

United by Music?

The relationship between type of leisure, social support and loneliness in people with intellectual disabilities.

Summary Bachelor Thesis Suze van Wijngaarden

Introduction

People with intellectual disabilities have been devalued in western societies for a long period of time. They have been segregated into institutional settings to protect so called normal society from them. Currently, there has been a new trend in promoting the acceptance, inclusion and integration of people with disabilities in mainstream society. In Europe this trend resulted in a movement towards deinstitutionalization; moving people out of large institutions into society. However, research on social participation has shown that community presence does not necessarily lead to meaningful social contact with other persons, especially contact with those without disabilities. Empirical evidence suggests that a large amount of normal developing people have no contact or only superficial contact with intellectually disabled persons.

One of the aspects that can open the pathways to social participation is *leisure*. Leisure has been widely recognized as playing an important part in the enhancement of psychological well being of all people, with or without disabilities. Leisure has been classified as either casual or serious. *Casual leisure* is immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it. *Serious leisure* on the other hand, is the steady pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or career volunteer activity that captivates its participants with its complexity and many challenges. It is profound, long lasting, and invariably based on substantial skill, knowledge, or experience. It requires perseverance, which may cause the participants to sense they are pursuing a career.

An important aspect of social inclusion is *social support*, which consists of two components: a *number of available others* to whom one can rely on in times of need and the *degree of satisfaction* with the available support. People with intellectual disabilities generally experience less social support than people without disabilities. This gives rise to the question whether these people also have more feelings of *loneliness*.



The aim of the present study is to explore the relationship between *type of leisure* on the one hand and *social support* and *loneliness* on the other hand, in people with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities.

Method

The sample consisted of 30 adolescents or adults with a mild to moderate intellectual disability. Twelve of them participated in a serious leisure activity provided by *United by Music*, an organization that supports musically talented people and gives people a chance to perform. The other eighteen participants only participated in casual leisure activities. All participants completed the shortened version of the Social Support Questionnaire and the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale.

Results

The serious leisure participants of United by Music experienced significantly higher *numbers of available social support* than casual leisure participants. On average, the casual leisure participants experienced social support from three people, compared to five people of serious leisure participants. No differences between the two groups were found concerning the *degree of satisfaction* with the available support. All participants had an extremely high score on the degree of satisfaction. Furthermore, the analysis shows that serious leisure participants of United by Music experienced significantly less *feelings of loneliness* compared to casual leisure participants

Conclusion

Participation in serious leisure activities, like United by Music, is associated with more social support and less feelings of loneliness. The results also support previous research that showed the positive consequences of serious leisure on social interaction among people with intellectual disabilities. Serious leisure activities can open new pathways to the normalization and greater inclusion of people with all kinds of disabilities. By participating in serious leisure activities, their community presence could lead to more acceptance, inclusion and integration in mainstream society.



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