

PSIHOLOGIE EDUCAȚIONALĂ

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND SCHOOL ADAPTATION OF CHILDREN WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES IN ARAB SECTOR (ISRAEL):
INTERVENTION PROGRAM

INTEGRAREA SOCIALĂ, EMOȚIONALĂ ȘI ȘCOLARĂ A COPIILOR CU
DIFICULTĂȚI DE ÎNVĂȚARE DIN SECTORUL ARAB (ISRAEL):
PROGRAM DE INTERVENȚIE

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Abstract

Keywords: learning difficulties; social adaptation; Arab families; intervention program; relationships; school adaptation; behavior; role of women; involvement and integration.

This article performs an intervention program for mothers from Arab Sector of Israel who have children with learning disabilities. The intervention program has helped mothers from Kafr Qasim, Kafr Bara, Tayibe, Tira, Jaljulia, Qalansawe and Zemer, Arab Sector of Israel, to improve the social, emotional and school adaptation of their children.

Cuvinte-cheie: dificultăți de învățare; adaptare socială; familii arabe; program de intervenție; relații; adaptarea școlară; comportament; rolul femeilor; implicarea și integrarea.

Astract

În acest articol este prezentat programul de intervenție destinat mamei din Sectorul Arab din Israel care au în grijă copii cu dificultăți de învățare. Programul de intervenție a ajutat mamele din localitățile Kafr Qasim, Kafr Bara, Tayibe, Tira, Jaljulia, Qalansawe și Zemer, Sectorul Arab din Israel să îmbunătățească adaptarea socială, emoțională și școlară a copiilor lor.

Until now the attitudes of mothers in the Arab sector in Israel who have children with learning disabilities have not been researched as far as this disability and the variables connected to the forming of those attitudes concerns. Our research examines the attitudes towards disability connected to demographic and socio-economic variables. In ad-

dition, the contribution of the level of mothers' knowledge about disability and over dealing with it are examined, reflecting the level of integration of children with learning disability. The current literature has showed the connection between women's status and the level of its influence on the level of integration of child with learning disabilities. Parents' attitudes in general and mothers' attitudes in particular and the level of their intervention in treating learning disability are a significant step in the level of integration of child with learning disabilities. In this article we have proposed a description of an intervention program being performed with the participation of mothers of kids with disabilities from Kafr Qasim, Kafr Bara, Tayibe, Tira, Jaljulia, Qalansawe and Zemer, Arab Sector of Israel. We spoke to 30 women that we had previously mapped them by phone, explaining them the program's nature and its goal but only 15 women responded to our invitation to participate in this project. We defined the group for mothers of children with learning disability in order to create mutual basis, focusing on mothers who have children aged between 6 to 18 years.

The setting was pre-defined to 4 meetings of 3 hours (in the afternoons) every week on Tuesdays for one month starting from mid-September to mid-December. The group was instructed in cooperation with the researcher and the experienced group instructor. The meetings' structure – an hour and 15 minutes, then a 15 minutes break, and again an hour and 15 minutes. The meeting took place in a regional school where refreshments were served to the participants.

Measurements – the participants filled in questionnaires both at the very first meeting and at the end of the training program which took place about a month later. The questionnaires were identical to

questionnaires given to the research of the whole population. The presence of each meeting was good, only 2-3 participants were missing at each meeting. The participation in the program was contingent on arrival to the opening meeting and participation in at least 3 meetings. The control group included mothers from the same schools who did not participate in any intervention. They only filled in the questionnaires (in September and again in mid-December).

The meetings program: since the attitude and behavior towards the child with learning disabilities is influenced by deep emotional perceptions, it is right to work on unconscious perceptions both on the cognitive level and in order to provide knowledge. The program was performed on three levels:

1. To influence the cognitive and verbal declarative component (mainly providing knowledge),
2. To influence the sensory and emotional component
3. To influence the component of attitudes - all these will affect attitudes and behavior. We used various methods and tools to understand and influence the emotional attitude towards the subject and unconscious perceptions.

One of the main goal of the program was to impart knowledge and tools to parents in order to deal with children with learning disabilities. The goal of the group was defined as a tool for dealing with children with learning disabilities. This was based on the assumption that increasing awareness and providing tools will help women cope better with their children and help the children in their social and educational integration. Sub-goals for the program: (a) to impart knowledge to mothers about learning disabilities and the challenges of dealing with it; (b) to increase awareness to the perception of the

personal role of the mother in relation to learning disabilities and understanding the importance of the mother's attitude and involvement in as far as the success of the children concerns (increased responsibility and active approach by understanding the importance and contribution of the involvement); (c) to increase the inclusion and acceptance of a child with learning disability; (d) to increase the sense of parental competence to cope with the child with learning disabilities and a true belief in the ability of children to succeed and achieve despite learning disabilities; (e) to create internal and external support sources - normalizing feelings and emotions towards mothers of children with learning disabilities and providing social support.

The group instructors - the group was co-guided by the researcher with the assistance of an experienced group guide. After the first four meetings, due to the great need of the participants in the meetings, and in order to extend the program, it was decided to continue the program. Then the meetings continued taking place once a week on Tuesdays.

The First meeting - completing personal questionnaires:

Presenting the program and its goals and the meetings' structure by the instructors; Introducing the participants - marital status, hobbies, occupation, etc.; Mutual matching expectations about the program - what they would like to get in the program and why they responded to the invitation to participate; „Me as a mother of a child with learning disability” - the participants were requested to bring an object that symbolizes what is being mother of a child with learning disability for them in order to raise and flood feelings about the disability (what is the disability for you? What feelings does it raise in you?) Methodologically, before a mother presented

the chosen object and its symbol, the other participants were requested to guess why this object was chosen, an action that allowed flooding many unaware perceptions; Meeting's summary - what insights each one got from the meeting.

The Second meeting: opening the meeting - opening round „what does each one bring to the meeting”; Lecture on the topic about learning disability. This lecture dealt with conceptualization, challenges and responds (by the researcher), difficulties of students with learning disability, the importance of education to social mobility, understanding that the disability is not related to basic cognitive ability but to disorders in specific cognitive process that forms the basis of learning functioning, the importance of getting recognition and help for success, the importance of special teaching adjusted to the needs and adjustments that allow them to express their ability, the number of diagnosed students that get assistance in Arab schools compared to Jewish schools; Processing the lecture, free dialog and participants' reference - What did you learn? What does it mean to you? Meeting's summary - what insights each one got from the meeting.

The Third meeting: Opening the meeting - opening round „what does each one bring to the meeting?”; What are my challenges as a mother of a child with learning disability? - Observing personal challenges as a mother of a child with learning disability through pair's exercise - mapping 3 main challenges as a mother. The idea of this exercise is to allow mutual learning of mothers, encourage meeting with other perceptions and meeting of active mothers with passive mothers; what the main stresses of a mother of a child with learning disability are, its influence on home conduction- work in pairs on each one of the stresses mentioned; Invitation

to „open space” – free speaking about dilemmas and case studies. The participants were invited to bring from their daily life a dilemma, a problem, something that really bothered them and all other participants supported and gave additional angles for observation and advises; Meeting’s summary – what insights each one got from the meeting.

The Fourth meeting: Opening the meeting – opening round „what does each one brings to the meeting”; The needs of a child with learning disability – the participants were invited to draw a group of the children with learning disability in groups of four. The group was asked to watch the drawings and see what could be studied about the needs and interests of the child with learning disability. The goal of this exercise was to stimulate the attention and awareness of childrens’ needs; Writing personal goals as a mother of a child with learning disability – put into practice in pairs the fact that the goal is to mark the insights and challenges for the future and sharing them in the plenum; Summary – what does each one learn from the program – what were they interested in and will the new feelings make them behave differently?

In the **fifth session**, only one case study was presented and the rest of the time was dedicated to reconciling expectations among the participants regarding the continuation of work in the group and their expectations of the group due to the change and the decision to continue the program. It was important to create a „new work contract” with an emphasis on commitment to participation. In the tenth meeting an interim summary regarding the work of the group and the personal goals that each mother set was made. In fact, the goals were updated after increasing the awareness to the keys to success and the holes to failure to meet goals and to re-

mark goals.

Meeting No. 11th dealt with the influence of learning disabilities on the family structure, with an emphasis on siblings. It is important to note that the meeting showed that coping, like the difficulties, belong not only to the mother but also to the siblings of children with learning disabilities. The meeting goals: 1. To enable mothers to recognize the complexity of sibling relations in general, and to characterize the relations between siblings with learning disabilities. 2. To recognize the difficulties that siblings face, and to provide mothers tools that will help them support her children. 3. To make the sibling a supportive factor in caring a child with learning disabilities.

Meeting No. 15th was dedicated to the relationship with school, in a panel of teachers that came to the group and discussed about the optimal way of work combining parents and teachers to support children with learning disabilities.

In meeting No. 16th, a lecture was held by a learning-disabled adult who is currently a manager in a successful high-tech company who spoke about the factors that contributed to his success in order to inspire and learn from successes and that even children with learning disabilities can have achievements. The meeting discussed possible ways of integrating children as adults in the labor market.

Meeting No. 21st was dedicated to closing and summarizing the program. The meeting included an evaluation of the program, a ceremonial summary and a parting of the participants from the group.

During the training, the mothers became more active in taking care and educating their children. Mothers learned how to appreciate their inner strengths. They learned to understand the nature of the problem and the limits in which children can be developed towards learning inde-

pendence. The mothers also learned about their strength facing crises and distress and actively cope with stress, and this was expressed in a more optimistic approach towards the disability. The group was very powerful and provided a unique response. The group provided the mothers an opportunity to meet other mothers who experience similar experiences. Sharing experiences, reflecting their situation in the stories of other mothers, and exposure to alternatives. It is clear that the mothers became more aware of their behavior and of the influences of the disability on the family fabric and to their unique way of coping with difficulties. In addition, mothers received significant support and created an important social network for their continued coping.

Findings. Description of the main themes that came up in the group during the intervention program. Apart from getting useful tools, the group also understood the role of women and the perceptions they brought to the program. The main themes were identified and the main tensions that came up in the group as well: the intensity of necessity in peer group – in the very first meeting we saw a great thirst for a group that share the same struggles and dilemmas of mothers of children with learning disability. As mentioned in researches, mothers of children with learning disability suffer more than the fathers of their child's behavior problems since their contact with the child is more intensive during most of the day and they cope with difficulties such as doing homework, disobedience, inability to get organized and more. Their reaction in those situations towards the child is extreme and more negative and is expressed in over protection combined with frustration and anger. Since we thought it was not right giving only cognitive tools and knowledge, in the very first meeting it was clear that there is

a need in a lot of work „inside” – on the private dilemmas of each woman, on her motherhood perception in work and on the struggles accompanying her being a mother of a child with learning disability. For this reason, we dedicated more time for „study cases” and working on it in some of the meetings.

Shame in front of the environment versus a willingness to seek for help – it was evident that many women felt shame concerning their children's problem, their difficulties and their lack of success. Maybe those feelings are empowered in Arab women comparing to Jewish women due to the characteristics of Muslim culture. As mentioned, the research findings indicate that the attitudes towards exceptional people in Arab society are mostly negative of those in Israeli Jewish society and its explanation is based on differences in cultural orientation. Researches in Israel compared between attitudes in Arab culture and attitudes in Jewish society towards the exceptional adolescent. It was obvious that the attitudes and behavior of Jewish parents towards their exceptional children are more positive, however, Arab parents feel more ashamed than guilt, these differences coming from cultural differences [4, 11, 9].

Perceptions towards learning disability as a focused disability or as a comprehensive problem – it was evident that there is a great variance between the participants not only in the children's disability's intensity but also in perceiving the disability as a focused problem that allows the child to express other abilities or as a comprehensive problem. Some of the women did not think that a child with learning disability can excel in something or study at a university and it seems that they had no information on the topic. As mentioned, researches found out that parents who show faith in their children's ability

with their disability make good influence on his self-esteem and it reflects in their academic achievements. In addition, the parents' attitude also influences on how the children cope with their difficulties. It was found out that the more positive the parents' expectations about their children are, the more they will succeed in improving their academic achievements [10]. It was also found out that parents' attitudes towards their children with various disabilities influences the children's emotional, social and academic functioning [6; 8]. It was evident that the lecture and the information supplied had great value in changing the participants' attitudes. Meeting with mothers that believed in their children's ability had great influence as well.

Providing independence versus excessive concern – after the participants, who arrived with mixed attitude, understood the importance of intervention, significant question came up about how much to be involved and how much to take care of children (within schools, with teachers and friends) versus how much to trust the child and let him cope independently. As mentioned, mothers who show excessive concern and protection causes their children high dependence, which make their independent functioning become difficult. We could see the influence of the dilemma on the parenting style between concerning / anxious versus empowering parenthood that increases children's sense of capability to cope with different situations.

Anger and accusation versus acceptance – many emotions arose in the group, including anger towards children with learning disability because of the work they cause to women and because this work often interfere with optimal coping with the other children in the family and other home chores. Many times, the anger was about the difficulty and the many conflicts with others. As mentioned, relationships

with family members and others may be difficult and dilapidated, what makes home, the place that should be the child's safe place, into another difficult and frustrating place, a fact that adds tension and difficulty to the parents of a child with learning disability [7]. Therefore, an anger circle is formed between the child with learning disability and his parents, when the parents react and express their disappointment on the child that does not meet their expectations, and the child sees the negative emotional reaction when he does not meet his parents' expectations, the dilemmas are formed in the family and the parents' pressure raises [1, 2]. It was evident that some parents' anger was accompanied by the mother's sense of self accusation for those feelings. Mothers that were angrier had less ability to accept the child. Maybe this tension and feelings are empowered within Arab women due to Islamic culture. As mentioned, in Arab culture the mother's main role is to be a wife and a mother. Mothers are responsible for the householding and atmosphere and they are perceived as the responsible for their decisions at home. Mothers are responsible for children's education and house chores. The main criteria for an evaluation of the traditional women are related in the level of her success to fulfil her duties as a wife and a mother [3; 5]. One of the assumptions in the basis of group work was that self-awareness in context of internal tension helps people find their way to freedom. Regarding the cooperation in the group, we could learn that many of the women are in constant experience of anger and guilt. The experience of anger and accusation is generalized by teachers and this fact makes the support of children be difficult. The ventilation of emotions in the group, the legitimation, the normalization and emotional support helped increase the space of child's inclusion and acceptance.

The findings of the program show that since the attitude and behavior towards learning disabilities are influenced by deep emotional perceptions, it is right to work on unconscious perceptions on more levels such as the cognitive level, or to provide knowledge. The program should operate on two levels: influence on a cognitive verbal declarative component (mainly providing knowledge). Influence on a sensory emotional component and the influence on the component of attitudes and behavior. Finally, it is necessary to use various methods and instrumental tools to understand and influence the emotional stance towards the subject and the unconscious processes. And a major goal of the program was to impart knowledge and tools to parents to deal with children with learning disabilities. The entire findings appear in this chapter. It is important to note that it was found out that mothers are responsible for the conduct of the home and its atmosphere and they are seen as responsible for the consequences of the decisions they make at home. Mothers are responsible for the children's education and household chores. The main criteria for evaluating the traditional woman are related to her degree of success in fulfilling her duties as wife and mother. I have learned from the group that many of the women are constantly angry and feel guilty. The experience of anger and guilt is generalized to teachers and makes it difficult to support the child. The enlightenment of group emotions, legitimization, normalization, and support for these feelings helped increase the children's containment and acceptance.

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