

## Prejudices Towards Children with Limited Abilities

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### **Abstract**

*The study was conducted at the Child Development Center in Tirana and the community close to it. Prejudice is a negative and unjustifiable stance toward a group and its members based only on their membership in the group. A pity and undervalue stance is kept towards parents, working staff and disable children. Such conclusion is drawn from interviewing 100 persons: 30 disable children parents, 20 working staff and 50 people from community randomly selected. Community sensitivity on some of the forms causes and consequences of prejudices towards children with limited abilities, their parents and working staff and making people conscious in reducing prejudices toward this social group. Vertical grill observation conducted in children environment, structured interviews conducted with parents and working staff and focus group were the used instruments. The focus group was organized in cooperation with specialist of the area from civil society, Social Service and homologues centers. Analysis with SPSS program, shows that 60% of parents think that cause for prejudices is lack of information. 55% think that lobbying serves to defend children and parents rights. 20% think that prejudices ruin couples relationships. 20% of them think that one of the parents should leave their job to serve their children. 30% do not believe in professional abilities of the working staff. From the interviewers in community, 45% think that prejudices are reduced if children are educated in public education systems. Working staff (50%), connect the causes for prejudice to the low general intellectual level of people and 40% of them see to education psychological technique as means of promotion for harmonious co-existence. Cooperation, parents, civil society, centers working staffs and media reduce prejudice. Ratification of Disabled Children Rights Convention and approval of Integration Law would help in reducing them. Children are different in abilities but equal to the rights as their others.*

**Key words.** *Prejudices, reduction, sensitize consciousness, integration, and rehabilitation.*

### **I. Introduction**

Last years there have been many attempts in drafting social policies for mentally and physically disabled children protection. But our country's service standards are not in accordance to the Mentally Disabled People Convent. This Convent is still not ratified to serve as legal source of rights. Approval of integral law would make possible that mentally and physically disabled people to have legitimate rights. Such a situation falls

under the term “legal discrimination”. This social group suffers the weight of prejudices, stigma and bad judgment only from the fact that they are disabled. Prejudices do not exist only to children. Such judgment is also to parents and social workers. They lie also in the denial of their right to education and employment. Employers do not trust their abilities and as consequence they are prejudiced even as employees. Prejudices are spread as an epidemic everywhere, at educational institutions, nursery, kindergarten and schools.

Ena tells her discrimination drama as the mother of a disabled boy:

*“My child was not accepted in the kindergarten or at school. The prejudiced opinion was shocking. Sometimes they pitied us. My husband could not bear this situation and filed for divorce. I had to leave job and dedicate to my son. Life became harder and lived only with 8700 ALL that was a monthly compensation for my son. After many years I was able to accommodate my son at the Center for Child Rehabilitation here in Tirana. But the lack of education at an early age has left non-repairable damages. He is now 30 years old and labeled handicap, prejudiced as handicap and as disabled”.*

This type of situation is lived in many Albanian families. There is no precise number of disabled persons and no institutional chain system that could prevent birth of disabled children. Also there is no functional network of institutions for children according to age: 0-3 years old, 3-6 years old, 6-14 years old, 14-18 years old that according to degree of cognitive development could be treated by specialized staff. Only 292 children are treated in State Social Service centers. Applications to treat children in rehabilitation programs and the number of stressed parents are added daily. In public and private centers capacities are limited.

Daily community multidisciplinary centers are conditioned by foreign and local projects and donations. Local authorities do not have priority in opening community multidisciplinary centers as funds are limited and we have a society that prejudices this category. Prejudice sources from some traditional factors and also incapacity to communicate with this category. Not knowing language of communication we prejudice, pity, stigmatize, label and discriminate. *In a occasional interview to a representative of the community, he declares that media promotion is a very influential instrument in limiting prejudice.* But promotion of disabled children achievements is done only on December 3<sup>rd</sup> in the International Day of Disabled People.

Public institutions, parent community, non-profit organizations, media, rehabilitating centers working staff through advocacy and lobbying can unite energies and release society from prejudice mentality. These relevant factors can orientate positive energies in securing the rights of this category. These methods will faster their integration process in society. Cooperation of service specialists with parents is the irreplaceable therapy for children’s rehabilitation and society integration.

*Nebia, specialist that works with disabled children from over 30 years, tells how her job was prejudiced by relatives and friends. Often she was prejudiced for her hard job with handicaps. Questions to particularities of these children in painting, music, sewing, phirography, sewing machine and ceramics she answers that these children are like all the others but require more love, devotion and professionalism. Year after year she said that these children became part of her life.* The study recommends that growth of social culture; sensibilisation and awareness of public lower the power of prejudices toward actors and area factors of different abilities. In the conclusions of the study is explicitly expressed that reduction of prejudices intertwine social, economic, legal and educational factors. Lobbying is one of the main instruments in securing legal basis. Central Government's and Local Council's budget should plan more investments. Quality of professionalism in residential and community centers would give better service quality to children with different abilities. Media should establish a better opinion for these children with different abilities but equal in rights. Specialists' cooperation with parents is irreplaceable to achieving prejudice reduction.

## 2. Review of literature

A disabled person is someone when his/her physical functions, mental health or intellectual abilities, exhibit differences from those of their age group for a certain period of time, hindering or preventing its normal participation in social life. Prejudice is the wrong opinion and unsupported by which one sets in judgment and actions. (*Dragoti, Edmond Social Psychology 2004*). Prejudice is a negative attitude against a group and its members based only on their membership in the group. (Janaqi, Gerti. *Social Psychology.2009*). Negative, undervalued and compassionate are the attitudes towards children with different abilities, to their parents and the staff who treat these children. To reduce the level of prejudice there do exist some recognized way, among which are evaluated as more effective such as:

The use of contact between the prejudiced and the prejudices through cognitive and educational treatments. Increasing the availability of contacts between the stereotyped and the stereotype is verified that reduces the negative stereotype. (Brewer and Miller 1984). Such an attitude does not normally held in many cases of children with different abilities. Experiences of working with disabled children have been observed that the first point of contact for children is indifference or cessation of cooperation that is being developed by his educator. Often contact persons for the first time with such a child are contracted in meeting the child or show signs of fear. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable with students or volunteers who develop practice with these children. Often we need to make people aware that the first contact with disabled children does need neither to show nor to pity or abandon but interact

with love and without the burden of psychological barriers. Cooperation in a common activity where success depends on the two sides is quite effective.

To reduce bias, specialist physiotherapy working with disabled children prepared a group of children in the center and in 2009 became part of Gjimnastrada Dance organized with 26 public and private education schools of Tirana. Team Development Centre children, through their game, created a lot of emotions and gave the message to participants that we are like all other children. Assessment of children with the Gjimnastrada Cup was the culmination of the professional work of staff based on modern methods of education. The début delivered by children and reduced bias emotions to spectators present, which followed display through ovations, emotions and tears. One method that can lower the level of prejudice is the application of the theory of contact. One area where the results can be better seen is mixed school integration. (Pango, Star. Social Psychology. 2005)

To carry children through child development, the Center organized painting lessons with the participation of children in the community. Cooperation between the two groups of children resulted in prejudice reduction and the integration of children with disabilities. Activity discovered and developed special skills to Albin and Aeneas. Their paintings won prizes in international competitions in Finland and Israel.

At the beginning of each school year, specialists engage in registration of children who have a slight mental delay in "Osman Myderizi" School. But children are not accepted to be exercised in academic training and to reveal the hidden skills, ability that specialists alone can identify and develop. In rare cases, children are admitted simply to assist in academic practice settings. Normal school integration of disabled children is not accomplished because they are battling in a mockery of their peer stigma labels. This is a social discrimination made against this social grouping. Therefore the right to be educated was respected by the specialist of the center and applied programs in special education.

### **3. Cognitive, situational, psychodynamic, historical and socio-cultural theories.**

*Cognitive Theory (Reflection)* is based on how the person perceives and processes information regarding the object of prejudice. (Hamilton, DL (1979). According to this theory, children with disabilities are perceived as biological beings having limited cognitive abilities and have both cognitive treatments. One attributed to theory and the other based on the difference between members and non-members of the group (Petigrew, Thomas & Johson, 1979). So is negative thinking, basis of negative attitudes by superstitious people, for children with different abilities. *Historical treatment* is subject to the stigma of public opinion, instead of helping these people to be trained. *Socio-cultural treatment* of individual bias is quite large. Attitude and


relationship to persons with disabilities have the level basis of the individual culture. The higher social culture, the lower will be the degree of prejudice and discrimination. We have been studying the justification of prejudice, particularly through values, stereotypes and the kinds of explanations when people make bad score. When a person is seen to be responsible for his/her behavior and life outcomes, then discrimination, hatred and rough handling is not only justified but is seen as naturally and ethically good; i.e. when a person is a criminal. (*Blackwell, Judith, Murray Smith, and John Sorenson.2003*)

Freudian *psychodynamic treatment* explains psychological functioning level barriers leading to bias. When children with special needs assessed instinctively emotions, the attitude towards them is underestimation, disparaging, discriminatory exclusionary. *Situational handling or social learning theories* explains the chance that the current environment may arise to a bias of the individual (*Crandall, C. S & Eshleman, A. (2003)*). It is believed that children gain through the prejudices of adults, parents' peers, through a reinforcement process directly or indirectly. There are some effective way of preventing and reducing prejudice.

There is a well known method *of using contact between prejudice and the prejudice's victims*, by increasing contacts reduce the degree of prejudice. Encouraging interaction between groups in children with special needs and normal children decreases prejudice. (*Pettigrew, Thomas & Johnson, 1979*) In children's groups was noted that in the development center, when children did not have much time to get acquainted with each other started to harass and argue with each other, for children with physical disabilities despised children with mental disabilities. When standing together they became friendly and familiar and their relationships were cooperative and not prejudicial. According to Brewer (*Marilyn, Brewer The psychology of prejudice, 1999*) bias "may not develop because positive emotions such as admiration, sympathy, and trust are reserved within the group." In 1954, Gordon Allport addresses issues of prejudice and categorical thinking. Allport claims prejudice is partly a normal process for humans. According to him, human "mind" should think with the help of established categories. Categories are based on normal bias. We can not avoid this process (*Allport, G. W.1958*). In our concrete plan according to this theory, prejudice against children with disabilities can be minimized but not disappear.

## Methodology

The aim of the study is to identify the forms, causes of prejudice and the discrimination against disabled children, parents and academic staff treats. The study was based on the following methodological tools:

-  Focus group.

- ✚ Vertical surveillance grill.
- ✚ Structured interviews.

Through these instruments, the study gathered data. Study sample consisted of 100 persons of which 30 parents to children of Development Centre in Tirana, 20 specialists and educators working in this center and 50 randomly selected individual from the community in Tirana. Participating volunteers working in the center helped to spread and collect structured interviews. The information collected was confidential and respondents were not asked in personal information.

**Table I.** Data on target groups interviewed.

No.	Data	Staff	Parents	Interviewed by community	Total
1.	<b>Interviewed</b>	20	30	50	100
2.	<b>Gender</b>	F-19	F-10	F-23	F-52
		M-1	M-20	M-27	M-48
3.	<b>Education</b>	High - 11	High - 9	High - 30	The top 50
		Medium-9	Medium - 21	Medium - 20	The middle 50
4.	<b>Status.</b>	Employees	Employed 20	Employed 28	Employed 68
		20	Unemployed10	Unemployed 22	Unemployed 32

I. Interviews were structurally designed as such: for target groups; for parents, staff and community and for casual respondents. Each respective target group had designed interviews containing questions about sex, education and status of the respondents. The content of the interview dealt with two types of topics.

- ✚ The first columns contained many questions of forms evidence, causes, types and modes of prejudice existence against children, their parents and academic staff.
- ✚ Second columns contained questions aimed to collect information on techniques, forms, opportunities, practices for the reduction of prejudice and discrimination against disabled children and staff training. Some of the questions included were: What are the forms of prejudice against the parents of children with different abilities? How can parents reduce bias due to children with different abilities? Which are some of the causes of prejudice against parents and children? What are the consequences of prejudice? How prejudiced by the community are disabled children? How can prejudice be reduced against disabled children? According to the law in every 25 people employed one should be from the disabled category. Why not apply this law?

How can the staff reduce prejudice? What are some of the psychological techniques and educational activities to promote harmonious coexistence?

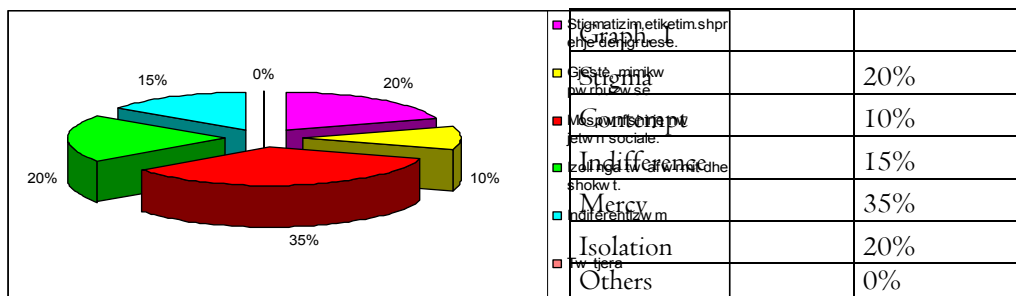
Structured interviews served to gather very specific information to argue not only high levels of prejudice to disabled children but also to recognize directly the views of different people on the negative effects of prejudice against disabled children, parents and their staff.

2. Focus Instrument group was organized with twelve people who knew cognitive problems in the field of disability like: specialists working with children in the Development Center, Specialist working in the Disabled Foundation, specialist working in the Department of Disabled Children at State Social Service and specialist in Help Life organization etc. Focus group was developed on the basis of twenty questions that provided on the individual response bias level of the actors in the field of disability and the opportunities reduce the level of prejudice against children with different abilities.

3. The third instrument that was used as part of this study methodology was observation with vertical grill. In order to have effective functioning of this instrument, five questions were in the form of statements, regarding prejudices to disabled children and prejudices that are made to parents and children, community attitude towards disabled children in public, stigma to disabled children by normal school peers and attitude of students towards children with different abilities during teaching practice.

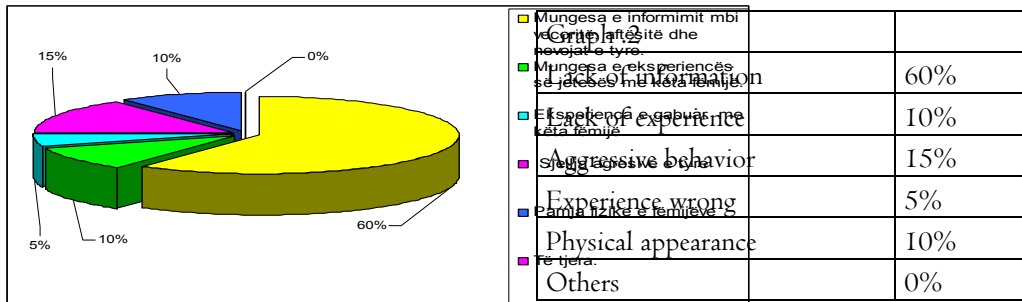
#### 4. Results

Graph . I. What are some forms of prejudice against the parents of disabled children?



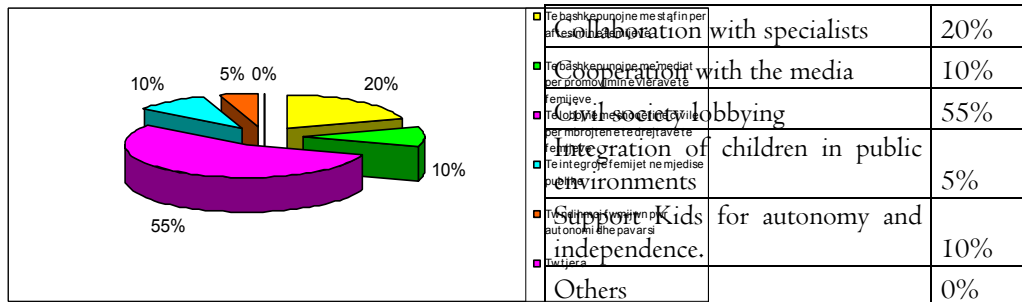
In this graph, the parents who were interviewed 35% replied that they are pitied and excluded from taking part in social life, as they are prejudiced as parents who have a disabled child. 20% of them feel isolated from relative and friends as a result of prejudice against children. 20% have tried the forms of prejudice, stigmatization, labeling and denigrating expressions.

**Graph. 2.** What are the causes of prejudice against their children according to parents?



The interviews shows that 60% of parents think that because of prejudice there is lack of information. 15% think that there is aggressive behavior of children because of prejudice. 10% think of due to lack of experience.

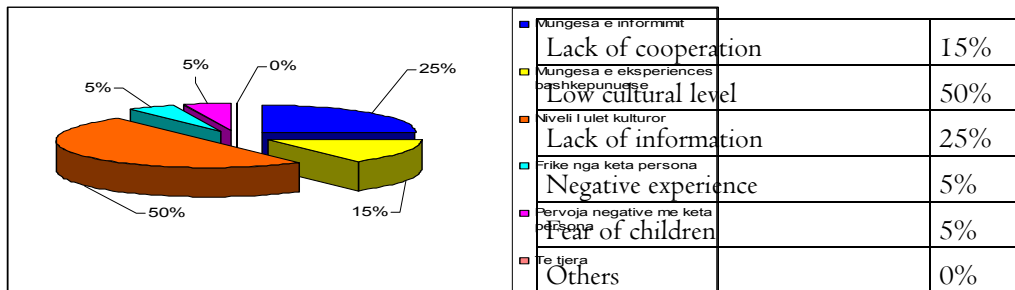
**Graph. 3.** How can parents reduce bias to disabled children?



As seen from the graph 55% of parents believe that reducing the level of prejudice is necessary lobbying with civil society for the protection of children's rights. 20% think of cooperation with staff affects the reduction of prejudice.

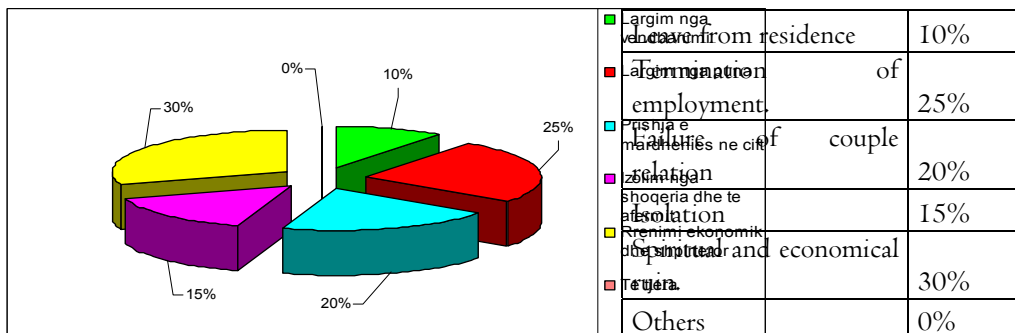


**Graph 4.** Which are some causes of prejudice to the staff and children with different abilities?



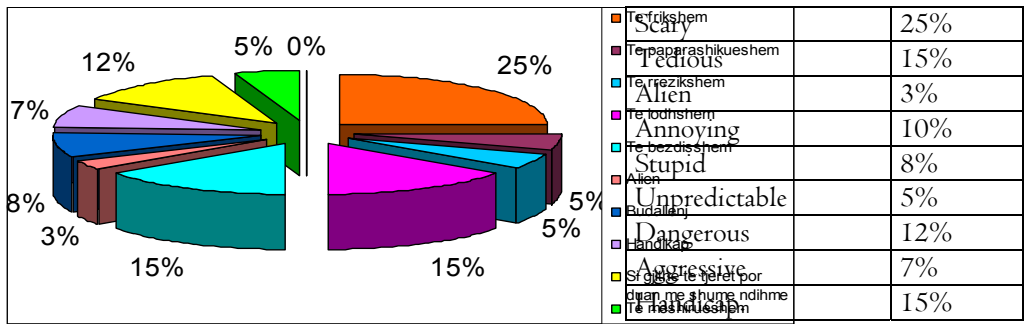
Low professional culture is estimated at 50% due to disabled children prejudice, parents and working staff. 25% of them claim that because of bias there is lack of information.

**Graph. 5.** What are the consequences of prejudice against the parents of children with different abilities?



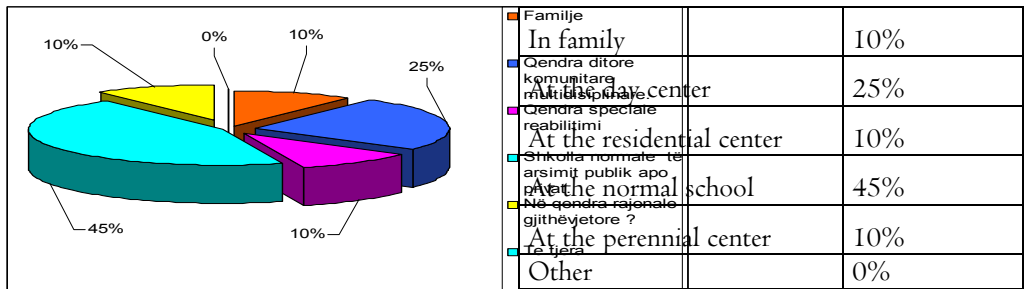
This graph shows that 30% of the consequences of prejudice are economic and spiritual ravages of these children families. 25% of the family members have to stop working and take care of the disabled child. 20% of them value relations decay due to prejudice.

**Graph. 6.** How disabled children are prejudiced by the community?



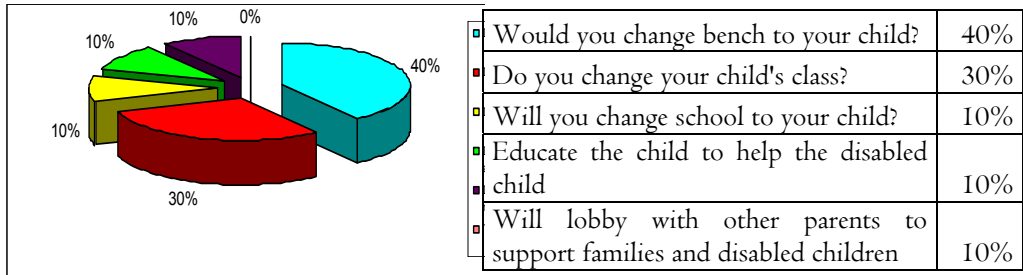
This graph shows that 25% of respondents qualify these as terrific kids, 15% of them tedious, 3% consider them alien, 15% of them label handicap, 10% of them annoying, 8% stupid 5% unpredictable and 12% dangerous.

**Graph . 7.** Can disabled children be taught?



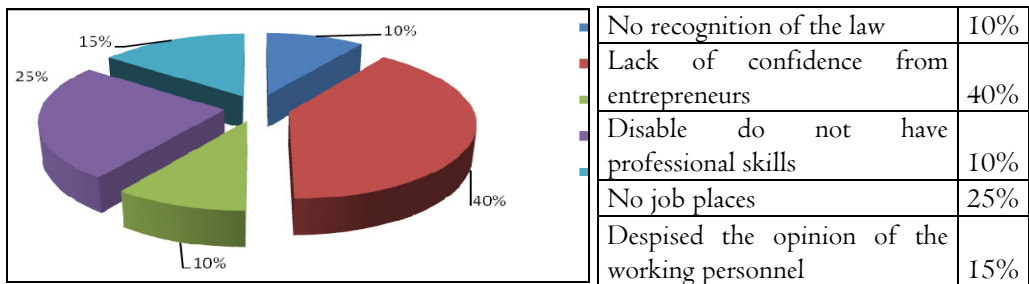
To this question, respondents answer at 45% that disabled children should be educated in normal public or private schools. 25% think that day care centers are successful rehabilitating institutions for disabled children.

**Graph 8.** Would you accept as a bench friend a disabled child?



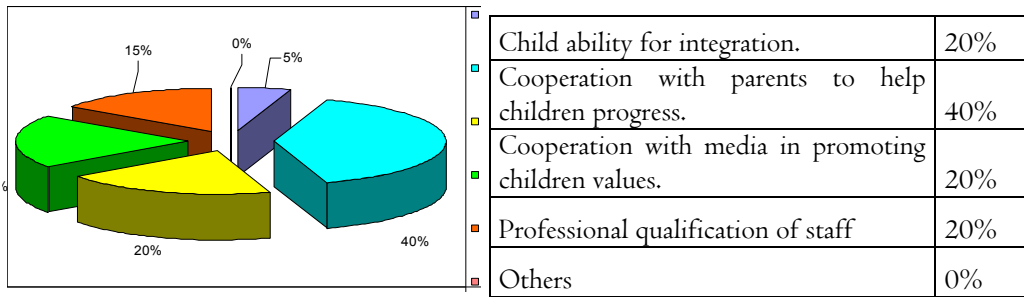
The right of these children to be educated is deprived because they are prejudiced and abused. Well, over 40% of answers would not leave their child to sit in a bench with a disabled child and 30% of responded would change their child's class. But there are intellectuals responsible parent at 10% that would lobby with the other parents for children's rights.

**Graph.9.** According to the law in every 25 employees, one must be disabled. Why not apply this law?



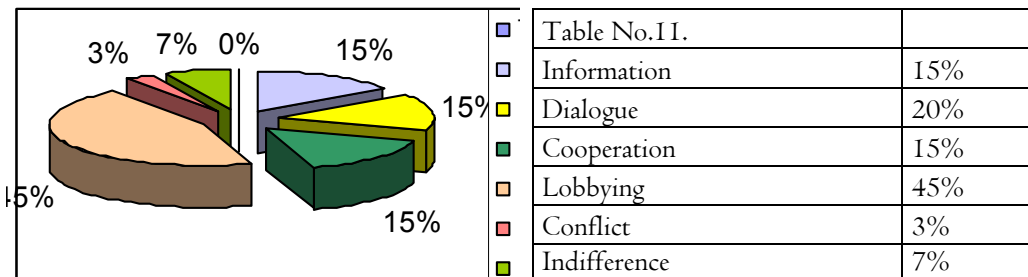
The rights of the persons are deprived of employment even when they finish rehabilitation programs in residential centers or weekly basis. 40% of respondents believe that employers do not have confidence in their professional skills. 25% think that even when they are trained and have professional skills they are despised by other employees at the place of labor.

**Graph IO.** How can the staff reduce prejudices at work?



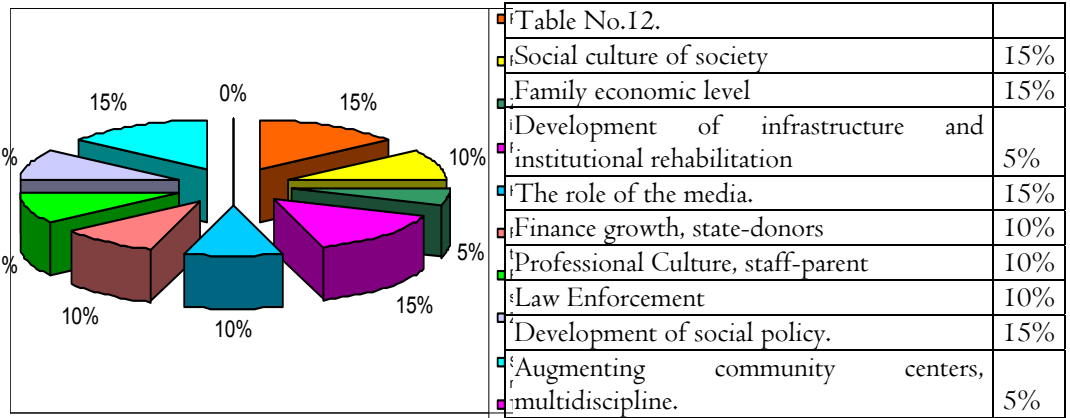
The staffs who works with children thinks that to reduce bias 40% of them think that they should cooperate with parents 20% think they should collaborate with the media to sensitize the public on the promotion of child. 20% think they should make children able and rehabilitate them with the goal to integrate into the community.

**Graph II.** Psychological techniques, education to promote harmonious coexistence.



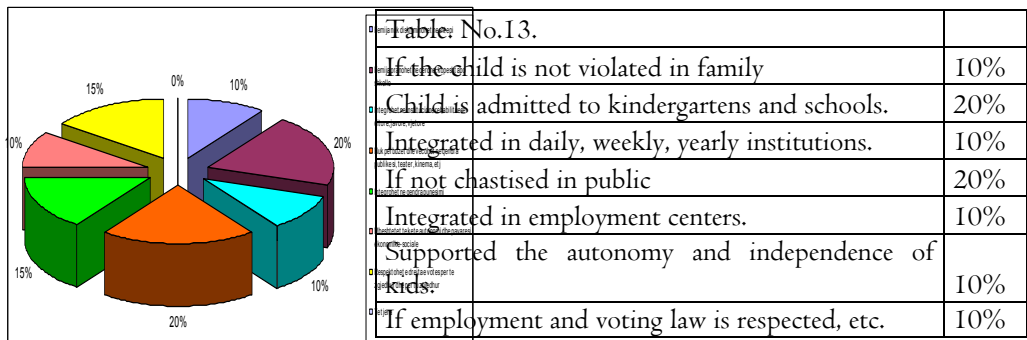
In this graph, questions on educational psychological techniques to promote harmonious coexistence response at 45% have chosen lobbying as real opportunity with greater impact in creating a climate of appreciation values to disabled children. 20% estimate as an effective technique the effective dialogue on public information.

**Graph. 12.** Factors that affect prejudice reduction according to specialists.



There are many factors that have influenced upon responses. 15% estimate growth of social culture of opinion. Compilation of developing social policies is as an important technique according to 15% of them. Increase of professional training is estimated at 15%, etc.

**Graph 13.** Do you think that the reduction of discrimination is followed by the following affecting factors?



In this graph are defined seven alternatives as factors contributing to the reduction of prejudice and discrimination against disabled children. 20% believe that if children are admitted to normal nursery, kindergartens and schools, bias opinion for children, parents and specialists would be reduced significantly. 20% think that the bias can be reduced if children are helped and not scorned in public, recreational, leisure and educational environments.

## 5. Conclusions

The study shows that disabled children are prejudiced. Prejudiced are their parents and training staff. Disabled children are not accepted in normal school and kindergartens to develop their potential capacities. They are admitted to public and private institutions to be employed after completing training programs in rehabilitation. Still there is no ratification from the Albanian Parliament of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There is no integral law to protect the rights of children with disabilities.

But people in general are not informed about the skills, values and needs of these people. Low culture of professional staff is considered as another cause for prejudice of children and their parents. Lobby of parents with staff with civil society, the media and actors working in the field of disability it is not becoming a practice. Qualifying the staff and especially the parents is not continuous. There is lack of social policy in supporting families with disabled children. Therefore the network of recreational facilities, entertainment and training for children with different abilities is limited.

Families with disabled children feel discriminated against, unprotected and in stressful situation.

There is a network of institutions to be synchronized by age groups according to the degree of cognitive development of the children treated by specialized staff.

In the entire country only 292 children are treated in centers, which are dependent on the State Social Service. There is no exact number of children with mental and physical disabilities. It is thought that there is a tendency of growing number, which means that economic difficulties and spiritual suffering families of disabled persons is a worrying phenomenon. It is time to support disabled children, their families, and staff and not be prejudiced and discriminated against.

## 6. Recommendation

It is necessary perception, envisage, revival, stance and the appreciation of towards children should be humanistic. There should be avoidance from any superstitious individual psychology to this group. Media should promote the abilities and rights of disabled children. Convention on the Rights of Persons with mental disabilities should be ratified. There should be adoption of integral law for the protection of the rights of disabled children.

There should be an increase of investment to enhance the quality of services to disabled children. There is need to strengthen co-operation of all stakeholders and decision-making factors, civil society's domestic and foreign donors, parents and staff,

to reduce the level of prejudice against these children. They should be integrated into comprehensive education, public and private.

There should be an expansion of network of daily multidisciplinary centers across the country, according to group ages. Employment law should be respected, where in every 25 persons employed one should be disabled. Social policies should be designed in support of children and their families. The level training of staff and parents should be in a better quality for accelerating the pace of development of disabled children. Enhancing the quality of modern software application for rehabilitation and integration of children it's a fundamental factor.

Building institutional chain system for prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disabled with different abilities, for: 0-3 years old, 3-6 years old, 6-14 years old, 14 to 18 years old it's another. At adult age they should be integrated in labor community centers monitored by civil society. The role of the media should be to raise the awareness of the community on the need to minimize the bias against disabled children, their parents and professionals staffs. Society should lobby for protection of the rights of disabled children and their families.

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