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Leisure time of intellectually disabled children in the opinion of their parents

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Objective of the study: The study aims at diagnosing the opinions of parents of children with minor and moderate intellectual disabilities on the forms and significance of leisure time behaviour.

Materials and methods: The study was conducted in 2017 among the parents of students of the Maria Montessori Special Primary School at the 102nd Special School Complex in Poznań. The author's own research questionnaire was used, containing questions about forms of spending free time, the amount of free time available and the participation of children in extracurricular classes and out-of-school activities, as perceived by parents.

Results: The majority of parent respondents, regardless of the degree of their children's disability, stated that their children had a lot of free time, at least two hours per day on weekdays and over six hours per day during the weekend. In the perception of most parents, during summer and winter holidays their children have whole days free. The respondents notice both active and passive forms of leisure activities pursued by their sons and daughters. The parents confirmed the participation of their children in numerous extracurricular classes and out-of-school activities.

The study revealed that parents, siblings, or other family members were most often partners of leisure for intellectually disabled children. All the respondents declare that they know what their children are doing in their leisure time and who they spend it with.

KEY WORDS: family, leisure time, free time, intellectual disability

Introduction

In contemporary civilisation, leisure time is one of the highest-rated values that influences one's personality and is decisive for one's quality of life. Its volume is treated as an important determinant of social well-being, cultural development, even the level of health in specific countries or social groups.

The volume of leisure time rising day to day forces not only the individual, but also the entire society to gain interest in new areas of human activity that will encompass this expanding volume¹. Rational management of leisure time, after all, influences the broad development of one's personality, the improvement of physical fitness, relieves conditions of emotional tension, serves the restoration of one's physical and psychological power.

Issues related to the filling and appropriate utilisation of free time are becoming a key social problem. In the modern family, coping more often than not with financial and organisation problems, the rational solution to the issue of leisure time is not easy. In many family circles, it can be observed that this issue does not enjoy any interest. Not all parents understand the profits stemming from correct usage of leisure time and the role it plays in the development of a child's personality. A. Jegier² indicates with fear the ever-often observed social phenomena referred to as the „managed child syndrome” or the „child neglected through wealth”.

Activities undertaken during leisure time, in particular their developmental and revalidation-relevant aspects, should be analysed in detail within the framework of oligophrenopaedagogy. The understanding that the development of intellectually-disabled persons must be comprehensive is becoming ever more common. One thus cannot speak of social adaptation of such individuals with consid-

¹ K. Czajkowski, *Wychowanie do rekreacji*, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa 1979.

² A. Jegier, *Wprowadzenie*, [in:] *Czas wolny małych dzieci w świecie realnym i wirtualnym*, ed. by A. Jegier, Difin SA, Warszawa 2016.

eration for one of the most basic levels of the revalidation process, which is rational consumption of leisure time.

Within the context of issues indicated as such, it seems significant for the obtaining of the opinion of parents concerning the leisure time of their intellectually disabled child seems to be of importance.

Leisure time of an intellectually-disabled child

The leisure time of a child differs from the leisure time of an adult. It must differ, as the socio-economic situation of a child and of an adult is different. Activities undertaken during leisure time of a young individual are subject, and should be subject, to control of parents or educators due to the fact that the child is characterised by lack of psychological maturity and limited experience³.

Within special education, it is accepted that the leisure time of intellectually-disabled persons is that time of day, which following the consideration of time spent learning at school or one's professional duties, regular regeneration of the body and special rehabilitation activities, with the addition of necessary duties around the house, remains for their sole disposal and thus may be a period of individual choices concerning the types and areas of activities related to relaxation, entertainment and the satisfaction of personal interests⁴. One needs to remember that the volume of leisure time that

³ K. Czajkowski, *Wychowanie do rekreacji*, WSiP, Warszawa 1979.

⁴ H. Borzyszkowska, *Zajęcia pozalekcyjne i poza szkolne oraz czas wolny dzieci upośledzonych umysłowo*, [in:] *Upośledzenie umysłowe, pedagogika*, ed. by K. Kirejczyk, PWN, Warszawa 1981, chapter 14; L. Ploch, *Jak organizować czas wolny dzieci i młodzieży upośledzonych umysłowo*, WSiP, Warszawa, 1992; M. Parchomiuk, *Sposoby spędzania czasu wolnego przez młodzież upośledzona umysłowo w stopniu lekkim i sprawną umysłowo*, „Wychowanie Na co Dzień” 2000, no. 4/5 pp. 13-16; T. Żółkowska, *Aktywność pozadydaktyczna uczniów z lekkim stopniem upośledzenia umysłowego a poziom opieki rodziców nad ich czasem wolnym*, „Zeszyty Naukowe. Prace Instytutu Pedagogiki i Psychologii” 1995, no. 21, pp. 115-128; J. Zimny, *Czas wolny wyzwaniem rodziny w kształtowaniu osobowości osób niepełnosprawnych*, [in:] *Rodzina w oczach społeczeństwa*,

children with limited intellectual abilities have is reduced as a result of participation in various additional activities spanning revalidation, such as speech therapy, rehabilitation, physical corrective exercises or reeducation. In addition, due to impairments in mental development, the lack of life experiences, social immaturity, these children are more dependent on their parents or caretakers. As a consequence, they are not at full liberty to design their leisure time as they please.

With respect to the intellectually disabled, L. Ploch⁵ notes four aspects of leisure time:

- the educational and psychological aspect; well-organised leisure time may aid in intellectual, moral, societal and physical development, simplifies social relations and experiences, creates opportunities to get to know and understand the surrounding world; awakens the need of cooperation with others, enriches the individual intellectually;
- the care aspect, meaning, support of comprehensive development of an individual, providing support in terms of security, health, prevention of difficulties and failures and the improvement of one's environment of life;
- the hygiene and health aspect; the mode of spending leisure time very clearly influences the psychological and physical relaxation of the body;
- the revalidation aspect, understood as creation of situations, in which persons with limited intellectual abilities must show initiative, activity and the ability to arrange their additional activities on their own.

L. Ploch further notes that „it may be inferred that the high significance of leisure time with respect to education, one's psychological condition, care and re-validation, is related to the interconnec-

ed. by J. Zimny, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II w Lublinie, Stalowa Wola 2013, pp. 9-27.

⁵ L. Ploch, *Jak organizować czas wolny dzieci i młodzieży upośledzonych umysłowo*, WSiP, Warszawa 1992.

tion of the operative and cognitive side of the education process within free and unhindered co-activity with the motivation side of the intellectually disabled”⁶.

The role of the family in the shaping of forms of spending leisure time

The influence of the social environment on an individual occurs in course of the process of socialisation. It is understandable that this environment – depending on the prevailing norms, standards, value systems, customs, habits, attitudes or convictions – may exert a positive or negative influence on the life style of an individual.

The original, primary group that plays the basic role in socialisation is the family. As the natural environment, it has great possibilities, among others, spanning the analysed preparation of the child for rational usage of leisure time, e. g. by encouragement to physical activity, through personal attitude, transfer of sports skills, creation of conditions of participation in family entertainment, enabling the use of recreation and culture facilities. The family teaches one to make choices, shapes interests and habits in terms of recreation.

The key sense of the experience of leisure time lies primarily in the full freedom of its choice. One needs to remember, however, that such freedom cannot be bestowed upon a person that had not mastered the following of worthwhile efforts and habits. A child of 13-14 is of course characterised by a great ability to act alone, arrange its leisure time on its own, work on itself in a manner serving comprehensive development. Still, the formation of leisure time of an individual that is growing yet still immature is and must be greatly influenced by the convictions of the parents, their beliefs about advantageous modes of management of leisure time and the scope of liberty necessary for the child in terms of choices and ex-

⁶ L. Ploch, *Jak organizować czas wolny dzieci i młodzieży upośledzonych umysłowo*, WSiP, Warszawa 1992, p. 16.

cution of leisure-time activities. However, the participation of a caretaker in the education and control of activities during leisure time must take into consideration the will of the young generation seeking its own mode of entertainment⁷.

The role of the family in the education and the process of socialisation of an intellectually-disabled child is a particular one, as, as W. Dykcik notes, „the care for them is a unique grave problem due to the complexity and relevant duration of the illness, as well as the need for early diagnosis, facilitation and making the individual independent, under home conditions”⁸. The level of difficulty in the execution of tasks and functions to be fulfilled by the family with respect to an intellectually-disabled child also rises.

An important sphere of influence is the preparation to the rational consumption of leisure time, because the family environment is where from a very early age the ability to play, entertain and relax develops, where the first extra-biological needs and interests unfold; it is here where the intellectually disabled child is taught how to spend their leisure time.

The parents bear the duty of rational control of the organisation of leisure time. However, with respect to influences aimed in this way, it is necessary to adhere to the basic rules in force within oligophrenopaedagogy, such as:

- adapting the leisure time activities to the needs, interests as well as psychological and physical abilities of the child;
- the voluntariness of participation;
- motivation to undertake activities;
- the attractiveness of the proposed leisure time activities;
- comprehensive activation;
- gradation of difficulty levels and staging of the execution of tasks within the organised free time;

⁷ J. Gracz, T. Sankowski, *Psychologia w rekreacji i turystyce*, Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego w Poznaniu, Poznań 2001.

⁸ W. Dykcik, *Tendencje rozwoju pedagogiki specjalnej. Osiągnięcia naukowe i praktyka*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Polskiego Towarzystwa Pedagogicznego, Poznań 2010, p. 162.

- the clarity of the methods and forms as well as the content developed for and used during leisure time activities;
- the continuity and systematicity of the provided care;
- assurance of hygiene and security.

Not every family can and may correctly prepare their children to manage their leisure time well. In this regard, L. Ploch⁹ distinguishes between three types of families:

- families that are consciously active, that create specific conditions to shape the abilities to arrange leisure time; the parents participate in the leisure time activities and are aware of their participation in the process of revalidation of a child with incomplete intellectual abilities;
- families that provide as much support as they can, leaving the initiative to facilities and institutions; their participation in the children's leisure-time activities is sporadic;
- passive families that do not attach importance to rational, cultivated and organised spending of leisure time.

The control of the mode of consumption of leisure time by intellectually disabled persons is a difficult and uniquely important issue. As the mentioned L. Ploch¹⁰ notes, it happens quite often that this time is neither organised nor supervised by adults. This creates great hazards for the security of children and youths, as well as for their physical and psycho-social health.

Assumptions of own research

Within the context of the aspects of leisure time delineated as such, it seems very important to get to know the opinions of parents on the leisure time behaviour of their intellectually-disabled child – as undertaken in empirical studies.

⁹ L. Ploch, *Jak organizować czas wolny dzieci i młodzieży upośledzonych umysłowo*, WSiP, Warszawa 1992.

¹⁰ L. Ploch, *Jak organizować czas wolny dzieci i młodzieży upośledzonych umysłowo*, WSiP, Warszawa 1992.

In order to obtain research material, the diagnostic survey method was implemented. During the conducted studies, the parent questionnaire technique was used, and it applied to the forms of leisure-time activities, the volumes of leisure time and the participation of children in activities outside of classes and of schools. The empirical data was collected in the year 2017 Maria Montessori Special Primary School at the 102nd Special School Complex in Poznań. The research group comprised 50 parents of minor-level intellectually disabled pupils – 52.6% (24 parents of girls and 26 of boys) as well as 45 parents of children with moderate-level intellectual disability – 47.3% (20 parents of girls and 25 of boys). The age of the children, to whom the study applied, lay between seven and 16 years. The decisive majority of these (83.1%) has siblings. The analysed parents represent a varied level of education. The most numerous groups are parents with higher (42.1%) and mid-level (29.5%) education.

Analysis of research results

The first analysed issue were the opinions of parents related to the leisure time budget of their children during school days, in the weekends as well as during winter and summer holidays.

The conducted research indicates that during the week, the majority of parents believe that children with moderate-level intellectual

Table 1. Volume of leisure time in the week in the views of parents (%)

Volume of leisure time	Opinions of parents of children with intellectual disability	
	at a minor level	at a moderate level
½ h-1 h	4.0	2.2
2-3 h	64.0	31.1
more than 3 h	32.0	66.7
has no leisure time	-	-
TOTAL	100.0	100.0

Source: own research

disabilities have more leisure time. It amounts to over three hours. Their peers with minor intellectual disabilities have at their disposal 2-3 hours of leisure time on school days. It can be supposed that this arises from their higher burden by homework. Pupils with minor intellectual disabilities do follow the basic curriculum of general education in force for public schools, which, among others, implies the necessity of heavy study also at home.

Positively should be evaluated that fact that no parents indicated their son/ daughter would have no leisure time at all. One needs to remember that an intellectually disabled child often participates in various additional revalidation courses, such as speech therapy, rehabilitation or re-education, which could imply excess limits of their time devoted to independent activity. And as A. Kuzstelak and K. Łąg prove, from the point of view of correct development of each pupil, „there must exist a balance between work organisation and leisure”, and a false rhythm within these „causes the body to weaken, illness immunity to fall, tiredness to set on quickly, nerve-muscle coordination to worsen, muscle or joint pains to arise”¹¹.

A further period analysed within the context of parental evaluation of leisure time were weekends.

Table 2. Volume of leisure time in the weekends in the opinions of parents (%)

Volume of leisure time	Opinions of parents of children with intellectual disability	
	at a minor level	at a moderate level
1-2 h	-	-
3-4 h	10.0	8.9
5-6 h	20.0	17.8
more than 6 h	70.0	73.3
has no leisure time	-	-
TOTAL	100.0	100.0

Source: own research

¹¹ A. Kuzstelak, K. Łąg, *Edukacja dla bezpieczeństwa. Interdyscyplinarne konteksty i dy-
lematy*, Wydawnictwa Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Handlu i Usług, Poznań 2010, p. 65.

Table 3. Volumes of leisure time during holidays in the opinions of parents (%)

Volume of leisure time		Opinions of parents of children with intellectual disability	
		at a minor level	at a moderate level
summer holidays	1-2 h	-	-
	3-5 h	-	-
	6-8 h	24.0	37.8
	the entire day	76.0	62.2
	has no leisure time	-	-
	TOTAL	100.0	100.0
winter holidays	1-2 h	-	-
	3-5 h	16.0	-
	6-8 h	30.0	22.2
	the entire day	54.0	77.8
	has no leisure time	-	-
	TOTAL	100.0	100.0

Source: own research

The results presented in table 2 show that irrespective of the level of intellectual disability of the children – in the opinion of the majority of parents, in the weekend they have at their disposal a lot of leisure time – over six hours.

Summer and winter holidays are, in the views of parents, primarily a time without duties for children.

The conducted research shows that in view of the majority of parents of children with intellectual disabilities, irrespective of their level, during summer and winter holidays they have the entire day free. Accordingly, a grave problem arises, which is the summer rest of a **disabled child. They may leave for a camp or special** rehabilitation course, but these are just 2-3 weeks out of two months of summer holidays. The remainder of the time is left for the parents to arrange, for thoughtful actions for the benefit of the intellectually disabled child, to plan activities that will be interesting, safe as well as beneficial for them.

The need for appropriate, rational management of leisure time is stressed by W. Siwiński, when he proves that „it is an affair of the utmost importance, not only how much leisure time one has on average, but also how they utilise it, what forms are applied, do they compensate for the effort put into work and to what extent do they influence the development of the individual, their health, actions and work results”¹².

Taking the quoted opinion into consideration in the subsequent part of the study, the issue of forms of consumption of leisure time by intellectually-disabled children, was analysed.

The surveyed parents state that their children undertake motor activity. 98.9% of those analysed indicate active consumption of leisure time in the weekends and holidays, and 86.6% indicate that this is the case in the week as well. In the group of active forms of recreation during leisure time in the week, the weekends and holidays, no particular differences were recorded. The most popular have turned out to be walks (70%), swimming, (50%), cycling (50%) and dancing (30%). With respect to weekend and holiday forms, the parents additionally indicated long walking treks and trips outside of the usual place of residence, horse riding and running. Rollerblading or skating enjoy little popularity, as do football and cycling tours. The level of intellectual disability of the child did not cause differentiation of the active forms of leisure time indicated by the parents.

Despite the fact that the surveyed parents declared active modes of consumption of leisure time by their children, however, they also indicate passive relaxation. Among these forms of relaxation, no significant differences were recorded between activities in the week, the weekends and during holidays. The parents indicated decisively in most cases watching television (70%), painting and drawing (60%) and listening to music or radio shows (60%). Individual cases indicated sleeping, inactivity and boredom. In addition, during weekends and holidays, the children go to the cinema (20%) and play board games (20%). The fact that such forms of passive consumption of leisure time as surf-

¹² R. D. Tauber, W. Siwiński, *Pedagogika czasu wolnego*, Wyższa Szkoła Hotelarstwa i Gastronomii, Poznań 2002, p. 32.

ing the Internet and playing computer games as well as reading books and magazines were indicated by parents of children with moderate intellectual disabilities is quite an unexpected result.

From the pragmatic point of view, the analysis of the open question, in which the interviewees exposed their own suggestions of the forms of consumption of leisure time that they perceive as appropriate for their children, is significant. Among the active forms of spending leisure time, the interviewees most often indicated walks, games and playing on small football fields, sightseeing in cities and the surroundings, playing football, cycling, walking and cycling tours. It must be noted at the same time that in the view of parents, passive forms of leisure are also appropriate, such as controlled watching of television, playing computer games, reading books, manual activities (painting, drawing, moulding with clay), art-related activities, board games, logic games, listening to music, cinema or theatre visits. With respect to the youngest children, the parents also very often (80.2%) indicated free play as a beneficial form of spending free time used successfully to compensate for developmental deficiencies in intellectually disabled persons. The achieved result must be interpreted with great praise, because according to the basic provisions of paedagogy of play, such a form of activity is of paramount importance in the process of upbringing and education of disabled persons. Opinions of parents as to the appropriate leisure-time activities were not differentiated by the level of intellectual disability of their child.

Uniquely significant and valuable is the fact that in many statements, the parents stressed the importance of the consumption of leisure time together with the children, irrespective of the level of their intellectual disability. Accordingly, they indicated family trips, joint games or reading books or stories, playing with siblings. The achieved results permit a slightly more optimistic interpretation of the clearly negative conclusions of R. Pięta and B. Matacz¹³ that indicated only occasional contact between the child and parents dur-

¹³ R. Pięta, B. Matacz, *Czynniki środowiska rodzinnego wpływające na osobowość i edukację szkolną dzieci upośledzonych umysłowo*, <http://www.profesor.pl> education website [accessed on: 23.04.2017].

ing leisure time. The child – in view of the authors – spends the majority of its time playing independently, without the participation of otherwise busy parents.

A further issue from the analysed aspects of research was getting to know the opinions on the usage of sports and recreation facilities in the closest vicinity. The decisive majority of parents with minor-level intellectual disabilities (86%) indicated that their son/daughter uses sports facilities regularly. Children with moderate-level intellectual disabilities visit sports facilities less often (53.3%). The places named most often are playgrounds (90.2%), swimming pools (85.3%) and sports fields (60.9%). Individual statements indicated sports halls or stadia, indoor climbing facilities and ice rinks. Of particular note is the large group of parents with moderate-level intellectual disabilities (46.7%) who indicated that they do not use sports infrastructure at all. They indicated the causes for this to be primarily the lack of appropriate facilities in their vicinity, offers not suitable for the needs and abilities of their child, the lack of its independence, health problems, as well as financial hardships.

The analysed empirical study also applied to the opinions of parents about the role that is or should be played by the school in terms of the shaping of leisure time behaviour of children and youths. Thus, the issue of additional activities arranged by the school as well as the tasks of the school with respect to the arrangement of leisure time for their pupils, was taken on. The majority of the interviewed parents (68%) assured that their child participates in activities outside of classes. The most popular ones turned out to be forms such as interest clubs (Me and sounds, music, reading, art, culinary, dance), art classes, re-validation courses (improvement of speech impediments, coordination of the senses, improvement of school techniques, correction of posture flaws) as well as classes to equalise education chances. 32% of the interviewed parents conclude that their child does not participate in additional activities. The causes for forgoing these turn out to be: unsuitable hours (33.3%), lack of will to participate (33.3%) and the child's tiredness (16.6%). For parents of children with moderate-level intellectual disabilities, deci-

sive turned out to be the uninteresting offer of activities (40.0%) and the distance from the place of residence.

The analysed parents were almost unanimous (94.7%) in believing that the school should aid them in arranging leisure time for their children. They indicated, as the expected support services, intermediation in seeking information on the options of spending leisure time by disabled persons, preparation of family festivities, arrangement of activities at sports facilities or trips to interesting places. Many parents also indicated the need for the school to arrange the leisure time of their children during winter and summer holidays, in the form of trips lasting a few days, or day camps. Opinions of parents on the participation of the school in the arrangement of leisure time were not differentiated by the level of the child's intellectual disability.

An important component of leisure time are also activities outside of the school. Positively should be interpreted the fact that the decisive majority of parents with moderate intellectual disability (78.4%) declares the participation of their sons/ daughters in organised forms of spending leisure time outside of the school. Children with minor-level intellectual disability utilise such forms less frequently (51.6%). The forms indicated most often turn out to be sports (33.3%). In addition, the surveyed parents also indicated speech therapy (57.1%), rehabilitation (28.6%) and SI occupational therapy (23.8%), which, however (according to the assumed definition) are not leisure time activities.

The last issue of the analysed research aspects was the problem of oversight by a parent or caretaker over the way leisure time is spent. All surveyed parents declared that they know what the child is doing in their leisure time, and who they spend it with. It is a beneficial and expected situation, as the lack of such control might lead to the child spending its time in an unsuitable and irrational manner, giving in to the not always good influence of their peers or persons it might look to imitate. The leisure time of every child, and of a disabled child in particular, must to a very high degree be subject to specific rules and regulations set by adults. The partners in leisure time activities of children with diminished intellectual abilities are in most cases par-

ents (95.3%), siblings (71.4%) or other members of the family (66.7%). The results of the conducted research prove that the level of intellectual disability of the child is a factor differentiating the opinions of the parents on the participation of peers in leisure time activities. Parents of children with minor-level intellectual disabilities indicated decisively more often (56.7%) friends as participants in leisure time than parents of children with moderate-level intellectual disabilities – in this case it was just 4.8% of parents.

Conclusion

The results of the conducted empirical study confirm the high volume of leisure time at the disposal of intellectually-disabled children. In such a situation, broad activities of schools, **the family environment, social circles** as well as special educators themselves are necessary in order for leisure time to become an important component **of revalidation for a child with incomplete intellectual abilities**.

Any individual activities or group courses organised during leisure time can be of rehabilitative importance. If appropriate stimulation is ensured by the environment, the own activity of the intellectually disabled child, which is in many cases a passive individual, will be stimulated. Impeded thought processes, difficulties in adaptation, effectively block the skills and abilities exhibited by disabled children, and they can only be brought to the surface by appropriate activities. Well-organised and well-spent leisure time is just this sphere that can compensate for all other failures, give satisfaction and the joy of life, which may satisfy the need of creativity, belonging, expression and actin. Leisure time thus seems to be a field of unlimited rehabilitation possibilities, and it should thus **take place** among the top both in terms of scientific research, as well as (or maybe – primarily) in the practical activities for the benefit of intellectually-disabled children.

Leisure time appears to be the area of limitless rehabilitation opportunities, and therefore it should occupy a significant position

both in scientific research and (perhaps predominantly) in practical activities undertaken to help children with intellectual disabilities. Extensive activity of the school, family environment and special education teachers themselves is required to implement leisure time as a vital element in the process of revalidation of intellectually disabled children.

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