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Original article

POINTS OF VIEW OF THE ADULTS AS REGARDS THE BENEFITS OF PRACTISING DIFFERENT MOTOR ACTIVITIES BY DOWN'S SYNDROME PATIENTS

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Abstract

Problem statement. The social dimension of the motor activities is very well known. There are a lot of specialists who claim that motor activities are permitted to a person to know himself, to better realize his own qualities and forces. But, when the person is a mentally disabled one, the awareness of his qualities is limited. The motor activities come to support this person. They underline the person's skills, help him to understand and can compare himself with the others. All these are possible because the motor activities have a lot of movement varieties. Moreover, the disabled person gives the others the possibility to know him, to discover him, to exteriorize himself through the motor activities.

Methods. The paper is based on a questionnaire which was elaborated using others questionnaires addressed by the disabled persons and the adults who care for these persons too. The questionnaire had 26 questions which wanted to underline the parents' / social assistances' perception in connection with the benefits of practicing the different sport braches by the Down's syndrome people. At the same time, we wanted to show the actions that the parents helped their children and their perception about the help offered by the motor activities for their children's social integration. The questionnaire was filled by the 140 parents. It was supplied by different NGO which paid attention towards the Down's syndrome people.

Results. The results come and supplement different studies realized into a research project. This is achieved and published under the aegis of the National University of Physical Education and Sports of Bucharest, as a partner of the programme co-funded by the European Social Fund within the Operational Sectorial Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 through the project Pluri- and interdisciplinary in doctoral and post-doctoral programmes Project Code: POSDRU/159/1.5/S/141086, its main beneficiary being the Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy.

Conclusions. The practice of the different motor activities by the Down's syndrome children and young people allows the parents to know their child better, find out the positive aspects of his personality, the avocations and provide him the equal chances with their other brother or sister. At the same time, the adults have the opportunity to meet other parents who have children with the same medical disease, discuss among them and exchange their experiences, with positive effects for them and their children.

Key Words: questionnaire, motor activities, adults, Down's syndrome patients, benefits.

Introduction

The social dimension of physical activities is well known. Any social activity by the medium of which one interacts with another could become a mean which contributes to the shaping of one's personality, to regaining one's health, to the normal development of the body a.o.

Physical activities allow an individual to know themselves, to better realise his qualities and skills in comparison to the others.

The benefits gained physically, mentally, but also dynamically can be noticed and also extend themselves over the „social group to which the individual belongs” (Epuran, 2013).

However, if the person suffers from retardation, the awareness of their own qualities will be limited. In support of these people can physical activities help through their endless varieties of movement which highlight the qualities of the individual, helps them understand themselves and compare themselves with

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others.

Moreover, by the medium of the practice of different sport branches, the disabled person gives their family members the opportunity to better know them, discover their skills and to externalize.

Physical activities are an instrument which aids disabled people integrate easier in society, they are means which help them „diverge from the major problems of life, helps them disconnect inner life from reality” (Georgescu, 1999).

In this context the goal of this paper is to detect the benefits for Down’s syndrome patients of practicing different physical activities as noticed by the parents or social assistants who take care of the patients.

These benefits are not limited to a physical level, the disabled person is perceived as a biopsychosocial being.

Methods

This paper is based on a questionnaire which we elaborated using other questionnaires addressed not only to disabled people but also to the adults who take care of them.

The questionnaire consists out of 26 questions which wanted to highlight the parents’/ social assistants’ perception regarding the benefits for children and teenagers with Down’s syndrome of practicing different sports.

At the same time, we wanted to mark out the manner in which parents/ social assistants are willing to help

their children/ teenagers who suffer from Down’s syndrom and their perception regarding the aid which, by means of practice of different sport activities, helped them on the children’s path to social inclusion.

The questionnaire was filled by 140 parents/social assistants from all across the country by the medium of NGOs which steer their activities towards children and young adults who suffer from Down’s syndrome. We also mention that throughout the paper we have used the terms of parents or adults to designate the parents or social assistants who filled our questionnaire.

The acquired answers are here to replenish the studies made within the, „The benefits of practicing swimming for children with Down’s syndrome” project which was held for a 16 month period.

Discussions

After analyzing the questionnaires we reached the following results:

- 140 people answered the questions of the questionnaire. These people were related to the children/young adults, patients of Down’s syndrome as shown in table 1.

Table 1. The adults who answered the questions

mother	father	brother/sister	grandparents	social assistants	other relatives
102	17	4	4	9	4

This piece of information helped us identify how well the questioned adults knew tha patients

- from the answers of the adults we found out that 99 children with Down’s syndrome were involved in practicing some kinds of sports, 33 of them weren’t regularly practicing sport, while 8 questionnaires didn’t have any answer for the question regarding the

involvement of the children suffering from Down’s syndrome in practicing physical activities.

- in order to see how involved the adults were in the activity of their child we asked whether they would accompany them to their practice lessons (see table 2):

Table 2. The involvement of the the adults in the activity of their child

Yes, I accompanied them	No, I don’t accompanied them	No answer
104	29	8

- moreover, we wanted to know whether the adults participated actively or passively in their training lessons (see table 3:



Table 3. The involvement of the the adults actively or passively		
Yes, I participated	No, I didn't participate	No answer
97	33	10

The arguments in favour of either active or passive attitude were diverse.

Some had positive effects for the child/young adult suffering from Down's syndrome: learning together and having the possibility to exercise at home what they learnt at the lessons, to encourage and motivate him, to see how they handle a situation and notice their progress, to observe how well they learnt the movements the teacher recommended, to advise them how to do better and to temper them. Due to other reasons some adults also expressed their passive role by driving the child to classes because there were few volunteers, by observing their behaviour around others out of curiosity.

The arguments among the adults who answered negatively were that they didn't have enough time because of their jobs or the child suffering from Down's syndrome was not involved in any sports activity.

- the following required a general point of view from the adults about physical activities.

Their answers could be synthesized as follows: such activities ,are beneficial for physical and social development, as a confidence and self-esteem boost.'

- the adults agreed (103 positive answers) that their child/ young adult suffering from Down's syndrome should practice different sport with fellow non-disabled pupils;

-15 answers were negative and 12 adults didn't answer this question.

The arguments for whether or not disabled people should practice sport activities with those non-disabled were very diverse.

The arguments in favour of the idea of inclusive physical activities were the following: it gives the children the opportunity to make new friends, interact with other people whether disabled or not of the same age, learn to stimulate and mutually help, to know other people and to learn from one another especially because a child/ teen suffering from Down's syndrome can learn a lot very well through imitation.

We can register as negative opinions for this question the following: there is a considerable danger of one hurting themselves, those undisable would

not be able to understand the children with Down's syndrome, they are not accepted by others.

- 111 adults believe that the practice of different sport activities has helped them to better know their child/ teen suffering from Down's syndrome because the involvement in practicing various sports has highlighted qualities and skills which parents would not have had the possibility to discover in any other circumstances such as other activities of which children take part at schools or at their NGO.

In this way the adults found that the children with Down's syndrome could learn and practice sport varieties which the parents don't have any knowledge of such as swimming, bocce, skyng, cycling.

At the same time the adults allege that ,they discovered new aspects of the personalities of their children with Down's syndrome and new abilities that they didn't even think' that they will ever learn. And to this question 14 adults answered negatively. They mentioned that the practice of sports by their children didn't help them change their image about themselves and 15 of them didn't offer any answer.

- another benefit noticed by the parents (84 affirmative answers) was related to new activities that the child/teen suffering from Down's syndrome does around the house.

They aim at personal care (dressing up, washing, combing, putting on shoes, a.o.), involvement in daily chores, but also the will of some to practice newly learnt physical skills, to read and write, to take care of younger siblings.

There were also adults (33 answers) who don't consider that their child with Down's syndrome managed to do new things by himself at home following the influences determined by the organised practice of physical activities, while 24 adults didn't offer any answer.

- we also found the attitude of the parents regarding their children patients of Down's syndrome important especially if they also have siblings.

In this case we were interested if the parents occupy themselves with all their children and pay attention to them in the same manner.



Thus we found out that 92 patients of Down's syndrome have siblings, 34 do not and 14 adults didn't answer this question. We found out from the parents who have other children that most of them occupy themselves equally with their children because they consider it 'normal to give them equal chances to develop' that 'they have feelings' towards all/both children, that they don't want them to feel any difference between them in order to keep balance in their family and not to develop hyperprotective attitudes for their child with Down's syndrome.' There were also adults who stated that they pay more attention to they Down's syndrome child because their other child is of age and now 'their entire attention is steered towards their disabled child.' There was also an adult who said that 'they always paid more attention to their Down's syndrome child because they had permanently greater needs than the other child.'

- a different benefit identified with help of our questionnaire aims the family of the child/teen with Down's syndrome and their bond with other families with disabled children or teens.

Thus 100 of the interviewed said that they had established bonds with other families whose child members have medical issues. At the same time 71 adults stated that because of the involvement of the child/teen in different physical activities they were able to discover new useful resources in their development and that the relationships between they children had tangibly improved.

Also 82 adults mentioned that they spend more time with their child because of physical activities and practice more sport activities together (74 answers) ever since their Down's syndrome child had begun practicing an organised sport activity.

- to the question regarding how occupied are their children 105 adults answered that their children often have something to do, while 63 adults said that they are almost always willing to do that thing with their child.

- another benefit identified by the parents (86 of them) as an effect of regular practice of physical activities by their children consisted of the easier interaction of the children who managed to make new friends to whom they speak or they meet at least once a week.

Other benefits of practicing different kinds of sports: maintaining physical and mental health, harmonious physical development, better adaptability in the society and a stricter activity programme, the possibility of having contact with other people

whether disabled or not, discovering new things and the desire of practicing them in the free time, more confidence in what one does, the desire of going to different sport activities in order to meet others, perfecting talking skills, a better coordination in all the activities one is involved in, a.o.

What also needs to be added is the joy the adults see in their children, participating in contests in the country and outside of it, the sense of independence that children earn, the more confidence they have in themselves, the motivation and desire of practicing new sports, a healthier and more organised life style.

And other international studies reflect these benefits. Thus, K.S. Menear (2007) talked about the very important benefits of sport practising. These benefits were observed by the parents who she interviewed.

She mentioned that 'most parents observed that their child participated in physical activities primarily for social reasons, most notably to be with their peers with or without Down syndrome' and 'all parents believed participation in physical activity has immediate and long-term positive health impacts on their child with Down syndrome'.

At the same time, N. A. Murphy (2008) affirmed that "Parents of Special Olympians reported that their child's participation promoted social adjustment, life satisfaction, family support, and community involvement".

Conclusion

The children/young adults suffering from Down's syndrome have the same needs as the other children. 'They must be accepted for what they are and must be treated with respect as part of the group, class and society as a unit.' (A. Moanță and colab, 2006).

Practicing different physical activities by children suffering from Down's syndrome allows the parents/social assistants to know their child better, to discover the positive aspects of their personality, their passions and to give them equal chances like their other siblings in their development. At the same time the adults have the chance of meeting parents who have children with the same health issue, they can communicate among themselves, share the experiences they have had with direct positive effects for them and their children.

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