qualitative researchs (Kitzinger, 1995). Content analysis is the most appropriate method to analyze the data (Kitzinger and Farquhar, 1999). The best way to analyze the data is to identify key themes under certain titles during or after the analysis.

Even short notes taken during recording is extremely useful for analyzes to be carried out later. Numbers should not be the important thing in making a report on the focus group. What the participants say should be the most important element. (Creswell, 1998). Detects determined according to the overall theme should be included in the report. Researchers should pay attention to speak a daily language when analyzing and making a report.(Çokluk,2011).

## **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Previous Behavior of Mentally Disabled Individuals Before Regular Physical Activity**

During the interviews, parents stated that their children used to spend a lot of time watching TV or playing computer games which have led them to inactivity and gaining weight. Apart from that, some of these kids were nervous and hyperactive while others were calm, quiet, introverted and unhappy. This has changed after bringing sports to their lifes as they were happier, more confident and courageous.

According to the statements of the parents, physical activity changes behavior of individuals with moderate mental retardation in a positive way.

### **3.2. Behaviors of Mentally Disabled Individuals After Regular Physical Activity**

Families state that their children are happier, more confident and courageous after a regular physical activity.They sleep better and they spend less time with computer and television. They are physically more active and they have better hand-eye coordination. They share, help and listen. Besides all, even regular walks are making them relieved and more open to communication without fear of human interaction.

Based on the opinion of their families, we may say that regular physical activity has an important place in social and physical development of individuals with moderate mental disabilities.

### **3.3. Comments of Families About Regular Physical Activity**

We have learned from our interviews that the children show improvement through sports. Families spend more quality time with their children this way and also have spare time for themselves while the kids are busy with sports.

Families also said that, having physically active children is helping them become more physically active. Thus, they find new topics to talk about and opportunity to have regular chats.

Based on what they told us, families with kids who have moderate mental retardation have better chances to become more social in daily life through sports. Children shows improvement in many areas and families are more connected with their children. In short, regular physical activity is making a significant contribution in terms of becoming socially and physically active.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

We have observed the effectiveness of the parents during the period of interviewing. These parents mostly had negative feelings when they first discovered that their kids were disabled.

But in a short while they have started doing more research and they have made plans about making life easier for their children. It takes time for them to get rid of the negative emotions and sometimes this period can vary between 2 to 5 years. They don't trust people to leave their children, not even grandparents, care takers or neighbors like the regular parents. Therefore, working mothers mostly quit jobs to dedicate their time to the children. Parents say that the attitude of strangers about their children is the most disturbing for them. Working mothers with disabled children try to overcome society's 'pity looks'. They work hard to become more 'accepted' in their own environment.

Infancy is less stressful for parents compared to puberty. Increased need of activity makes things harder for both sides. Mothers get professional help in order to gain conscious since the behaviours change as time goes by. Special education centers are the first place both parents and kids start to become more socialized. They share experiences with other families just like them. They enjoy sharing common issues and communicating with each other. They are trying to find common solutions to similar problems.

Mother's don't have any free time. They say that they are happy with the kids, but it would be good to have some 'spare time'.

Mothers who complain having extremely active or inactive kids say that they observed significant changes in their children after doing sports. They are happy when they see positive changes. It also allows them to have some free time. Families describe this positive changes as happiness and 'serenity'. They think that acceptance comes from becoming more social and active in society. Children's success, the strengthening of communication that sports can develop the properties indicated that they accepted in society. Methods of socialization should be one of the main issues in studies on disabled individuals and undoubtedly sports are one of them. This study will hopefully be a resource about socialization of disabled kids and their families.

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