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CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON DISABILITIES
AND EMPLOYMENT OF SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Adults with Disabilities in Israel

Editor: Denise Naon

The study was commissioned by the steering committee overseeing the establishment of "Masad Disabilities" – a strategic partnership between the Government of Israel and JDC-Israel aimed at developing and establishing services for community-dwelling adults with disabilities



RESEARCH REPORT

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Executive Summary

The study was commissioned by the steering committee overseeing the establishment of "Masad Disabilities" – a strategic partnership between the Government of Israel and JDC-Israel aimed at developing and establishing services for community-dwelling adults with disabilities. The report includes comprehensive information about the population of people with disabilities and provides decision-makers with a thorough basis for the development of services for them.

The topics in the report were selected by the steering committee. The findings and conclusions are based on an analysis of earlier studies and surveys and on in-depth interviews with policymakers, service providers, representatives of organizations for people with disabilities, researchers and academics, and others.

The diversity and number of needs of people with disabilities were too great to allow for the inclusion of all needs of all groups of people with disabilities, nor all aspects of their lives. However, the report does contain comprehensive and important information about the characteristics and needs of adults with disabilities (aged 20–64) and special populations among them.

- ◆ According to Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) *Social Surveys*, 17.9% of adults aged 20–64 have a physical or health problem that impedes or greatly impedes daily activities and has lasted at least six months (average rate, 2002–2006) – 11.7% have a moderate disability and 6.2% have a severe disability (have difficulty performing personal care activities – washing, dressing, and eating – or difficulty with mobility).
- ◆ These percentages are similar to those in several Western countries, which range from 11% in the United States to 21% in Sweden. In most countries, they range from 16%–19%.
- ◆ According to this estimate, the number of people with disabilities aged 20–64 in Israel at the end of 2007 was 697,000. Of these, 241,000 had a severe disability and 456,000 had a moderate disability.
- ◆ The number of recipients of disability pensions in Israel aged 18–64 is 253,000 (December 2006). Of these, 212,000 receive benefits from the National Insurance Institute (NII) (general disability, work injury, victims of hostilities, mobility allowance, and special services) and 41,000 receive an allowance from the Ministry of Defense.

One of the major issues for service planners is to ascertain to what extent the percentage of persons with disabilities remains constant over time and whether it is expected to change in the future. It has been argued that due to the increase in life expectancy – and particularly among people with disabilities – an increase in the disability rates can be expected. The counter-argument is that technological development and medical advances will result in lower disability rates, particularly severe disability rates. There are no long-term data regarding the number of people with disabilities in Israel. However, there has been a very significant increase in the

number of recipients of general disability pensions from the NII, and in recent years, the growth rate has been almost three times greater than the growth rate among the general population. This is partly the result of the increase in the percentage of people aged 55–64 within the population of people of working age, due to the aging of the baby-boomers.

People with disabilities have several unique demographic and social characteristics that distinguish them from people without disabilities:

- ◆ The percentage of older people among people with disabilities is higher than the percentage among those without disabilities.
- ◆ The percentage of educated people among those with disabilities is lower than among those without disabilities.
- ◆ The employment rate among people with disabilities is much lower.
- ◆ The income of households in which there are people with disabilities is much lower than that of households in which the members do not have disabilities. For example, the income of 40% of households comprising a single person with a disability is below NIS 2,500 (approximately \$600), compared with 19% of households comprising a single person with no disability.
- ◆ A higher percentage of people with disabilities than of those without disabilities are less satisfied with their social contacts, are less satisfied with life, feel more isolated, are less optimistic about the future, and are less involved in the community.

The following section summarizes the characteristics and problems of selected groups of people with disabilities and the needs to be addressed when developing services for each group. The population data are accurate as of December 2007.

People with Disabilities in the Arab Sector in Israel

Population Size

The total number of people with disabilities in the Arab sector is 169,500. Of these, 94,900 have a severe disability. The percentage of people with a severe disability in the total population of Arab adults is three times greater than in the Jewish population (14% vs. 5%, respectively).

Characteristics and Problems

- ◆ A high percentage of them have a low education.
- ◆ A high percentage of them have a low income.
- ◆ They have problems of accessibility to their homes and immediate surroundings.
- ◆ The location of services and the language spoken by service providers creates accessibility problems.
- ◆ There is a need for more medical and paramedical care, social work, and domestic help.
- ◆ There is a stigma about people with disabilities in Arab society.

Service Development Needs

- ◆ Professional counseling for people with disabilities regarding the use of services and actualizing eligibility
- ◆ Assistance for family and caregivers
- ◆ Development of sheltered employment frameworks and the possibility of employment in the open market
- ◆ Enhancing accessibility of clinics and the NII
- ◆ Training of paramedical staff

Women with Disabilities in Israel

Population Size

The total number of women with disabilities is 374,000, of whom 138,000 have a severe disability.

Characteristics and Problems

- ◆ The percentage of women with a severe disability is higher than the percentage of men with a severe disability.
- ◆ The percentage of unmarried women with a severe disability is higher than the percentage of unmarried men with a severe disability.
- ◆ Women with disabilities have to cope with a greater number of employment problems than men with disabilities.
- ◆ They constitute one of the most notable groups of victims of violence.
- ◆ A significant number of the emergency health services and preventive medical services are inaccessible to women with disabilities.

Service Development Needs

- ◆ Suitable emergency care centers
- ◆ Health promotion/preventive medicine programs
- ◆ Preparation for pregnancy and childbirth
- ◆ Occupational rehabilitation services

New Immigrants with Disabilities

Population Size

The total number of immigrants with disabilities is 124,000, of whom 34,000 have severe disabilities.

Characteristics and Problems

- ◆ The rate of people with higher education is relatively high in comparison with non-immigrants with disabilities.
- ◆ A high percentage of them have a low income.

- ◆ There are mental problems.
- ◆ They lack information about supportive services.
- ◆ They suffer stigma against mental problems and referral for treatment.

Service Development Needs

- ◆ Encourage people with mental problems to seek help – reduce stigma
- ◆ Assistance accessing services (personal care, mobility)
- ◆ Allocation and training of suitable professional staff

Transition to Old Age for People with Disabilities

Population Size

The number of people with disabilities aged 55–64 is 215,000. They account for approximately a third of the people with disabilities in the 20–64 age cohort.

Characteristics and Problems

- ◆ There has been an increase in the life expectancy of people with disabilities (e.g., retardation, multiple illnesses), who in the past would not have reached an advanced age.
- ◆ Premature aging: health and functioning may deteriorate at an earlier age than among other members of the population.
- ◆ The family's ability to provide support changes as the caregiving parents or siblings themselves age.

Service Development Needs

- ◆ Early intervention – preparation for old age
- ◆ Define the rights of family members caring for a person with a disability
- ◆ Consolidation and cooperation among ministries/organizations providing care for people with disabilities in response to their various needs

People with Multiple Disabilities

Population Size

There are no national data on people with multiple disabilities. It is known, however, that 43% of recipients of disability pensions suffer from more than one kind of disability (physical, mental, intellectual, etc.).

Characteristics and Problems

- ◆ There are no services specifically for this population.
- ◆ Service provision is based on the main disability and there are not adjustments for additional disabilities.
- ◆ When it comes to eligibility for services, people with multiple disabilities fall between the stools, since responsibility for each kind of disability is divided up among different ministries and departments.

- ♦ Access to mental health services may be problematic for people with physical disabilities.
- ♦ The professionals lack knowledge, particularly in medical matters.

Service Development Needs

- ♦ Training of professionals
- ♦ Coordination of services
- ♦ Increased accessibility of mental health services

Transition to Adulthood for People with Disabilities

Population Size

Some 7,000 young people with disabilities complete their schooling each year.

Characteristics and Problems

- ♦ It is difficult to cope with independence, particularly for graduates of a special education framework.
- ♦ There are no equal opportunities to achieve the objectives of adulthood (further education, employment, self-management of budget, family, relationships, and recreational activities).
- ♦ Young adults need to protect themselves from exploitation and the denial of rights at work and in the community.

Service Development Needs

- ♦ Preparation for transition to adulthood while still in education system and prevention of dropout
- ♦ Involvement of young people with disabilities and their families in planning the transition to independent life
- ♦ Provision of information, counseling, and support regarding: independent living; financial independence; solutions for health needs; access to further education/employment
- ♦ Imparting of social/employment/financial management skills
- ♦ Learning through experience

Parents with Disabilities

Population Size

Altogether, 336,000 people with disabilities – 48% of the people with disabilities – have children under the age of 18. Approximately 133,000 of them have severe disabilities.

Characteristics and Problems

- ♦ Parents with disabilities (chiefly those with mental and intellectual problems) are vulnerable to social stigma regarding their parenting ability and they fear that their children will be taken away from them.
- ♦ Their low income makes it hard for them to raise their children.

- ♦ They encounter problems of accessibility to services for their children, e.g., schools and preschools.
- ♦ There is a high incidence of domestic problems.
- ♦ Parents with disabilities – chiefly those with mental problems – encounter crisis periods (hospitalization).

Service Development Needs

- ♦ Supportive services for parents based on specific type of disability
- ♦ Care services for children/auxiliary aids to help parents look after their children
- ♦ Support for every family
- ♦ Advocacy about parenting rights for people with disabilities

Families Caring for a Person with a Disability

Population Size

At least a third of the population of Israel has a person with a disability in their immediate family.

Characteristics and Problems

- ♦ Family caregivers have to make sacrifices and compromises in their working lives, free time, and social lives.
- ♦ Care provision has a negative impact on the family's financial situation.
- ♦ The physical and emotional burden has a negative impact on the health of the caregiver.
- ♦ Families, including the children of the person with a disability, suffer social isolation.
- ♦ The service system treats the family members as associate caregivers rather than acknowledging that they themselves are in need of assistance.

Service Development Needs

- ♦ Information, knowledge, and counseling
- ♦ Emotional support
- ♦ Assistance obtaining services and coordination of the services
- ♦ Social arrangements to relieve the burden on the families (e.g., flexible working hours, respite care)

People with Acquired (New) Disabilities

Population Size

There are no national data about the prevalence of people with acquired disabilities. It is known, however, that there are approximately 10,000 new recipients of disability pensions every year.

Characteristics and Problems

- ♦ They undergo an emotional crisis – sense of losing control.
- ♦ It is difficult to obtain rehabilitation services from social services.

- ◆ They lack information about the service system.
- ◆ They need to change their lifestyle (employment, social life, recreational activities, family relationships), but receive no guidance in the matter.
- ◆ They have to cope with different systems and with bureaucracy (health service, NII, social services).

Service Development Needs

- ◆ Occupational rehabilitation
- ◆ Technological adaptations to help enhance autonomy
- ◆ Emotional support to help psychological adjustment/coping

Use of Computers and Internet among People with Disabilities

In addition to examining the needs of specific groups of adults with disabilities, we also examined the use of computers and Internet among all people with disabilities, since this has great potential for them. The Internet offers a wealth of information and interaction that people with disabilities have difficulty obtaining any other way, due to problems of accessibility. With the assistance of special aids adapted for people with disabilities, computers can be the ticket to a social and professional life. They can facilitate many aspects of life – purchasing food and household items, obtaining medical information, creating virtual friendships, and even matchmaking.

- ◆ Although computers are essential to the daily functioning of people with disabilities, great disparities were reported in the use of computers by people with disabilities and those without disabilities: 51% of people with a moderate disability and 24% of people with a severe disability use the computer, compared with 71% of people with no disability.
- ◆ Computers were found to have a significant impact on the lives of people with disabilities: 30% reported that the Internet had significantly enhanced their ability to communicate with friends and family.
- ◆ About 50% reported that computers significantly improved their ability to keep themselves up to date with what was happening around them.
- ◆ There are many barriers to computer use: Expense; accessibility of websites; and training and learning how to use the computer in ways adapted to specific needs.

Issues Brought Up in Interviews with Key Personnel

The study included interviews with 49 key people in Israel including policymakers and partners in the disability database project; representatives of social services; senior executives of organizations and nonprofit associations; representatives of organizations for people with disabilities and the third sector; and academics.

The respondents noted many areas where there is a need to develop services:

- ◆ **Transportation:** This was noted as a very important issue, particularly in the periphery (north and south of the country). The lack of transportation in the north and south means that existing services are not being used.
- ◆ **Access:** Like transport, accessibility is a prerequisite for use of all services. There are many forms of accessibility, but what they all have in common is that they give the person with a disability the full opportunity to feel like a "normal person," able to take advantage of the services provided, to communicate with other people, to read texts, and so forth. Of particular importance in this area are: physical accessibility; access to medical equipment and auxiliary aids; access to a computer; and access to information and health services.
- ◆ **Housing:** Several respondents believe housing to be one of the most important areas of service provision. The topic was brought up both in general and specifically in regard to certain groups of people with disabilities. The need to develop a continuum of solutions suitable for various levels of functional ability was noted. Emphasis was also placed on the need to develop community housing, particularly for people with intellectual difficulties, autism, and physical disabilities and for couples who both have disabilities
- ◆ **Social and recreational services:** Many respondents considered social and recreational services to be among the most important services, which are not receiving appropriate budgets, even though the absence of such services leads to increased government spending as the result of ensuing mental problems and hospitalization of people with disabilities.
- ◆ **Family:** A large number of respondents noted the family – and in particular the family's role in the process of coping with disability. Training and service for families is perceived to be an integral part of integration in the community. The greater the number of services for families of people trying to cope with disabilities, the smaller the number of people with disabilities in need of out-of-home solutions.
- ◆ **Preventive medicine:** The need to develop preventive medicine programs was also noted. The importance of promoting the prevention of secondary morbidity by adopting a healthy life style (including sport and correct nutrition) was emphasized. Health promotion acquires greater urgency given the early aging process, which characterizes a large percentage of people with disabilities (e.g., those with physical disabilities and chronic illnesses).
- ◆ **Violence:** There is growing awareness about violence against people with disabilities, particularly women, yet little is being done about it. The respondents indicated the need for a solution to emergency situations and also long-term work with various agencies involved in the daily lives of people with disabilities.
- ◆ **Preparation for independent life:** In every area of life, the preparation for independent living is perceived to be essential in the general process of empowerment and integration of people with disabilities into the community. This comprehensive, holistic process starts with preparing and counseling people with disabilities for independent life within the community and ends with augmenting their sense of empowerment and self-efficacy. Examples of such programs are the centers for independent living, peer counseling, and self-help groups. It is

important that the personal assistance be given with the full involvement of the person with the disability in selecting the type of assistance and support, the solutions required, and the persons providing the assistance themselves.

- ♦ ***Inter-ministerial and inter-organizational cooperation:*** This is perceived to be vital to the development of services currently lacking. According to the respondents, almost all of the populations with disabilities should be able to enjoy cooperation with the various ministries and agencies, but people with several disabilities (multiple disabilities) are particularly in need of inter-ministerial cooperation. Other populations that fall between the stools – such as those living in the periphery, young adults who straddle the seam between the education system and social services, people with acquired disabilities, and people with disabilities who also have geriatric problems – are likely to benefit from enhanced cooperation.

The report contains extensive information about a large numbers of aspects of daily life for people with disabilities. Obviously, it cannot relate to all areas of life and all the needs of this population and some important topics have not been included. With regard to some of the topics, information is available and/or studies focusing on those issues have been conducted; with regard to others, information should be expanded in the future. Among the important topics that were raised by professionals and were not included in the report in detail: health promotion and preventive medicine for people with disabilities; violence against people with disabilities; accessibility, recreational activities, housing, and employment.

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Members of the Steering Committee

Chair: Arnon Mantver, Director, JDC-Israel

Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services:

Ministry of Social Affairs and Services: Dr. Shlomo Eliashar, Director, Rehabilitation Services Administration; Hanan Paritski, Senior Division Director, Division of Budget and Finance; Dr. Chaya Aminadav, Director, Division of Services for the Developmentally Disabled; Lili Abiri, Director, Supervisor, Services for the Treatment of Autism; Michal Golan, Director of Rehabilitation in the Community, Rehabilitation Services Administration; Nili Daniel, National Supervisor of Services in the Community, Rehabilitation Services Administration; Shosh Reshef-Zeev, National Supervisor, Services for the Treatment of Autism

Ministry of Health: Yechiel Shereshevsky, Director of Mental Health Rehabilitation Services; Michael Dor, MD, MPA. Head of the General Medicine Division

Ministry of Finance: Ohad Reifen, Budget Department

National Insurance Institute: Brenda Morginstin, Director, Division of Service Development Funds

JDC-Israel: Haim Factor, Deputy Director; Prof. Yossi Tamir, Director, Tevet; Dror Rotem, Director of Research and Development, ESHEL; Tamara Barnea, Director, Unit for Disabilities and Rehabilitation; Avital Sandlar-Leff, Area Head Independent Living, Unit for Disabilities and Rehabilitation

Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute: Prof Jack Habib, Director; Denise Naon, Director, Center for Research on Disabilities and Special Populations

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