SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to investigate the contribution of services and programs of special education centers (SECs) to the social empowerment of individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID). The social empowerment survey was prepared and distributed to 94 administrators and employees at SECs in the northern region of Jordan. Results indicated that there are a moderate contribution of Jordanian SECs services and programs to the social empowerment of individuals with ID according to the perspectives of administrators and employees in the northern region of Jordan.

Keywords: individuals with ID, social empowerment, special education centers

1. Introduction

Empowerment has become extremely important in national policy and has been met with a considerable acceptance of government institutions and civil society organizations (Al-Zoubi & Bani Abdel Rahman, 2014). Empowerment programs vary between different societies, but its general definition refers to the individual's ability to be active (Dito, 2013); it seeks to give individuals rights (Flatt-Fultz & Phillips, 2012), and it provides societies with the necessary skills to accept human diversity (Ahmed & Khalid 2012). Empowerment aims to provide individuals with disabilities the potential and abilities to be productive members in society. The term social empowerment has

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emerged to provide opportunities for social coexistence between individuals with and without disabilities.

The treatment of individuals with disabilities has often been associated with abuse, rejection, and injustice. Therefore, religions sought to ensure the rights of individuals with disabilities by instilling social justice and equality values within society (Al-Hattab, 2015). Humanitarian trends have begun to take an institutionalize approach (Jenkins & Davies, 2006), and other approaches seek to normalize their lives through deinstitutionalization (Malin & Race, 2010; Lerner & Johns, 2012). Civil society organizations have presented initiatives to promote the rights of individuals with disabilities (Kirakosyan, 2016) and to improve their social skills (Brown, Cobigo & Taylor, 2015). Decision-makers have responded to these initiatives by issuing legislations that help individuals with disabilities attain their rights (Mitchell & Philibert, 2002). As a result, contemporary terms of sustainable human development have emerged, including productivity, equity, sustainability, and empowerment (Nanny, 2011). In the present era, the advancement of societies has been measured by services offered to individuals with disabilities (Winter, 2003).

The implementations of social justice, equal opportunities, acceptance of diversity, and anti-discrimination have become more prevalent in the field of special education (Liasidou, 2014). The American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities has led the self-advocacy and defence movement that rights seeks for individuals with disabilities (Ford, Acosta & Sutcliffe, 2013). However, social inclusion aims to improve quality of life (Davis 2010; Clarke, Camilleri & Goding, 2015), and quality of life is compatible with empowerment and normalization (Wood, 2000).

Empowerment aims to expand the potential of individuals with ID to actively participate in the various institutions of society (Narayan, 2002). Empowerment contributes to the self-esteem and self-confidence of individuals with ID (Van Houten & Jacobs, 2005). Empowerment seeks personal development, and improves social, economic, and political conditions (Drower, 2005). Empowerment is vital for individuals with ID to take a role in society by having access to their rights as well as opportunities to discover themselves (Ofuani, 2011).

Empowerment theory has had a positive impact on the health and well-being of individuals with disabilities; in addition, it affects the modification of human ideologies towards individuals with disabilities (Wood, 2000). Constructivism theory also advocates for the social inclusion of individuals with disabilities (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2011).

Empowerment came as a reaction to the social exclusion for individuals with disabilities (Hills, Grand & Piachaud, 2002). In the field of special education human societies have excluded individuals with ID, and insufficient opportunities and poor

social interaction are evidences that these societies are still implementing social exclusion. Thus, the lack of services and social empowerment of individuals with ID are negative social policies practiced against these individuals (Koller, 2008). The social exclusion policy is contrary to the principles of social justice. So, empowerment efforts must seek to include of individuals with ID in all aspects, including educational, psychological, economic, political, and social (Al-Kharouf & Al-Hadidi, 2011; Adams, 2008).

Based on the Jordanian Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the care of individuals with disabilities has developed significantly. Jordan has been at the forefront of the Arab world in highlighting disability as a social issue that requires the provision of the best educational, health and institutional care for individuals with disabilities.

The Higher Council for Affairs of Persons with Disabilities (HCAPD) is the highest authority in Jordan that is responsible for determining policies for individuals with disabilities. The HCAPD seeks to implement the national strategy for individuals with disabilities, establish a set of Jordanian standards to evaluate the quality of programs and services that are provided to individuals with disabilities, and commit to the implementation of national and international legislations related to individuals with disabilities (HCAPD, 2017). In this regard, Disabled Care Act and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act were issued in Jordan (HCAPD, 2017). These acts emphasized the rights of individuals with disabilities in education, training, rehabilitation, and employment (Alghrair, 2010).

Special education services in Jordan are typically provided by institutions rather than communities (Alghrair, 2010). These services are provided through special education institutions and schools. The Jordanian Ministry of Social Development (JMSD) is the supervisor of the special education and rehabilitation centers. These centers offer programs and services for many special education categories in order to provide individuals with ID with education and vocational training, which enables them to adapt and social empowerment. There are 24 special education centers that are distributed to all Jordanian governorates, and they provide a range of educational, health, and vocational rehabilitation programs and services to 1317 individuals with disabilities (JMSD, 2017).

The JMSD emphasizes the use of special education centers, which operate during the daytime to provide education and training programs for individuals with ID (Alghrair, 2010). In these centers, a number of educational programs are offered to individuals with ID aged 6-12 years; these programs are related to teaching basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and independence and social skills (JMSD, 2017). Pre-vocational, academic, and independence skills are offered to individuals with ID at

aged 13-17 years (JMSD, 2017). Individuals in aged 17-25 years are offered vocational rehabilitation programs by training them in careers that are appropriate to their abilities (JMSD, 2017). These centers offer sports activities for individuals with ID that allow them to participate in national and international sports competitions through the Jordan Paralympic Committee or the Jordanian Association of Disabled Sports (HCAPD, 2017). The SECs also provide annual summer camps that highlight the achievements of these individuals.

Previous studies have discussed the empowerment programs for individuals with ID. Some studies have confirmed the contribution of the social empowerment on life quality, social well-being, and social welfare for individuals with ID (Al-Zoubi, 2008; Mahmoud, 2008; Saleh, 2011). Abu-Nasr (2004) considered that it is currently required to construct positive social attitudes towards individuals with ID by removing all forms of discrimination, whereas, Pham and Murray (2016) suggested that the positive relationships contribute to improve the behavioral and emotional skills of individuals with disabilities. Also, Siperstein and Parker (2008) noted that there are positive signs to facilitate the social inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

Other studies have confirmed that the support and assistance of families of individuals with disabilities by service providers contributes to the social empowerment of individuals with ID (Halawah, 2012; Damrah, 2011; BaOmer, 2011). In this regard, Koegel, Brookman and Koegel (2003) recommended collaboration between special education staff and families of individuals with disabilities. Also, Nijnatten and Heestermans (2012) stress the benefits of communicative empowerment to improve personal communication skills of individuals with ID.

Other studies have addressed the programs and services of institutions and special education centers their contributions to social empowerment. Al-Khateeb, Al-Zoubi & Bani Abdel Rahman (2013, 2012), and Al-Otaibi, Al-Zoubi & Bani Abdel Rahman (2015) stressed the weak contribution of rehabilitation centers programs to social empowerment of individuals with ID. Sultani (2014) and Ebersold (2007) emphasized the role of organizations and institutions in social empowerment of individuals with disabilities. Yamani (2012) confirmed the effective contribution to adult education institutions in empowering of individuals with ID, and Baranauskieno, Gerulaitis and Radzeviþieno (2011) stressed the vital role of non-governmental organizations in social empowerment. Boutin (2006) indicated the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation programs that are supported by the community.

Some studies have justified the weakness of social empowerment of individuals with ID using a variety of reasons. Qasas (2004) confirmed that the weakness of vocational rehabilitation programs has led to a lack of job opportunities for individuals with ID. Powell, Mercer and Harte (2002) believed that quality of life is affected by the

type of training services that are offered to individuals with disabilities. Al-Khalidi (2011) recommended that special education institutions and centers should include social services, sports, and vocational rehabilitation. Cannella-Malone et al (2015) showed that leisure activities have positive effects on social interaction, communication skills, and quality of life for individuals with disabilities. Nabi (2009) showed that the practice of arts, sports and social activities helps to improve the life quality of individuals with ID. Hamdan (2007) pointed out that improving the environment of special education centers promotes opportunities for social empowerment of individuals with disabilities. Meanwhile, Saleh (2011) suggested standards and indicators to facilitate social empowerment of individuals with ID related to social justice, health care, social rehabilitation, and job opportunities.

From this literature review, it is clear that there are programs that can help with the social empowerment of individuals with ID. Vocational rehabilitations as well as, sports, arts, and educational activities may also help to promote social empowerment of individuals with ID. This study aims to identify the role of special education centers in improving social empowerment of individuals with ID. Thus, according to the philosophy of these centers, it is assumed that the programs contribute to the empowerment of individuals with ID by helping them to advance in educational, professional, economic, and social fields; this advancement then facilitates their empowerment and inclusion in society and provides them with job opportunities. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the contribution of SECs services and programs to the social empowerment of individuals with ID?
2. Do the contributions of SEC services and programs to the social empowerment of individuals with ID differ according to participants' gender and position?

2. Methods

2.1 Participants
The study population consisted of 408 administrators and employees working in 24 SECs affiliated with the JMSD. These centers provide care services for individuals with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities. Moreover, these centers are distributed within three administrative regions in Jordan: North (8), Central (10), and South (6). Since it was difficult to distribute the survey to the entire study population (i.e., 24 special education centers), the Northern Region was selected for the study using a cluster random sampling method.

In the northern region of Jordan, there are 8 special education centers that are affiliated with the JMSD. These centers consist of 103 administrators and employees. 94

out of 103 administrative and employees completed the survey correctly. Thus, the final sample consisted of 94 respondents (31= employees and 63= administrators), (38= Male and 56= Female), and their ages range from 27-54 years. In addition, the respondents held bachelor's degrees in special education, sociology, social service, physical and occupational therapy, nutrition, psychology or vocational education. Table 1 shows the demographics of the study sample.

Table1: Demographics of the Study Sample

Demographics	N	%
Gender		
Male	38	40
Female	56	60
Position		
Administrative	31	33
Employee	63	67

2.2 Instrument

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a survey was developed after performing a literature review (Al-Otaibi et al., 2015; Sultani 2014; Saleh 2011; Baranauskieno et al., 2011). The first draft of the survey was composed of 16 items related to the social empowerment of individuals with ID in Jordanian SECs. The survey items focus on vocational rehabilitation, community-based rehabilitation, educational programs, sports and artistic activities, and the relationship of the SECs with the community and the families of individuals with ID.

The survey was revised by five experts in the field of special education at Najran University, Saudi Arabia. Based on their suggestions, the final draft of the survey was composed of 10 items. In addition, a five-point Likert scale was used, which ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. In order to analyze the results, the means for the survey items were classified into three levels: low (M = 1-2.33), moderate (M = 2.34-3.67), and high (M = 3.68-5). The Cronbach's Alpha formula was used to test the reliability; the survey was applied on a pilot sample composed of 15 administrators and employees at a special education center in the central region of Jordan. Thus, the reliability of the survey was (r=0.81).

2.3 Procedures

The researchers used the following procedures:
1. An official letterfrom the Ministry of Social Development was obtained in order to implement this study on the administrators and employees at SECs in the northern region of Jordan.

2. The researchers met with the administrators and employees in all SECs in the northern region of Jordan in order to present the objectives and significance of the study.

3. The survey was distributed to all administrators and employees at each of the special education centers (N=103), and the participants were asked to answer the items of survey by using a pencil.

4. After one week, the survey was collected from all respondents. After checking the surveys, we found that 94 out of 103 administrators and employees completed the survey correctly.

3. Results

A.   Research Question 1: Social Empowerment of individuals with ID

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations and the social empowerment level of individuals with ID. The mean of survey items ranged from 1.55-4.36. The items 1-7 received a high score, and the items 8-10 received a low score.

Table 2: Descriptive data regarding the social empowerment of individuals with ID

N	Items	M	SD	Level
1	SECs contributes to removal of social barriers	4.36	.801	High
2	SECs uses media to emphasize art and sports activities	4.19	.871	High
3	SECs developed a positive relationship with families	4.17	1.04	High
4	SECs organizes lectures and seminars for the community	4.15	.627	High
5	SECs celebrations enhance social empowerment	3.94	.872	High
6	SECs offers educational programs and support services	3.89	.860	High
7	SECs encourages individuals with ID to participate in organizations	3.88	.914	High
8	SECs adheres to national and international legislations	1.86	.811	Low
9	SECs participates in community-based rehabilitation programs	1.68	.721	Low
10	SECs provides vocational rehabilitation programs	1.55	.560	Low
Total Survey		3.37	.296	Moderate

B.   Research Question 2: Gender and Position

Table 3 shows the results of the t-test according to gender and type of position (*i.e.*, employee or administrator). The table reveals that there is no significant difference in the social empowerment of individuals with ID due to gender or position (p>.05).

Table 3: Results of the *t*-test according to gender and type of position

Demographic	N	M	SD	t	df	P
Gender						
Male	38	3.33	.233	-.828	92	.410
Female	56	3.39	.332			
Position						
Administrative	31	3.36	.218	-.056-	92	.955
Employee	63	3.37	.329			

4. Discussion

According to the means of all of the items of the survey, the results the role of SECs in promoting the social empowerment of individuals with ID was moderate according to the perspectives of administrators and employees in the northern region of Jordan. Improving the quality of life of individuals with ID helps them to overcome social problems, gain satisfaction, and self-acceptance, and adapt well achieves their empowerment into society. Therefore, special education centers should try to match their environment to that found in normal social life. In this regard, Devi, Goyal and Ravindra (2013) stressed that a negative environment can reduce the empowerment of individuals with disabilities, and the removal of these barriers may contribute to empower them with respect to social, educational, and vocational aspects. The improvement of the social quality of life of individuals with ID is associated with humanitarian, educational and health dimensions and it depends on the efforts of institutions and civil society organizations.

The improvement of the quality of life of individuals with ID is associated with the attitudes of the community. Fitch (2002) indicated that community attitudes play an important role in the social empowerment of individuals with ID. Thus, staff in institutions and special education centers is responsible for modifying community attitudes towards individuals with ID. Tawfiq (2008) confirmed the contribution of governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as, family and media in empowering individuals with ID. Moreover, the activation of laws and legislations in special education centers will improve the quality of the social lives of individuals with ID, and also will help provide a social environment that is based on the foundations of empowerment, normalization and social inclusion. Omari (2007) highlighted the influential role of laws and legislation in improving the quality of the social lives of individuals with ID.

The philosophy of social empowerment seeks to achieve social justice and equal life opportunities for individuals with ID that was demanded by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Al-Khateeb & Hadidi, 2014). Moreover, the annual

initiatives of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities advocate social empowerment and non-discrimination of individuals with disabilities. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) emphasized to remove all social barriers by including individuals with disabilities in various educational settings (Clarke, Haydon, Bauer & Epperly, 2016), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) seeks to achieve the social inclusion through educating individuals with disabilities in the least restrictive environments (Bouck, 2009). The Disabled Care Act and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in Jordan emphasized the rights of individuals with disabilities in education, training, rehabilitation and employment.

Jordanian SECs should offer educational and vocational training programs. These programs can contribute to self-concept, social competence, and personal skills among individuals with ID, consequently, these programs will facilitate the social empowerment programs for individuals with ID. The results of some studies showed the effectiveness of vocational training programs in improving social skills and social empowerment of individuals with ID (Larsson & Gard, 2003). Moreover, the vocational rehabilitation programs require a professional who has an in-depth understanding of social empowerment. Flatt-Fultz and Phillips (2012) stressed the importance of training professionals on the principles of empowerment in special education centers.

Sports clubs and volunteer camps provide sport activities for individuals with ID in national and international forums and also help in the social empowerment programs. Rihani and Imam (2012), and Saleh (2011) emphasized the contribution of civil society institutions to achieve social empowerment of individuals with ID through sport activities. Accordingly, in order to achieve success in this area, there must a moral and humanitarian commitment by the community, support for individuals with ID, as well as rehabilitation and training programs that are compatible with their abilities and their potential. Kaufman and Wandberg (2010) believed that special education services cannot achieve their goals without programs that seek to empower individuals with special needs, and these programs must be compatible with their abilities and potential. Social empowerment programs are the best method for evoking a positive social change toward individuals with ID. Accordingly, human societies should be conscious of their cultural and social responsibility for individuals with ID. Social empowerment is one of the most basic approaches to achieve social justice among individuals with ID. Thus, the civilized societies can contribute to provide services for individuals with ID by establishing special education centers that include health, psychological, educational, social, economic and vocational rehabilitation programs for individuals with ID. Jackson (2015) confirmed that individuals with ID have received few social and community inclusion achievements.

Social empowerment needs a real community support by activating developmental activities, providing financial and human resources, and removing social barriers. In this regard, Rule (2013) emphasized that community-based rehabilitation programs changed from an institutional system to programs related to community development, social empowerment, and equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Kuipers (2013) indicated that the concept of social empowerment is compatible with the principles of community-based rehabilitation and disability-inclusive development. Also, Jackson (2017) stressed the importance of discussions between professionals about all of the services provided to individuals with ID.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the contribution of services and programs at Jordanian SECs in to the social empowerment of individuals with ID. The general results showed that these centers play a moderate role in promoting social empowerment. In light of international trends that seek the inclusion and social empowerment of individuals with ID, the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development is reconsidering the philosophy and goals of special education centers through the development of a national strategy plan for the advancement of these centers in order to keep up with international trends related to the social empowerment. Therefore, the improvement of the quality of life of individuals with ID contributes to the achievement of social empowerment and inclusion of individuals with ID. This requires that governmental and non-governmental institutions and civil society organizations highlight the social rights of individuals with ID. Jordanian SECs demonstrate success stories in professional, sports and social aspects for individuals with ID. Social empowerment requires providing access to individuals with ID to participate in national and international associations and organizations. We recommend that Jordanian SECs should include vocational rehabilitation and, community-based rehabilitation; also national and international legislation should be enacted related to social empowerment. Future research should address the vocational and economic empowerment of individuals with ID.

Biographical notes
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