

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FUTURE ORIENTATION OF ARAB ADOLESCENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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Abstract

Future orientation focuses on the image an individual constructs regarding their future; including future goals and courses of action they set for themselves in order to realize these goals. The present study discusses the consolidation of the future orientation of Arab adolescents with mild intellectual disabilities who attend special education schools in northern Israel. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. 79 adolescents, aged 16 to 21, participated in the study. The questionnaires which were used were originally designed for adolescents without disabilities. Hence, they were adapted for the population of this study. The results show that the future orientation of adolescents with intellectual disabilities is obscured, pessimistic, and dependent on close ones. It also reflects the division of gender roles in the Arab society. It further reveals the loneliness and helplessness the adolescents feel because of the social rejection and the repulsive attitudes towards them.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Arab society, future orientation, gender differences, intellectual disabilities.*

1. Attitudes of the Arab society toward people with intellectual developmental disabilities

Attitudes of the Arab society toward people with and toward people with intellectual disabilities in particular are influenced by stereotypical negative beliefs. Hence, people with an intellectual disabilities are usually rejected. People treat them with misery, compassion, and patronization. society, and considers them as a burden (Karni, Reiter & Bryen, 2011).

2. Future orientation

Future orientation is the subjective intention of a person toward his future. It is composed of a person's self-perception, ambitions, plans, expectations, hopes and fears of the short term and long term future. All of these are vital for the purpose of establishing personal goals, examining future possibilities, and making important decisions and binding them (Seginer, 2009). According to Seginer the consolidation of future orientation is influenced by the proximate environment and cultural values (Seginer, 2009). Moreover, the development of future orientation is an interactive process, which is complex and ongoing within socio cultural, familial, and internal personal spheres (Seginer, 2009). Future orientation can be presented based on two approaches. The first one is the thematic approach. This approach focuses mainly on cognitive representation processes. Two categories of future orientation may be distinguished (Seginer, 2009): (1) the prospective life domain which covers higher education, work and career, marriage and family. (2) The existing life domain which encompasses "concern for self," and "concern for others". The disadvantage of this approach is its lack of identifying the process which underlies thoughts regarding the future and the changes over time. The second approach is the three components approach. Future orientation in this approach is described to have motivational, cognitive, and behavioral components (Seginer, 2009). It is a generic approach which offers a common model for several different future domains. The order of the components is fixed. The motivational component leads to the cognitive component which in its turn leads to the behavioral one. The motivational component is defined by three variables : (a) values which is the importance of each of the future domains for the adolescent; (b) expectations which is the probability for an adolescent to achieve future ambitions or goals (c) control which is the extent to which the adolescent can achieve a certain goal independently or dependently on others. The cognitive component deals with the construction of expectations according to a future time course and it includes both a positive aspect expressed by hopes, as well as a negative aspect expressed by fears. The behavioral component is

expressed in activities the adolescents make in order to examine the future domains that interest them. This approach is an extension to the thematic approach because it does not only deal with the cognitive component but also with factors that motivate and trigger the adolescents' interests in the different domains (Seginer, 2009).

3. The socio-cultural context of the future orientation of Arab adolescents

The sociocultural contexts of the future orientation were examined in several studies which focused mainly on the socio-political aspect (Seginer & Mahajna, 2018). According to them Arab adolescents invested in prospective life domain. In addition, studies of Arab adolescents revealed gender differences in relation to the future orientation.

4. Gender differences in the future orientation of Arab adolescents

There is a rigid demarcation of gender roles in the Arab society. Women are found on a low rung of family hierarchy (Odeh, 2007). Arab girls became unsatisfied with their status. Therefore, they emphasize higher education in their future orientation more than boys, but they are still more concerned with the family domain than other domains (Seginer & Mahajna, 2018).

5. The family context of the future orientation

Family interaction and context affect the consolidation of future orientation of the adolescents in three ways: (a) setting normative standards by parents (b) Parents being a model for problem solving and carrying out tasks. (c) Parents can make their children interested in a particular domain of adults' life. According to Seginer (2009) Positive parenthood motivates the adolescent to consolidate a positive future orientation, and parental support motivates adolescents to think of options for their future, and develop skills for that purpose.

Unfortunately, former studies took into account solely the formation of future orientation of adolescents with no disabilities. Scholars did not study the future orientation of adolescents with disabilities directly. Rather, in their studies they examined concepts similar to those of the future orientation, such as hopes, fears and expectations (Raz, 2019). A literature review by Raz (2019) shows that adolescents with disabilities have hopes and ambitions related to future career, education and leisure where the main theme raised related to this is the need of keeping relation with important other and making decisions. Yet the expectations of adolescents with disabilities were low. Most of them expect to finish school and have a job, but still fear being financially independent due to low wages. Fears repeatedly expressed by adolescents with disabilities were fears of losing loved ones such as family members, fear of being abused and harmed, fear of loneliness and being unable to keep relations, and fear of failure in general. According to Raz (2019), due to the fact that adolescents with disabilities are overly protected by their families and teachers, and the limited role models and opportunities they are given to explore existed options, they develop unrealistic expectations regarding their future.

6. Aims

This research focuses on the characteristics of the future orientation of Arab adolescents with intellectual disabilities, while trying to shed light on the ways cultural values might influence this orientation.

7. Method

A mixed design method was use, both quantitative and qualitative, which enabled a greater understanding of the future orientation of Arab adolescents with intellectual disabilities. The quantitative component was dominant while the qualitative component was to complement quantitative findings (Kelle, 2001).

8. Participants

79 Arab adolescents (66% males, 34% females) with mild intellectual disabilities between the ages 16 and 21 participated in the study. All subjects lived and attended special education schools in northern

Israel. 89% of the adolescents were Muslims, 6% were Druze and 5% were Christians. Most of them were of a low socio-economic status.

9. Measures

The original tools used for the examination of the future orientation were designed for adolescents without disabilities. Therefore, it was necessary to adapt them for the research participants by: (a) simplifying the language. (b) reducing the number of options from 5 to 3 on Likert scale so the participants would be able to distinguish between the various options (c) adapting the questions to the Arab culture. Because of the fact that the participants could not read, the data was collected by using a structured interview. The questions were read aloud and explained to them if needed.

The future orientation of the adolescents was examined using four questionnaires: (1) "Future Life Fields" (Seginer & Halabi, 1991). A future orientation questionnaire which is concerned with life aspects. It was designed to measure the motivational and behavioral aspects of future orientation. (2) The "hopes and fears" questionnaire (Seginer, 1988) which contains two questions: when you think about the future, what are your hopes; when you think about the future, what are your fears? To assess the assumptions in light of the future orientation questionnaires and to analyze the sum of the relevant responses regarding hopes and fears separately, three categories of subject matter were delineated: (a) education and employment (b) social relationships (c) marriage and family. (3) "My Future" questionnaire (Seginer, 1988) which examines the frequency of thoughts on hopes and fears. The participant was asked to rate each statement on a 3-point Likert scale. Internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) were found (hopes: $\alpha = 0.85$, and regarding fears: $\alpha = 0.94$). (4) "Perception of the Future" questionnaire (Seginer & Lilach, 2004). The first part deals with profession, while the second part deals with social relationships. Subjects had to rate statement on a 3 point Likert scale. Internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) were found (professional training: $\alpha = 0.79$, and personal relationships: $\alpha = 0.84$).

10. Procedures

School referrals were made with the approval of the chief scientist of the Ministry of Education. Adolescents participation in the research was subject to the consent of the adolescents' parents or guardians.

11. Analysis

Statistical analysis for this study encompassed a number of stages: (a) testing and describing the frequencies and distributions of the background characteristics of the study participants (b) testing the internal consistencies (c) defining the study variables and examining their distributions. For future orientation variables which were extracted from the interviews with the adolescents, the frequencies and percentages were described in all of the future orientation fields (d) the study hypotheses were tested through the appropriate means, using various analyses and executing hierarchical regressions. The first research hypothesis was tested through a gendered perspective.

12. Results

In the results section, the future orientation of the adolescents was described according to the results of the interviews and the questionnaires. The adolescents were asked about the perceptions of their future in three fields: acquiring a profession (employment), social relations, marriage and family. The analysis was carried out according to motivational, cognitive, behavioural, and other components.

Motivational component, more than 95% of the adolescents expressed positive feelings regarding the domains of their future. Cognitive component, more than 60% of the adolescents reported thinking about acquiring a profession or employment and social relation 'all the time', 50% of the adolescents reported thinking about marriage and family 'all the time'. Behavioural component, Approximately 66% of the adolescents had already taken steps to acquiring a future profession and initiating social relationships. No adolescent took an actual step towards marriage.

In the present study, an additional component was added to these three existing components: searching for the archetype (modelling). This component includes the following various five elements which were highlighted in the personal interviews with all of the adolescents: the source of influence, the source of support, the degree of realism within the future ambitions, consistency, and devotion to one's goal. Acquiring a profession, 96% of the adolescents reported having a support in this domain, 31% of the adolescents described their professional future in a realistic way, 80% showed consistency, and almost

40% expressed devotion to their goal. Social relationships, 62% reported having no support at all, 76% of the adolescents described their social future in a realistic way, most of them (94%) expressed consistency, and 13% expressed devotion to their goal. Marriage and family, 75% of the adolescents reported family support, 89.7 % expressed consistency, 7.8% showed devotion to a goal.

Gender differences were found regarding the behavioural component in the domain of acquiring a profession. 64% of the male adolescents and 72% of the female adolescents took an actual step towards their professional future. However, 40% of the male adolescents and only 19% of the female adolescents had previous experience in this domain ($Z=1.85$, $p=.64$). Almost 29% of the male participants worked for wages in comparison to 4% of the female adolescents. This gender difference was significant ($Z=2.75$, $p<.01$). An additional gender difference was found in the degree of 'realism' in choosing a profession. In this field, the perception of reality among the male adolescents was significantly higher (40%) than that of the female participants (15%) ($Z = 2.26$, $p < 0.05$). In the domain of marriage, the number of the supporters of the male adolescents in this domain was bigger than the number of supporters for the females ($Z= 2.31$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, significant gender difference was found in the number of fears in the domain of 'education and profession'; the number for male adolescents was higher than that of the female adolescents.

13. Discussion

The future orientation of Arab adolescents' with intellectual disabilities is affected by the sociocultural values of the Arab society. The influence was reflected in various contents raised by the adolescents during the interviews. One of these contents is gender differences. Significant gender differences were found in the future orientation of the adolescents in the domain of acquiring a profession. Male adolescents expressed more fears about their future than females, and the professions they mentioned were realistic and compatible with their abilities in comparison to those mentioned by female adolescents. The former gender difference can be explained by another significant gender difference which was revealed in the study. Males, in comparison to females, showed more experience in the behavioral component of acquiring a profession. They have been paid for their work more than female adolescents. This made males consider jobs which suit their abilities. This gender difference indicates that boys are given the attention, and are raised to fulfill the male role as a bread winner in spite of their disability. The second influence of the Arab society on the future orientation raised by the adolescents during the interviews is their perception of themselves as helpless and easy to be harmed. It seems that adolescents are aware of society's repulsive attitudes towards them (Karni et al., 2011). The way adolescents with intellectual disabilities tried to deal with the fact of being socially rejected was also affected by gender (not significant). Girls prefer to stay at home and be cared for by their mother, while boys intend to have a normal male life relying on the fact that their fathers, brothers, or uncles will protect and help them. That emphasize the passivity adopted by the adolescents in dealing with the social rejection they face that might stem not only from helplessness, but also from the lack of training and providing them with active tools to deal with this rejection.

As a result of being rejected, loneliness was another characteristic of the adolescents' future orientation. Their narratives emphasized that their recent and future relations are confined to their schoolmates, brothers, sisters, and their relatives. When adolescents were asked about the possibility of having other friends than those who they mentioned, they answered that they do not know who their future friends will be. Some even answered that their parents will forbid them from having other friends because they want to protect them from being hurt. An additional characteristic of the future orientation of an Arab adolescent is dependence. The component "searching for an archetype (modeling)" add by Arslan-Suleiman (2013) articulated the difficulty for adolescents with intellectual disabilities to think about the future, and emphasized their strong dependence mainly on their families and support system. They are an adolescent's role model and the source of support which is required to guarantee the fulfillment of their ambitions. Even an adolescent's devotion to a certain goal is conditioned by having the expected support, especially in the domains of acquiring a profession, and family and marriage. Pessimism characterized the future orientation of female adolescents with intellectual disabilities despite the fact that they kept repeating clichés of being confident of having a future job, social relations, and a future family. Their pessimism stems from their awareness of girls being socially rejected and their perception of themselves as helpless and easy to be harmed. The future orientation of adolescents with intellectual disabilities can be also described as obscured. This obscureness stems from their awareness of being socially rejected and from the lack of sufficient plans that might prepare them in their transformation from adolescence to adulthood. Their future orientation might also be described as limited due to the lack of transformation preparation plans, social rejection, and repulsive attitudes towards them. This resulted in their exposure to a small number of role models and opportunities.

14. Conclusions

The results of the research indicate that an action is required in the various domains mentioned earlier. First, there should be programs focused on empowering families and help them cope with their children's transition from adolescence to adulthood, and raise their awareness towards their children's abilities and weaknesses. Second, there should be programs focused on society and its institutions. Such programs should aim to change attitudes toward people with disabilities. Teams should be trained to prepare an appropriate plan for an individual to help them transform from their adolescence to their adulthood. Lastly, there should be programs focused on adolescents in order to empower them, raise their awareness regarding their abilities and weaknesses, and expose them to the various opportunities and barriers which exist in society.

15. Limitations of the study

The study has a number of limitations, such as an unequal gender representation, and an unequal representation of the three religions.

16. Suggestions for future research

We suggest to conduct the following future studies: (a) an examination of the future orientation of adolescents with other disabilities; (b) a comparison between the future orientation of individuals with different disabilities; (d) significant factors in the life of adolescents with disabilities and their impact on their future orientation.

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