
Individual concepts and experiences of adulthood of people with intellectual disabilities in the context of inclusion/exclusion, participation and human rights

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Abstract

In our presentation we concentrate on the phenomenon of being adult with intellectual disability in the context of participation, inclusion/exclusion and meaning making. We want to show the results of the research which aimed to reconstruct the experiences of the participants as adults and focused on the meanings they ascribe to the concept of adulthood: we wanted to see the ways in which they understand and define their individual biographical experiences connected with adulthood and disability.

The presented analyses refer to the selected group of adults with intellectual disabilities, participants of Polish workshops of occupational therapy and community self-help homes, functioning within contemporary Polish social support system for people with disabilities. It includes many institutions and organizations which conduct various activities aiming for social and occupational rehabilitation, social integration, countering social exclusion of these people and improving their life quality.

The research was realized applying qualitative model of enquiry: we used individual and group ethnographic and biographic interviews with 26 participants – women and men with intellectual disabilities, aged 24 – 53. Participants narrations revealed the meanings ascribed to adulthood showing actual and missing fields of experiences/activities like: family life, vocational activities, health, leisure time and joy, interpersonal relationships, being a couple, love, marriage. Their concept of adulthood/ being adult appears however the matter of some individual needs, desires and expectations/or even imagination rather than real/ actual life experience. This makes us to suggest that integrating, inclusion, participation and normalization processes seem to fail as far as social supporting of people with intellectual disabilities in adulthood is concerned.

In the context of our research, social integration and inclusion appear not only an important ideas and human rights, but they significantly influence the quality of life of adults with intellectual disabilities, providing a better direct and adjust social support in the experience of adulthood, adequately/or not to their needs, expectations and individual abilities, exposing social background they live in.

Keywords: adulthood, intellectual disability, interaction, inclusion/exclusion/human rights

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