



Prejudice On Disabled Children

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Abstract: Introduction. Prejudice is a negative unjustified attitude towards a group and its members based only on their membership in the group. There is an inferior and merciful attitude towards children with disabilities, their parents and their staff. This conclusion comes out by interviewing 100 random people: 30 parents of those children, 20 staff members and 50 people from community. **Study's aim:** Awareness of the community on some forms, causes and consequences of prejudice towards: children with disabilities, their parents and the staff treating them in order to reduce prejudice on this social group. **Methodology:** The instruments used in this study were: observation on vertical grill realised in the children's environments, structured interviews with the parents and staff of the focus group. The focus group was organised with specialists by civil society, the center of social service and homologue centers. **Results:** According to SPSS, 60% of parents think that prejudice happens because of lack of information. 55% of the them think that lobbying serves to protect the children's and parents' rights. 20% think that prejudice ruins relationships in a couple as one of the parents has to quit his/her job to look after the child. 30% of them do not believe in the professional skills of the training staff. 45% of the interviewees in the community think that prejudice decreases if the children are educated in normal kindergardens and schools. 50% of staff related the prejudice on them to the poor culture of the prejudising people, and 40% of them consider the psychological educative technique as an instrument for promoting the harmonious co-living. **Conclusion:** Collaboration, lobbying from parents, civil society, specialists who work with the children and media, reduce prejudice. Applying the Convention of the Rights of Children with mental disabilities and the approval of the Integrated Law, would help in reducing prejudice. Children have different abilities but they have equal rights just like the other children. Inclusion accelerated the psycho-social rehabilitation and integrated the children with disabilities.

Key words: Prejudice, reduce, awareness, integration, rehabilitation

INTRODUCTION

Recently, efforts have been made to design social policies about defending the rights of children with special needs, but our standarts are not according to the Convention for the Rights of People with mental disabilities. Eventhough this convention is ratified, still it is not fulfilling its mission (Service stanards' implementation, 2005). The approval of the Integral Law would enable the people with mental and physical disabilities to enjoy their legitimated rights; otherwise, it is a legal discrimination. This social group suffers prejudice, it is stigmatised and called names just because they have different abilities. Prejudice does not fall only on these children but on their parents, and social worker employees, too, going far to denying their rights in the education and employment field. Employees do not believe in their abilities, as a result they are prejudiced as employers or entrepreneurs, too. Prejudice is everywhere in the education system: in the nursery, kindergarden, and schools (Aervice stanards' implementation, 2005).

Emma, tells her discriminating drama as the mother of a disabled son: *“Our son was refused in the kindergarden and later at school. The opinion was shocking, prejudising. Sometimes they pitied us. My husband couldn’t face it and asked the divorce. I had to give up my job to look after my soon. Life became more difficult. I lived only on 8700 Albanian leks by looking after my son. After many years, I managed to accommodate him in the Center of Children Rehabilitation here in Tirana, but lack of education in his early childhood has severely effected him. Now he is 30 years old classified as handicap, prejudiced as handicap, and discriminated because he is a disabled boy”*.

Many families in Albania experience this situation. Still, there is not an exact number of them and of the disabled people as there is not a chain of institutions to prevent the birth of the disabled children. There is not a functional network of institutions to treat children according to their age-group: 0-3 years old, 3-6 years old, 6-14 years old, and 14-18 years old, so that according to their cognitive development, the children can be treated by the specialised staff. Only 292 children are treated in the public centers of social service whereas the demands to treat children by rehabilitation programmes are increasing daily, and so does the number of the stressed parents. The capacity in the state rehabilitation centers and in the private ones is limited (Ballhysa N, 2010).

The multidisciplinary daily community centers depend on local and foreign projects and donations. The opening multidisciplinary community centers are not a priority for the Local Government as their funds are limited. Prejudice is triggered by some traditional factors and by the inability to communicate with this category of society. We prejudice, pity, despise, stigmatise, call names, and discriminate because we lack communication (Osmanaga F, 2016). In a spontaneous interview with a community representative, he says that *“the media is a very effective tool to limit prejudice.”*

However, promotion of the achievements of the disabled children is done only on 3 December on the international day of the disabled people. The public institutions, parents’ community, the non-profitable organisations, and the staff of rehabilitating centers can join their energy to free the society from the prejudicing psychology by advocating and lobbying for them. These relevant factors can lead their positive energy to ensure the rights of this category and this can precipitate their integration process in the society. The unique therapy to rehabilitate and integrate these children into the society is the collaboration between the specialists and the parents.

Nebia, a specialist who has been working with the disabled children for 30 years tells us how her job was prejudiced by her relatives and friends because of the difficult job with the handicaps. When asked for features of these children’s abilities in painting, music, handcraft, pirography, sweing, and clay, she said that: “they are just like other children but they need more affection, devotion and professionalism. Year after year, - she says, - these children became part of my life”. The study recommands that the increase in social culture, and awareness of the public opinion, decreases the power of prejudice towards the actors and factors in the field of different abilities. It is concluded by the study that reducing the prejudice depends on social, economic, legal and educational factors. Lobbing is one of the main tools to ensure the legal basis. The budget of the local government and local councils must plan more investments. The professionalism of the residential centers and the community ones will increase the service’s quality for these children with different abilities. Media has to create a healty opinion for these children who are different in their abilities but equal in their rights. Specialist – parents cooperation cannot be replaced in order to achieve success and reduce prejudice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A person is defined as disabled when his/her physical, intelectual or mental health are different from those of the same age group for a certain period of time by impeding or not making possible for them to normally partecipate in the social life. Prejudicing is a wrongly unbased thought which makes somebody to judge or act (Dragoti E, 2004). It is a negative unjustified attitude against a group and its members based only in their membership (Janaqi G, 2009). Even the attitude towards children with different abilities or the disabled, their parents, and

the staff that treats them is negative, underestimative and merciful. There are some ways known as lowering the prejudice level, among which the following ones are considered as effective:

- Creating contacts between the prejudicers and the prejudiced ones
- cognitive and educative trainings. It has been proved that the increase of opportunities to contact among the stereotyping and the stereotyped highly decreases the negative stereotype (Anderson K, 2010). Such abnormal attitude happens in many cases with the disabled children. Experience has shown that the first contact with these children is indifferent or they interrupt cooperating with them which is being developed by his/her educator. People who meet such a child for the first time often get contracted and pity the child or are afraid of him/her (Plous S, 2011) This phenomena is especially noticed with the students or volunteers who do their practice with these children. We often have to make the people who meet them for the first time aware of the fact that they must not pity the disabled children or to abandon them but to cooperate, with them with love and without any psychological barriers. Cooperation is a common activity and success depends highly on it.
- To decrease the prejudice level, the specialists of physical therapy of the disabled children prepared the group of the children in the center, and in 2009 became part of Gymstreet Dance organised in 26 public and private schools in Tirana. The team of the children of the development center, with their games, transmitted a lot of emotions and the message to the audience that “we are just like the other children”. The team of these children with the trophy of gymstreet was the coronation of the professional work of the staff based on modern teaching methods. The performance released the children from their emotions and decreased the prejudice of the audience who followed the show in ovation, emotions and tears. One method that can effect in decreasing prejudice is to apply the theory of contact. Integrating them at school is a field where the results can be mixed (Pango Y, 2005).

Painting classes were organised in the center of children’s development to practise them in painting, and children from the community took part in it. Collaboration of two groups of children affected in lowering the prejudice and integrating the disabled children. This activity discovered and developed Albi and Enea’s special skills. Their paintings were given awards in the international competitions of Finland and Israel.

Every year at the beginning of school, the center’s specialists commit to register children who have a slow mental development in the school “Osman Myderizi”, but these children have refused to practise in the academic development and to find out their hidden skills which can be identified and developed only by the specialists. In rare cases, the children have accepted to assist in the academic environments. Integrity in normal schools of the disabled children has not been realised because they have also been bullied, given names and stigmatised by their friends (Nano L, 2016). This is a social discrimination towards this social group that is why the right to be educated was respected by the specialists of the center and it was applied in the programmes of special education.

Cognitive theory, psycho-dinamic, situational, historic and socio-cultural factors:

- The *Cognitive theory (thinking)* is based on the way a person percepts and processes the information related to the prejudice object (Hamilton DL, 1979). According to this theory, the disabled children are perceived as biologic beings with limited cognitive abilities. There are two cognitive treats. One of them bases on the attribution theory and the other in differentiating between members and nonmembers of the group. Therefore, it is the negative thought the basis of negative attitude from the prejudicing people about the disabled children.
- *Historic treatment* is object of stigmatisation by the social opinion instead of helping these people to become capable (Dovidio J et al, 2005).
- *Socio-culturali treatment* of individual prejudice is very big. Attitudes and relationships with the disabled people are based on the culture level of the individuals. The higher the social culture, the lower the degree of discrimination and prejudice. We have been studying the justification of prejudice especially through values. The Stereotypes, and explanation types are for the bad result (Inclusion of disable children, 2015) When a person is seen to be responsible for his/her behaviour and life results, then hate and similar

treatment not only has been justified, but it is seen as ethical, natural and good, for example when someone is a criminal (Blackwell J et al, 2003).

- *Psychodynamic treatment* explains that barriers in the psychological level of functioning lead to prejudice (Pettigrew T, 2010). When children with special needs are assessed instinctively and emotionally, the attitude towards them is underestimative, exclusive and discriminative.
- *Situational Treatment or the theory of social learning* explains the possibility that the on spot environment can create a prejudice in an individual (Crandall CS et al, 2003). It is thought that children create their prejudice through the adults, their peers and parents by a direct or indirect enforcement. There are some effective ways to prevent prejudice and reduce it.

Also, there is the method of making contacts between the people who prejudice and the prejudiced ones (Garth TR, 1985). The contact increase minimises the prejudice degree. Encouragement to interact among the disabled group and the normal group decreases. In the groups of children in the development center, we noticed that when children do not have some time to know each-other, they tease and fight because the physically disabled children despise the mentally disabled children (Rosnow RL, 1972). When they stay together and get familiar, their relationship becomes cooperative and not prejudicing. According to Tajfel, H. (Tajfel H, 1982), prejudice "may not develop because positive emotions such as admiration, sympathy and trust are reserved for the within group". In 1954, Gordon Allport dealt with prejudice and categoric thinking. Allport pretends that prejudice is partly a normal process for the people. According to him, human "mind" has to think with the help of the formed categories. The categories are the basis of a normal prejudice and we cannot avoid this process (Allport GW, 1958). In our plan, according to this theory, prejudice on disabled children can be minimised but not vanished.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to make evident the prejudice forms, causes and the discrimination degree towards the disabled children, their parents and the staff that treat them. This study was based on these instruments:

- ✚ Focus group.
- ✚ Observation with vertical grill.
- ✚ Structured Interviews.

Data was collected by these instruments. The study's population was composed of 100 people, 30 of whom were the parents of the children in the Development Center in Tirana, 20 specialists and educators who work there, and 50 individuals randomly selected by the community in this city. Volunteers who work in the center helped to deliver and collect the structured interviews. The collected information was confidential and the interviewees were not asked personal information.

Table.1. Data of the interviewed target groups.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Prarents</i>	<i>Interviewees by the community</i>	<i>Total</i>
1.	<i>Interviewees</i>	20	30	50	100
2.	<i>Gender</i>	F-19	F-10	F-23	F- 52
		M-1	M-20	M-27	M-48
3.	<i>Education</i>	Higher – 11	Higher - 9	Higher - 30	Higher 50
		Secondary - 9	Secondary – 21	Secondary - 20	Secondary 50
4.	<i>Status</i>	Employed	Employed 20	Employed 28	Employed 68
		20	Unemployed 10	Unemployed 22	Unemployed 32

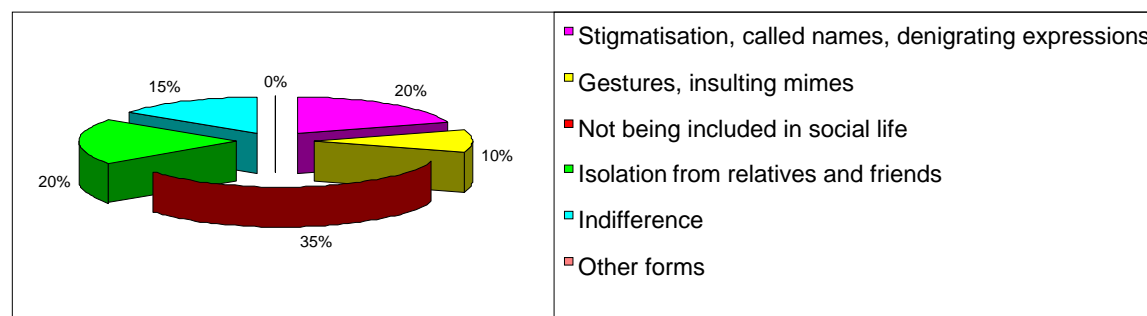
- i. Interviews were structured for: the target groups, the staff, parents and casual interviewed by the community. Each of the interviews had questions on gender, status and education of the interviewee for the respective target groups. The content of each of the interviews dealt with two kinds of rubrics.
 - ✚ The first rubric contains many questions on making evident the forms, causes, types and manners of the existence of prejudice on the children, their parents and the academic staff.
 - ✚ The second rubric contained questions that aimed gathering information on techniques, forms, ways, possibilities, practices of reducing prejudice and discrimination on disabled children, and their training staff. Some of the questions from the interview were:
 - i. Which are the prejudice forms on parents of children with different abilities?
 - ii. How can parents reduce prejudice because of the disabled child?
 - iii. What are some of the causes of prejudice on parents and children?
 - iv. What are the consequences of prejudice?
 - v. How are the disabled children prejudiced by the community?

Reducing prejudice on disabled children: According to law, one in 25 employers should be a disabled person.

- i. Why is this law not obeyed/applied?
 - ii. How can the staff act to reduce prejudice?
 - iii. What are the psychological and educative techniques that promote harmonious coexistence ?
- Structured interviews served to collect very specific information not only to argument the high level of prejudice on disabled children, but also to directly know the points of view of different people about the negative effects of prejudice on disabled children, their parents and their staff.
2. The instrument of focus group was organised with twelve people who knew the issues of disabilities i.e. specialists in working with the children at the development center in Tirana, specialists who work in the Foundation of special needs, specialists of the Department of disabled children near the public social service, specialists of the organisation “Ndhmoni jetën”, etc.
- The Focus group was developed based on 20 questions and the participants individually answered on the prejudice level about the actors in the field of special needs and the possibilities that reduce the prejudice level on disabled children.
3. The third instrument of this study was the observation with vertical grill. In order to function effectively, 5 questions were written in the form of agree/denial on the prejudice to physically and mentally disabled children, prejudice by the staff to children’s parents, community’s attitude towards disabled children in public schools, stigmatisation to disabled children by their peers in normal schools, students’ attitude towards the disabled children during their practice.

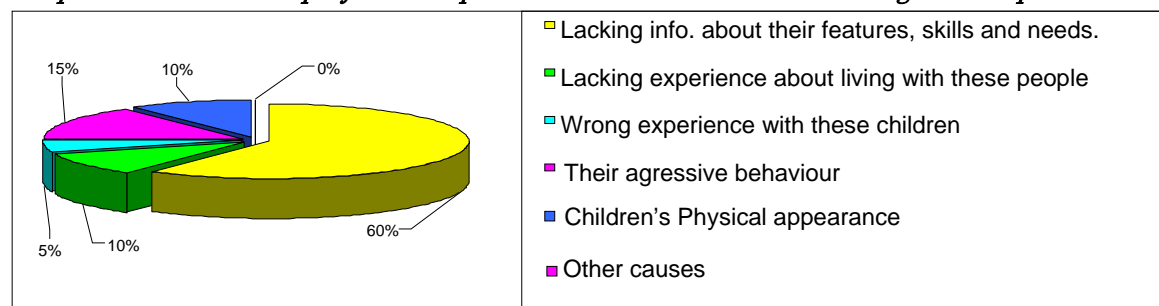
RESULTS

Graph No. 1. What are prejudice forms to parents of disabled children?



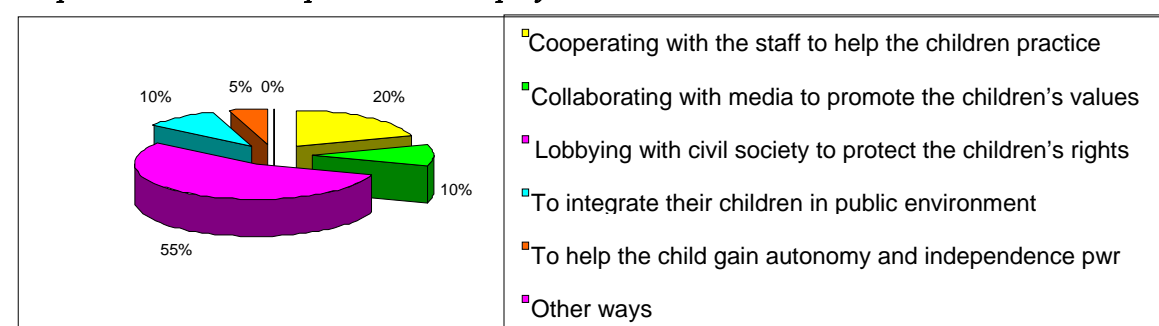
This graphic shows that when the parents were interviewed, they said that 35% of cases are pitied and excluded by participating in social life as they are prejudiced as parents with a disabled child. 20 % of them feel isolated from their relatives and friends as a consequence of their child’s prejudice. 20% of them have experienced prejudice as stigmatisation, being called names and denigrating phrases.

Graph No. 2. Causes of prejudice on parents and their children according to their parents



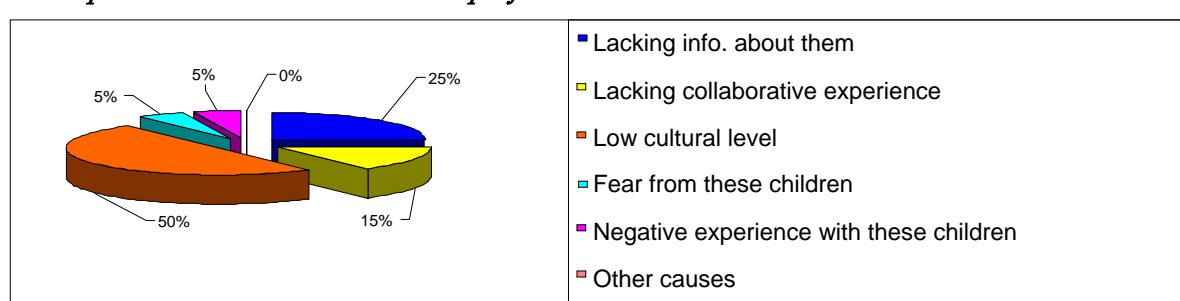
According to the interviews, it can be seen that 60% of parents think that the cause of prejudice is because of lack of information. 15 % of them think that the aggressive behaviour of the children is the cause of prejudice. 10% of them think that lack of experience causes prejudice.

Graph No. 3. How can parents reduce prejudice because of a disabled child?



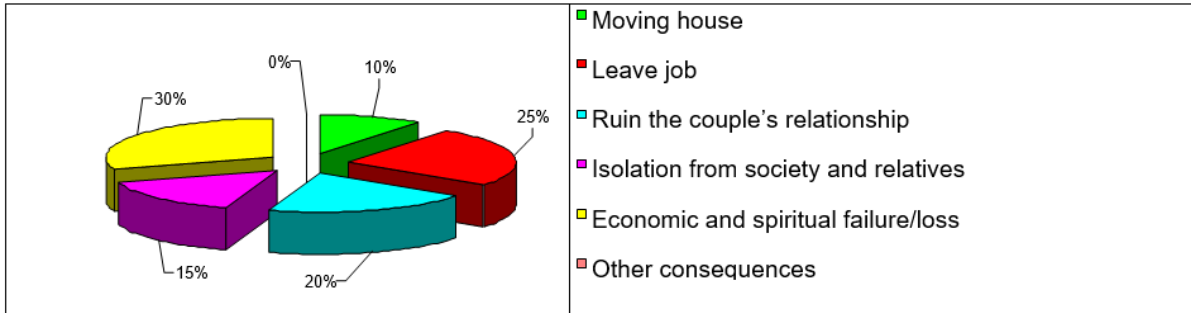
As it can be seen from the graph, 55% of the parents think that lobbying with the civil society is necessary to reduce prejudice and defend the children’s rights. 20% of them think that cooperation with the staff has an effect on reducing prejudice.

Graph No.4. Some of the causes of prejudice on staff and the disabled children



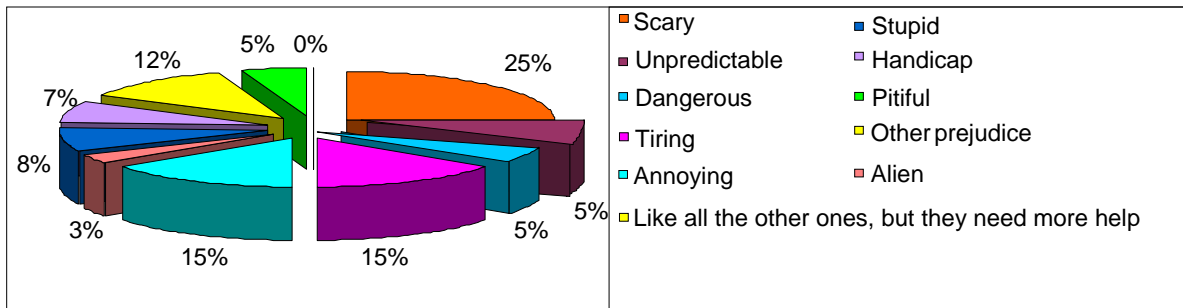
The low cultural level on the profession is considered in 50% of the answers as the cause of these children’s prejudice and their parents’ and staff who work with these children. 25 % of them agree that lack of information is the cause of prejudice.

Graph No. 5. Consequences of prejudice on parents with disabled children



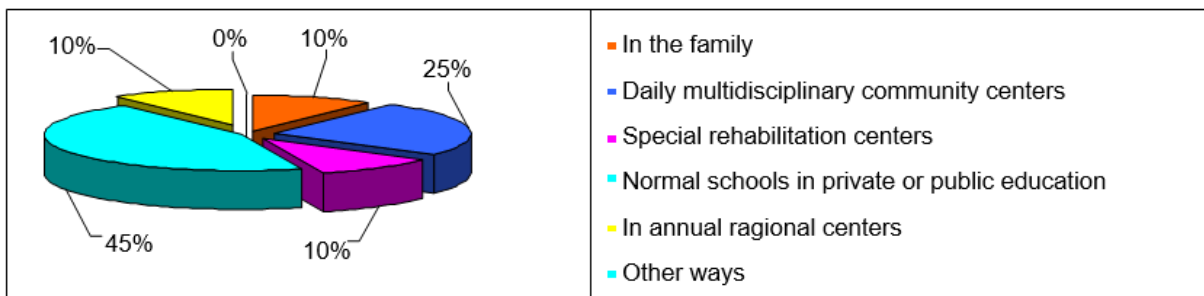
This Graph No.5. shows that 30% of the consequences of prejudice are the economic ruin and spiritual failure of the family of the child. In 25% of the cases, one of the families has to give up working and look after the disabled child. 20% of them consider prejudice as a factor for destroying the couple’s relationship.

Graph No .6. Community’s prejudice on the disabled children



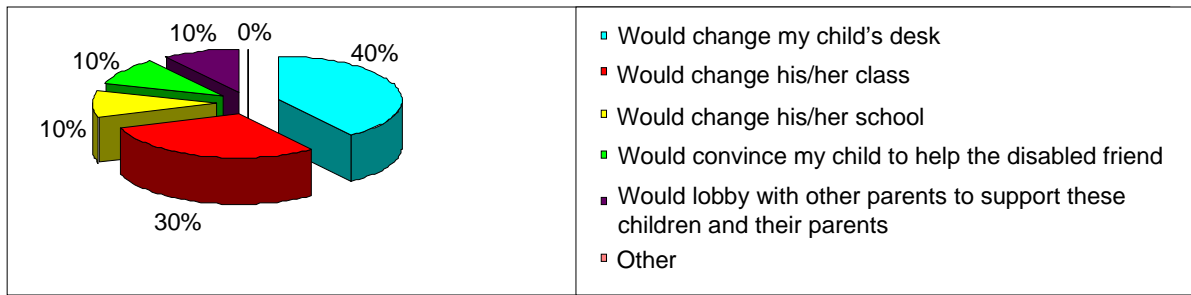
In this graph, it is shown that 25 % of the interviewees call these children scary, 15% of them call them tiring, 3% of the interviewees call them alien, 15% of them name them handicap, 10 % annoying, 8 % stupid, 5% unpredictable, 12% dangerous, etc.

Graph No 7. Can the disabled children be educated?



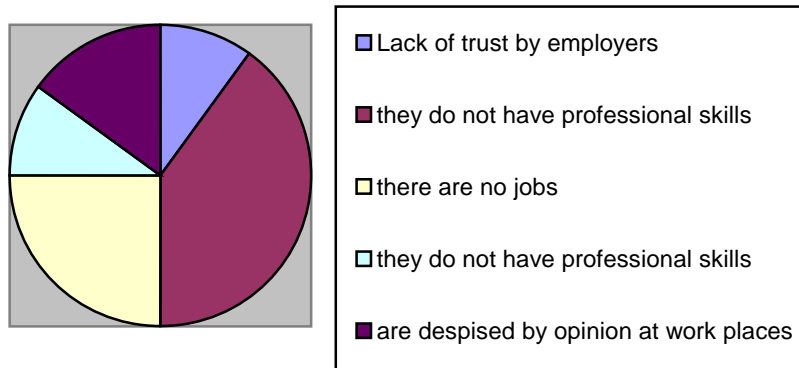
45% of the people answered to this question that the disabled children have to be educated in normal state or public schools, 25% of them think that the daily centers are successful rehabilitating centers for the disabled children.

Graph No 8. Would you accept a disabled child as a desk friend for your child?



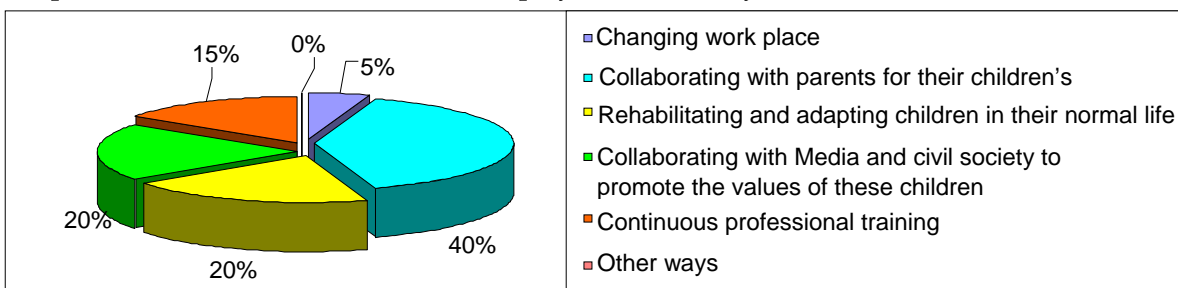
These children’s rights to be educated are deprived because they are prejudiced and despised. Thus, 40% of the interviews said that they would not let their children sit in the same desk with a special need child, 30% of them said that they would change the child’s class, but there are also intellectual parents, 10% of whom said that they would lobby with the other parents to defend the children’s rights.

Graph No. 9. According to the law, one in 25 employees has to be with different abilities. Why is this law not applied?



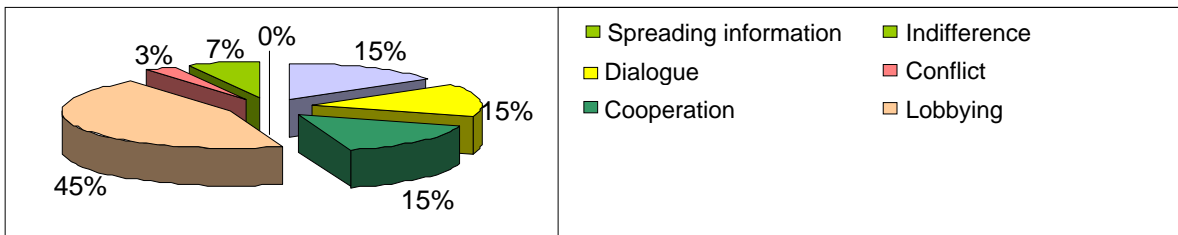
These people’s right to be employed is deprived even when they finish the rehabilitating programmes in the residential or weekly centers. 40% of the interviewees think that the employers do not trust in their professional skills/abilities, 25% think that even when they are treated and have professional abilities and skills, they are despised by other employees in their work place.

Graph No 10. How can staff act to reduce prejudice on their job?



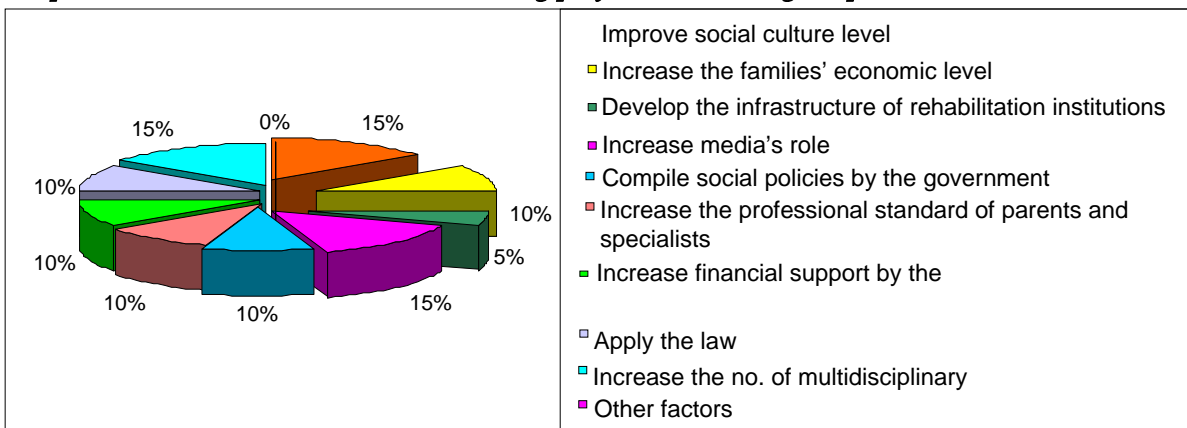
The staff who treat these children think that in order to reduce prejudice on their work, 40 % of them think that there should be collaboration with the parents to integrate the child, 20% of them think that they should collaborate with the media to sensitize the opinionin in promoting the children’s values, 20% think that the children should be rehabilitated and be able so that they can be integrated in the community.

Graph No 11. Psychologic and educative techniques for promoting harmonious coexistence



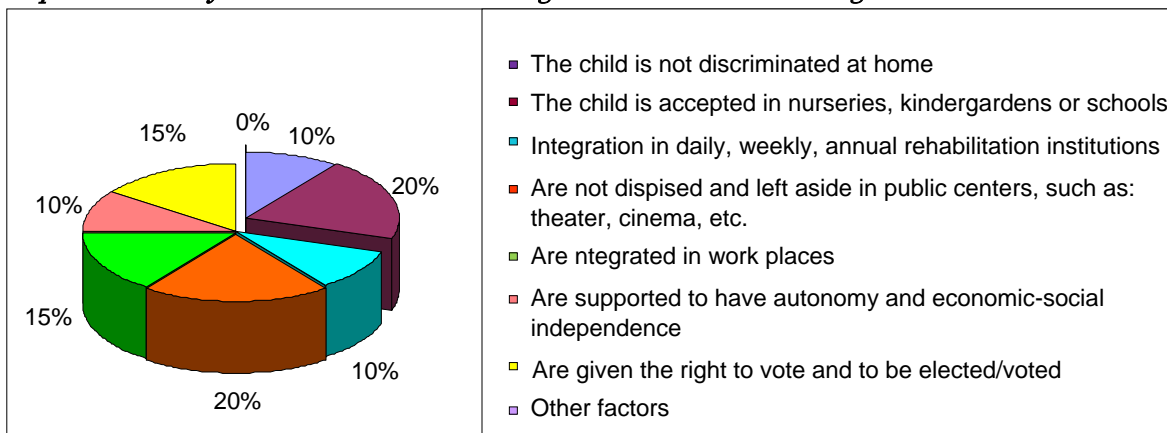
As it can be seen in the graphic concerning the interviews on psychological and educative techniques to promote the harmonious coexistence, 45% of them choose lobbying as a real opportunity with great effect in creating an appreciative climate towards the disabled children. 20 % of them consider the dialogue as an effective technique to inform the opinion.

Graph No.12. Factors that effect in reducing prejudice according to specialists



There are many factors that define the answer to the question. 15% of them value the increase of social culture opinion. Designing social policies is valued as an important technique by 15% of the interviewees, and increase of professional qualification is valued by 15 % of them, etc.

Graph No 13. Do you think that the following factors effect in reducing discrimination?



In this graphic, 7 alternatives are defined as the factors which influence reducing prejudice and discrimination of the disabled children. 20% of the people think that if children are accepted in nurseries, kindergardens and

normal schools prejudice for the children, parents and specialists would quite decrease. 20% of them think that prejudice can be reduced if the children are helped and not despised in public places, leisure environments and the educative ones.

CONCLUSIONS

By this study, we came to the conclusion that:

- the disabled children are prejudiced.
- Their parents and the children's training staff are also prejudiced.
- These children are not preferred to be accepted in kindergardens and normal schools to develop their possible capacities.
- The disabled people are not accepted to be employed by public and private institutions after they finish their training programmes in the rehabilitation centers.
- Eventhough the Conventipon of the Disabled People's Rights has been ratified, it has not been applied effectively to increase the life standart for the disabled people and their families.
- There is also lack of the Integral law on defence of children with different abilities/the disabled.

People who prejudice lack information on the abilities, values and needs of this social group. The low professional culture of the staffs is considered as another cause for these children and their parents. Partents' lobbying with the staff, civil society, media, actors and factors who work in the special needs field has not become a common practice, yet. The staff and especially the parents' qualification is not a continuous one. There is lack of social – economic policy by the government to support the families of special needs/disabled children. There are limited facilities for relaxing, leissure activities and therapeutical ones for the disabled children. Families of the disabled children feel discriminated, unprotected and stressed. There is no institutional sincronised network according to children's cognitive developement degree so that they are treated by specialised staff.

Only 292 children all over the country are treated in the social service centers which depend on the State Social Service. There is no exact number of special needs/mentally or physically disabled children in national range. It is thought that there is a tendency that this number increases, which means that the economic difficulties and spiritual sufferings of the family of the disabled children is of a worrying degree. It is time the special needs of children, their families and the staff who treat them to be supported and not to prejudice or discriminate them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is necessary that the perception, imagination, experience, attitude and evaluation towards the special needs/disabled children to be considered among human in order to avoid the prejudicing psychology of every person towards this social group. Media must promote the abilities and rights of the disabled people. The Convention on the physically and mentally disabled people must be applied. The Integral Law of defence of the rights of the disabled children must be approved.

Investment on these children has to be increased in order to improve the service quality for the disabled children. Collaboration among all actors and decision making factors has to strengthen and that of the civil society, local and foreign donators, parents, and staff's so that the prejudice level on these children is reduced. These children need to be integrated in the public and private inclusive education.

- The network of the daily multidisciplinary centers in the country has to be broaden according to their age-groups. The employment law has to be respected and one per 25 people has to be a disabled employee. Social policies need to be designed to support these children and their families. The staff's and parents' qualification level must increase to preceptitate the rythm of the disabled children's

development. The programmes' quality needs improvement in order to rehabilitate and integrate the children.

- To build an institutional chain system to prevent, diagnose and treat the special needs/disabled children respectively: 0-3 years old, 3-6 years old, 6-14 years old, 14-18 years old. Hereafter, they need to be integrated in the community work centers monitored by the social society.
- To increase the media's role in community's awareness about the need to minimise prejudice on the disabled children, their parents and the specialists who treat them. Civil society must lobby about protecting the rights of the disabled children and their families.

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