

MIFGASH

JOURNAL OF SOCIAL-EDUCATIONAL WORK

- > Using puppets with kindergarten children on the autistic spectrum
- > Dilemmas of parents of autistic children regarding diagnosis disclosure
- > Personal well-being of Israeli Arabs with Down syndrome
- > Teachers' coping with integrated classes that include special-needs children
- > Prevention of eating disorders in schools
- > Professional ethics for social educators



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ABSTRACTS

The effect of using puppets in elementary communication with kindergarten children on the autistic spectrum

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The key aim of this research was to examine the unique contribution of using puppets to produce primary communication between high functioning children with autism and an adult they encounter for the first time. This was an explorative study through which we sought to investigate a new phenomenon, which, hitherto has not been explored according to the professional literature.

Eleven children aged 4–6.5 years old, who were diagnosed with high functioning autism and 11 adults participated in the research. The research framework included semi-structured interviews with each of the children. Interviews included a puppet that was operated by an adult whom the children were meeting for the first time.

The research findings show a high level of response on the part of the children. This was expressed in the dialogue they carried out with the puppet, while sharing their internal world and individual areas of interest. The children also expressed their desire to continue to meet in the future.

The interviews with the adults after the encounters with the children maintained that the puppet created interest and enjoyment on the part of the children during the interview, and all this over a relatively short time span. All interviewees were in full agreement regarding the great contribution the puppet had made to the primary communication process.

The research findings testify to the benefits of using puppets as an effective mediating tool to produce primary communication with children diagnosed as highly functioning on the autistic spectrum.

Key words: puppets, high functioning autism, elementary communication, preschoolers

“Even if you don’t tell, everybody knows” – Dilemmas of parents of autistic children regarding diagnosis disclosure

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The medical diagnosis of autism, held during childhood and adolescence, is often presented only to the parents. Therefore, they face the dilemma of when, whether and how they should disclose it to their child. While the prevalence of the diagnosis of children and adults with autism has been increasing in recent years, there is still no therapeutic approach that addresses the coping of parents, children, teenagers, and young adults, with the issue. The present study depicts a qualitative inquiry based on a two-sessions focus group with parents confronting this dilemma who have not yet disclosed the diagnosis to their child. The article presents a model of five complex and interconnected dilemmas with which parents must cope. The first concerns the invisibility of autism and the fact that it can be concealed. The second addresses the stigma related to the diagnosis and the difficulty facing the word itself. The third dilemma addresses the time motive and the concerns related to the child’s reaction to the diagnosis. The fourth focuses on the child’s surroundings who are aware or unaware of the diagnosis, and the last dilemma addresses the child’s personal narrative and the practice of disclosure. The article’s conclusion contains initial recommendations that can be used as a basis for the further development of a detailed intervention program that can assist parents throughout the diagnostic process.

Key words: autism, diagnosis disclosure, disability closet, parents, identity

Personal well-being of Israeli Arabs with Down syndrome

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The present study examined the personal well-being of Israeli Arabs with Down syndrome, through the relationships between the person's severity of intellectual disability, functioning and engagement in activities and measures of social participation.

The sample included 51 adults with Down syndrome (aged 21–61), currently working in 20 extended employment programs in Northern Israel. The study tools comprised background questions, and questionnaires that measure the severity of intellectual disability, functioning and engagement in activities, social participation, and personal well-being.

The findings indicate a positive correlation between the severity of intellectual disability and their levels of functioning and engagement in activities and social participation. These two variables were also correlated with personal well-being of these adults.

However, a closer examination of the association between social participation and personal well-being demonstrates that while medical and functional variables were directly correlated with personal well-being, the level of social participation was mediated by adults' functioning and engagement in activities. Findings are discussed regarding policy, planning of services and practice.

The impact of economic variables, parents' employment status and area of residence on the social participation of people with Down syndrome is emphasized. The article also highlights the low use of formal services, by people with Down syndrome and their families. Many barriers, such as poverty, low exposure, lack of awareness of the existence of services, as well as a fatalistic approach regarding the family's ability to cope with the difficulties and challenges of raising a child with Down syndrome, may lead to the underuse of services in the Arab society. The article encourages an in-depth discussion of the differences between people with Down syndrome in the Arab society and those in the general society.

Keywords: personal well-being, Israeli Arab, Down syndrome, social participation, severity of intellectual disability, daily functioning

Teachers' coping with integrated classes that include special-needs children: A comparison between teachers in different education sectors

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The aim of this study was to explore the situation of teachers working with special-needs children who are integrated in regular classes without any aids. More specifically the differences in the coping resources of the sectors, the sense of coherence, the sense of personal school coherence and coping patterns were examined and the teachers' degree of job satisfaction were reported.

Six-hundred and thirty-seven teachers completed self-report questionnaires including the Sense of Coherence questionnaire, an adapted version of the Sense of School Coherence questionnaire, the COPE questionnaire and the Employee Satisfaction Inventory questionnaire.

Results showed no significant differences between teachers from different sectors in most coping strategies. However, job satisfaction was significantly higher among teachers in the religious and ultra-Orthodox schools compared to those in the secular schools. Furthermore, significant positive relationships were found between sense of coherence, sense of school coherence, adaptive coping, and job satisfaction, and a negative correlation was found between maladaptive coping and job satisfaction.

The results are discussed in the context of the unique sectors of society in which the teachers work and based on Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping theory and Salutogenic model. Additionally, practical recommendations based on the conclusions of this study are provided.

Key words: coping resources and strategies, teachers, job satisfaction, integrated students, school sectors

"First, do no harm": What is helpful and what is harmful in the prevention of eating disorders in schools

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In recent decades, the prevalence of eating disorders (EDs), and related symptoms have been increasing in the Western world, including Israel. The etiology is multifactorial, while increased exposure to harmful messages, related to beauty has a significant harmful impact, especially on children and adolescents.

Studies have indicated that most prevention programs in schools are ineffective, and some are even harmful. Studies have shown that eating disorders can be influenced by social pressure, friends, family, or media. Therefore, prevention programs have focused on challenging the major risk factors associated with EDs, such as poor body-image, low self-esteem, peer pressure, and media influence. Findings indicated a significant improvement in psychopathology, associated with disturbed eating.

This article describes the varies of types of EDs among adolescents, presents the main prevention programs in schools, and highlights programs that may be harmful compared to those found to be effective for middle and high school students.

Key words: prevention, eating disorders, schools, eating-related pathology, adolescents, body image

Position: Professional ethics for social educators working with adolescents who are in at-risk situations'

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Unlike most professions included in the “helping professions”, in which separate ethical codes have been established, hitherto, no code of ethics exists for social educators. This paper deals with the concept of professional ethics from two aspects: One, is the perspective of professionals who provide the services. Second, is the point of view of the service receivers – namely children, youth at-risk and their families. This position paper presents an overview about the way in which professional codes of ethics have been developed for different professions, around the world and in Israel. In addition, we present specific dilemmas of those social educational professionals who educate and care for children and adolescents from at-risk populations. Finally, we discuss the challenges involved in the development of an ethical code for social educators in Israel and its implementation. The authors of this position paper support the necessity of developing an ethical code for social educators in Israel. We consider it an essential step toward the professionalization of these workers. The code of ethics would strengthen the public legitimacy of this profession, which, hopefully would lead to its recognition, including proper legislation. We hope that this will end the discussion concerning the necessity of this occupation to be a distinct profession.

Key words: social-educator, professional ethics, children and adolescents at risk situations, professionalization, standards for professional practice