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Article

Social Support for Families Raising Children with Intellectual Disabilities: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract: This article examines the problems and prospects of social support for families raising children with intellectual disabilities. The study analyzed the psychological, economic, and social challenges faced by families. The effectiveness of existing state programs, rehabilitation centers, and social services in the Republic of Uzbekistan was evaluated. The study's findings identified the need to improve the support system, enhance the qualifications of specialists, and expand the inclusive educational environment. Recommendations for improving social policy were provided as a conclusion.

Keywords: *intellectual disability, social support, children with special needs, family, rehabilitation, inclusive education, psychological support, government programs, social services, disability, Uzbekistan.*

INTRODUCTION

Raising children with intellectual disabilities represents a significant social, psychological, and economic burden for families. According to the World Health Organization, more than 15% of the world's population has some form of disability, a significant portion of which are intellectual developmental disorders. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, this problem is also of pressing importance: according to official statistics, more than 100,000 children with intellectual disabilities are registered in our country[1].

These families often face feelings of loneliness, social isolation, a lack of qualified specialists, and financial difficulties. Numerous studies show that parents—especially mothers—are prone to chronic stress, depression, and emotional exhaustion. At the same time, it has been shown that when an appropriate support system is in place, such families can contribute significantly to their children's development[2].

The purpose of this article is to analyze the state of the existing social support system in Uzbekistan, identify its weaknesses, and develop prospective recommendations. The research was conducted through a comparative analysis of national and international experiences[3].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous scientific studies have been conducted by foreign and local scholars in the field of researching the problems of families raising children with intellectual disabilities. Among international researchers, Turnbull and Turnbull analyzed social support for families raising children with intellectual disabilities based on family systems theory. Their research highlights the importance of the balance between formal (governmental) and informal (community, friends) forms of support[4].

In her extensive meta-analysis, Singer found that the psychological condition of parents raising a child with an intellectual disability is significantly more severe compared to parents in typical families. Specifically, mothers were found to have depression rates that were 2-3 times higher. Baqaeva and Hasanova, studying the social problems of families of children with special needs in Uzbekistan, identified material and economic difficulties, as well as issues with vocational education, as the main obstacles[5].

Karimov analyzed the system of rehabilitation centers in Uzbekistan, noting their uneven distribution by region and the poor quality of services. Rafiqova, in turn, detailed the challenges faced during the transition to an inclusive education system: teacher unpreparedness, a lack of flexible infrastructure, and societal negative attitudes[6].

In international practice, comprehensive support systems for families of children with intellectual disabilities are operating effectively in countries such as Sweden, Finland, and Germany. These systems include financial allowances, psychological counseling, rehabilitation services, and community integration programs. Toshmatov has studied the possibilities of implementing a similar comprehensive model in Uzbekistan[7].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a mixed methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. The empirical part of the study was conducted in the Tashkent, Samarkand, and Fergana regions from 2022 to 2024.

The research methods included the following:

- A survey of 120 parents of children with intellectual disabilities;
- Conducting in-depth interviews with 30 parents, 15 social workers, and 10 medical specialists;
- Analyzing existing legislation, government programs, and statistical data
- Comparative analysis of international practices.

The survey participants were 78% mothers and 22% fathers. Respondents aged 25 to 55 participated in the study. The children's ages ranged from 3 to 18 years, covering various levels of intellectual development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings identified the following key issues:

1. Psychological and emotional problems. 84% of the parents surveyed complained of chronic stress and emotional exhaustion. 67% of respondents indicated a need for professional psychological support, but only 23% reported being able to access this service. In-depth interviews showed that many families—especially those living in rural areas—face social isolation and a negative societal attitude[8].
2. Economic difficulties. Raising a child with an intellectual disability significantly reduces a family's monthly budget. According to the study, it was found that 71% of families reported being unable to cover the costs of treatment, rehabilitation, and special education from their own resources. In many cases, government benefits cover only 30-40% of the actual expenses[9].
3. The problem of the availability of rehabilitation services. While families in Tashkent city are relatively well-served in terms of access to rehabilitation centers and special education institutions, these opportunities decrease sharply in regional centers and rural areas. 58% of respondents reported spending hours traveling to and from the nearest rehabilitation center[10].
4. Qualifications of specialists and quality of services. The majority of interviewees complained about the insufficient knowledge and skills of social workers and medical professionals regarding intellectual disabilities. In particular, the quality of services for initial diagnosis and early intervention was rated as poor[11].
5. Legal Literacy. 62% of parents surveyed admitted they were not fully aware of what government benefits and services are available for their children. This situation is preventing families from accessing the support they are entitled to[12].

On the positive side, it is necessary to highlight the expansion of the legislative base in this area, the opening of new rehabilitation centers, and the efforts being made in the direction of inclusive education in Uzbekistan in recent years. Since 2021, a number of decisions have been made to strengthen state support for children with disabilities and their families[13].

Compared to international experience, Uzbekistan still has a long way to go in establishing a comprehensive support system. The family-centered approach observed in Scandinavian countries – where flexible and continuous services cover all family members – could also be an effective model for Uzbekistan[14,15].

CONCLUSION

This study confirmed that families raising children with intellectual disabilities face serious social, psychological, and economic challenges in Uzbekistan. The current support system is not fully meeting all the needs of these families.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were developed:

1. Expand the network of rehabilitation and special education centers, especially by opening new centers in rural and remote areas;
2. Expand psychological support and group therapy services for parents, providing these services for free or at a low cost;
3. Implement systematic retraining programs for social workers and special education teachers;
4. Create an information platform to inform families about their rights and benefits;
5. Expand inclusive education practices and accelerate reforms aimed at making the school environment welcoming for all children;

6. Revise the amount of financial support for families of children with disabilities to align with actual expenses.

By deepening the reforms underway and implementing the recommendations provided, it is possible to significantly improve the quality of life for families in Uzbekistan raising children with intellectual disabilities.

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