

## CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS FAMILY EDUCATION AS A PARTNERSHIP COMPREHENSION IN RURAL AREA

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### Abstract

Family education as a support to families where children are with special needs is mentioned in family politics statements. Unfortunately, family education problems in rural areas characterise present day situation in Latvia. Professionals with less specific knowledge essential to deal with special needs satisfaction is a reality in rural areas in Latvia. It is vital to advance family autonomy, develop an opportunity to deal with consequences that disabilities cause and, improve environmental conditions for children with special needs. The aim of this article is to fortify necessity of family education as a partnership comprehension development to children with special needs in rural area. The investigation was carried out in National Rehabilitation centre "Vaivari" in April 2012, by involving families with children with special needs. Analysis of scientific resources has been done; survey and statistical analysis of data were carried out, by using non-parametric method - Mann Whitney U test. During the research, the main family education comprehension aspects to families living in rural or city area and having children with special needs are identified. The advantages in special needs satisfaction context in rural areas and city environment are analysed. Measurements of respondent attitude to innovative family education e-solutions are made. Objectively and subjectively determined social isolation risk of families having children with special needs in rural area show the necessity to use family resources related to consequences that disabilities create. It is necessary to develop ways to use modern technological opportunities, provide appropriate family education and partnership with professionals.

**Key words:** children with special needs, family education, partnership, rural area.

### Introduction

The education in a globalised knowledge society has become a process with comprehension not limited to analysis of formal education. Today education is related to fields of human life that are viewed as an economical and national existence base in the industrial societies, for example, work and family. Work meaning reproduction of available resources that was observed in previous centuries, today puts forward a demand of excellence that declares a necessity for educated employees and organisations that are ready to change. The family whose historical input over the centuries was to provide patriarchal hereditary rights, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century from unitary concept is transformed in alternative and even ambivalent existence justifications that points to crisis and development (Darling and Turkki, 2009). Searching the developmental opportunities as an instrument, education today is related to family existence for two significant aspects: collaboration necessary in order to merge work with family life and liberal statements based on the family value that is revaluated from which present families as a self-organised system idea results. This assumption denies the vertical hierarchies axis in family and professional relationships and introduces a mutually responsible partnership principle. The family becomes a research object and subject. The family that is able to learn is a future paradigm and also today's paradigm – learning ability paradigm.

The family functionality that is the base of wider society development differs in various culture environments (Beveridge, 2005). The city and rural

areas (the countryside) are different environments due to recourse differences and capacity, but both of them are necessary components in a common society developmental structure.

Also, the family functionality establishes a satisfaction with family internal needs – standardised or special benefits. The children with special needs have an influence on family functionality if ways to compensate or creatively overtake the objective physical and mental limitations are not found.

Those families having children with special needs that live in rural areas are subjected to longer adaptation process than families living in cities. Care, medicine, rehabilitation, social benefits, education and environmental accessibility barriers are one part of difficulties to these families. Although in 1999 in State Family Principles support for families with children with special needs, an action platform for development of institutional family support mechanism was formulated, there are still uncertainties between state and local authorities support administration (Konceptija valsts atbalsts..., 1999). The family politics that is reflected in State Family Principles reflects a discrepancy for local authorities to support families with children with functional disabilities, training and consulting and lack of accessible benefits for those living outside cities (Ģimenes valsts politikas pamatnostādnes, 2011).

In Latvia, support for families having children with special needs is treated as a social help or environmental availability improvements, ignoring the family educational necessity aspect. There is lack of political platform for debates on family education.

At the same time, academic discussion on family education definition and constructive development of it has not been started. As a result, the empirically taken measures are considered to be a self-initiative of researchers, and for its realisation it was not possible to avoid limitations that created theoretical uncertainties.

In present researches on families having children with special needs, their psychological, medical, care and rehabilitation questions, orienteering to disability or treating a child as an individual but not family and part of wider environmental system are discussed. In researches on children with special needs' family role is insufficiently analysed (Bērziņa, 2010). The characteristic influences of rural environment are discussed as minor aspects in separate local researches, underlining that necessary benefits are not available in local area of residence (Bērnu un jauniešu..., 2011). Family inability to receive education and information about opportunities of disability overcoming, using e-technologies (Vientuļo vecāku..., 2007) is mentioned.

The aim of article is to justify children with special needs family education as a partnership comprehension developmental necessity in rural environment, gathering information about children with special needs and their comprehension of family education.

In this research the author has described the difference between comprehension of family education in rural environment and city environment, underlining characteristic family necessities and interaction with environment aspects. The author paid attention to political and institutional platform necessity of innovative family education comprehension, defining families that have children with special needs and professional groups as partners.

## Materials and Methods

### *Theoretical Framework of the Study*

The article is based on a multifunctional approach for family education concept as well as theoretical analysis of J. Thomas, M. Arcus (1992) and R. McPherson (1998) etc. works where this approach is outlined. The family and multi-professional resource interaction, cycle of family life and sustainable statements of continuous family development were compiled in a family education comprehension. The research of family education is insufficient in author works from Latvia and other countries. The newer researches point to support searching for families with children with special needs as an existence of social efficient functional structure, considering professional and family connection basis. Family information and education determine opportunities of disability's overcoming, it helps to prognosticate the further development (Ray et al., 2009; Stewart et al., 2006).

Since beginning of partnership idea in work with families having children with special needs in 90ties when N. Dale (1996) offered a conceptual negotiating model for partnership (Negotiating Model for Partnership), asking to revise responsibility's distribution of families and specialists and underlining a division with knowledge meaning, the wider view in partnership comprehension is established. For theoretical partnership relationship comprehension of research in family education, the main statements of human ecological developmental theory, defining a partnership from other interaction forms of environment structures and underlining activity's necessity and essential modifications of involved parties (Beveridge, 2005) are used. An innovative approach in family (where children are with special needs) education as a partnership comprehension is pointed at political and institutional resource involvement, research development of school and family, family and treatment, care and rehabilitation specialists interaction. Family oriented care manifests a future aim whose significant parts are both family education and professionalization of family educators that includes necessity of certification. Latest researches show that this approach provides an optimal help for children with special needs (Gonzales et al., 2004; Knapp and Madden, 2009).

In order to solve a unique problem spectrum families having children with special needs face with, one cannot ignore an environmental background. Satisfaction of special needs can take different family resources in cities and rural areas because benefits offered in cities are of wider choice than those in rural areas, availability of them is preferential, minimising the possible barriers. The research analysis on necessity of family education in the rural area where children are with special needs shows that there are few researches that focus on specific barriers of rural area environment. Differences of socio-economical segment and health-care infrastructures in rural areas and cities are observed. In rural area that is defined as a populated area with less than 2,500 inhabitants (Darling and Gallagher, 2004), children often encounter benefit availability difficulties such as -, transport availability aspects, mental health-care, paediatric, family doctor and dentist availability and general poverty tendency both in Latvia and foreign countries (Darling and Gallagher, 2004; Skinner and Slifkin, 2007). A recent specific factor interpreted as a barrier is difficulty in development context of children with special needs in Latvia that manifests both in unsolved discussion between country and local authorities about responsibility division in family politics realisation, and closure of small rural schools, creating significant difficulties and isolation risk exactly to children with special needs and their

families. In this situation a partial solution could be the e-technologies that might help to educate and provide necessary information to families. It could help to adopt families the definite inner psychological support and children care and education function as a self-organised capable systems that traditionally are comprehended as specialist competence. Today there are few researches about family education comprehension in rural area and family attitude to partnership introduction in relationship with specialists, e-technologies as an informative, educational and communication instrument.

The family perspective where children are with special needs today is connected not just with adaptation of environment conditions but capability to change environment themselves. Family education that is based on partnership offers new development opportunities to families, professionals, institutions and politicians.

#### *Methods*

The investigation was carried out in National Rehabilitation centre "Vaivari" in April 2012. The service in this rehabilitation centre is available for every Latvian inhabitant, with respect of regional belonging.

In order to realise a family education research of children with special needs as a partnership comprehension in rural environment, the quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. The author has summed up and analysed 40 respondent answers about family education comprehension as a partnership, 20 from them were rural inhabitants who have a child with special needs and 20 citizens. Family members taking part in this research were 5-15 years old; questions are connected with children with special needs. Elder children with wide physical and mental disability spectrum are represented in this research that is connected with special needs concept.

14 men and 26 women in the age group of 22 to 47 participated in this research. The average age of respondents was 32.36 years (Mean (M) = 35.83; Standart Deviation (SD)=8.506). 22 respondents have secondary special education and secondary education, but 18 have higher education or not completed higher education (SD=0.504).

15 respondents with secondary special or secondary education lived in the rural area, but 7 in the city (SD=0.477); 12 citizens and 6 inhabitants from the rural area (SD=0.485) have obtained higher education. Inhabitants who are living in the city have a higher education level. Case of relatively similar education level does not support a discriminating myth about correlation of children with special needs and education level with uneducated and uninformed parent social strata.

The participants answered to 16 open and closed type questions, in order to specify family education comprehension, gather information about family education actuality and possible comprehension differences in families having children with special needs in cities and rural areas. The open-type questions provoked respondents to conceptualise ideas about family education and discover the main advantages and disadvantages in the city and rural areas. By answering closed inquiry questions, the respondents evaluated family education and partnership with Professional necessity in Likert scale.

IBM SPSS 20 packet was used for quantitative data analysis. The descriptive statistics indicators were defined and statistical Mann Whitney criteria was calculated, analysing differences of family education comprehension of respondents living in cities or rural areas.

Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the gained results were compared and integrated results were obtained providing a concept about significant family education comprehension aspects in rural area and brought forward assumptions for further question research.

#### **Results and Discussion**

##### *Comprehension aspects of family education*

Comparing given answers with J. Tomas, M. Arcus, and R. McPherson etc. approach for family education concept with emphasis to continuous disturbance overcoming knowledge and ability perfection subordinate to physical, psychological and social development period of family life, analogical view was marked.

Respondent comprehension about family life focuses on conceptual knowledge about disability production axis. There is knowledge that helps to understand children needs (64%), knowledge that turns to solution (19%) and knowledge whose production is specially organised in collaboration with specialists in a seminar form (17%). As the knowledge production aim, an opportunity to deal better with disability created consequences both to family, and child (65%) and optimal development of children with special needs (35%) appears in respondent opinions. Importance of family life development is not enough conscious in family education comprehension as underlined J. Tomas and M. Arcus (1992). As a negative attitude to family education component manifests a disbelief of necessary information of respondents who are living in rural area because previous experience displays situations in which families have to overcome lack of knowledge in solitude without professional help (82%).

In general, there are no fundamental differences in comprehension of family education concept between respondents that are living in the city or rural area because both city inhabitants (64%), and rural area inhabitants (63%) consider knowledge about children special needs as the fundamental family education components. Although the significant differences do not appear between respondents who are living in the rural area and city in family education concept comprehension, there are no differences depending on education level. People living in rural area and having children with special needs are more pessimistic about family education opportunities to change situation than those who are living in the city. It alludes to presently dominant negative or in drift left families, where children are with special needs, experience of disability's overcoming in the rural area; more over, it underlines disadvantages in existent family and professional collaboration system that has not been solved since 1999 when Concept of Family with children support was worked out.

#### *Components of family education comprehension*

Base of family education concept that in literature is related with knowledge and ability production and development to an optimal overcoming of disability (McPherson, 1998), is explicit represented in family education concept comprehension of research participants ( $M=9.2$ ) (McPherson, 1998). As an equivalent the family knowledge about themselves, children who have special needs in ability development and knowledge for mutual psychological support administration in family apart from specialists involvement ( $M=8$ ) were evaluated. This statement complies with E. Kozleski, P. Engelbrecht and R. Hess (2008) inter-culture research about increase of

family collaboration in activities and decision making, advancing a family autonomy.

The medical knowledge ( $M=7.1$ ) and social ability production ( $M=4.9$ ) are evaluated lower; that can partly be explained with a special medical care for children with special needs in various disability cases needed, so it will determine social activities present experience (see Fig. 1).

#### *Comparing of rural area and city conditions*

The conditions in the rural area cannot be unequivocally interpreted as a disadvantage for children with special needs and families satisfied existence. Although in researches (Darling and Gallagher, 2004; Skinner and Slifkin, 2007; Hornsby and Witte, 2010) dominates an opinion that families where children are with special needs have a chance to meet needs in the city environment easier, the research points out the factors that could be specifically positive to special needs satisfaction in the rural area (see Table 1).

Advantages of rural environment include traditional societies that are typically preserved in rural areas and could define stability that in respondent opinions balance on rural social isolation comprehension as a value. These opinions point to rural inhabitant insecurity in globalised today's society. An emphasis on an isolation advantage determines families where children are with special needs confrontation with lack of tolerance and negative society's attitude that can be avoided in rural environment from, keeping local connections. An advantage is also ecological factors that positively relate to health maintenance opportunities. Natural farm economical contribution and relative material rural inhabitant equality evaluation can be criteria to region backwardness

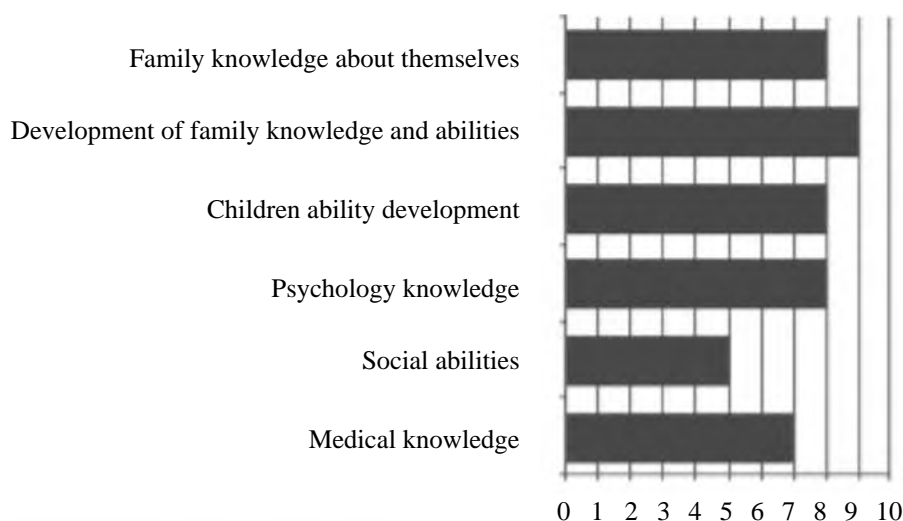


Figure 1. Evaluation of family education components in 10 points Likert scale.

from the city environmental trends, it purports about existence in agrarian society structures with an orientation to past socialism ideology. This situation also points to investments deficit and present government mechanism inefficiency.

Families having children with special needs percentage have to face with environmental barriers. Family real experience differs from inclusive education and even integrative education ideals. In rural regions there is a tendency not to enrol student with special needs in education institutions as well as there are various barriers – unavailable or hardly available benefits in common poorly developed infrastructure, lack of specialists, general unemployment and poverty, lack of information, transport and education problems. Analogical data were gained in foreign countries concluding that poverty together with mobility barriers and infrastructure features creates difficulties to satisfy special needs. The analogical

data were gained in foreign countries according to which the conclusion that poverty in combination with barriers for mobility and infrastructure factors defies to satisfy special needs was drawn (Skinner and Slifkin, 2007).

City environment is friendlier to families where children are with special needs but the barrier analysis shows that political interest in conceptual solution of problems in cities also influences special needs satisfaction.

In statistical analysis, families who have children with special needs and live in rural or city environment and their ability to deal with difficulties that disabilities have created is compared. In accordance with the empirical division indicators, data proceeding, reposing in descriptive statistic, non parametric statistic method – Mann Witney U criteria because  $Skewness_{calculate} |-0.792| > Skewness_{critical\ value} 0.533$

Table 1

**Comparison of rural and city environment factors**

Rural environment		City environment	
conductive factors	barriers	conductive factors	barriers
▪ traditional environment;	▪ favours are unavailable or are too far;	▪ available medical and rehabilitation favours;	▪ country disinterest;
▪ ecological environment, food	▪ lack of necessary specialists;	▪ guaranty with specialists;	▪ society intolerance;
▪ personalised education environment that define little classes at schools;	▪ no contact with families with analogical problems;	▪ favour and specialist choice opportunities;	▪ ecological factors (fresh air, food);
▪ special transport to education institutions;	▪ general unemployment and poverty;	▪ environment sustainability to children with movement disabilities (sidewalks etc.);	▪ high prices of goods and favours.
▪ tolerant society;	▪ lack of information;	▪ specialised kindergarten and schools;	
▪ protection from society;	▪ poor developed infrastructure;	▪ integration in comprehensive schools;	
▪ lack of psychological pressure;	▪ education institutions do not want to enrol students with special needs;	▪ opportunity to out-of-school interest development;	
▪ relative material equality;	▪ in problem case it is impossible to change education institution;	▪ culture environment availability.	
▪ economical contribution of natural farms.	▪ transport irregularity or lack; ▪ adjustment to school bus.		
Conductive factors in 43% of respondent views	Barriers in 57% of respondent views	Conductive factors in 84% of respondent views	Barriers in 16% of respondent views

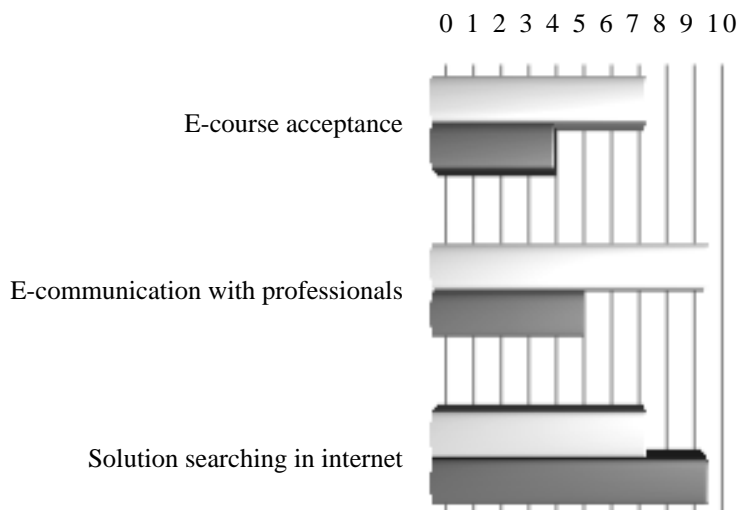


Figure 2. Evaluation of e - solutions in 10 points Likert scale: □ - in city; ■ - in rural area.

was chosen. Two sided importance level  $0.003 < 0.05$  confirms that there exists a statistically significant difference between ability of rural area and city environment inhabitants to overcome the difficulties that disabilities have created.

#### *Family education as a partnership comparing in rural area and city environment*

Evaluating statistically necessity of family education, there were not established statistically significant differences between respondent opinions of rural area or city environment because accounted two sided level is  $0.099 > 0.05$ . It means that families where children are with special needs see an opportunity to greater family independence from specialist favours both in the rural areas and city environments.

Respondent comprehension about family and professional partnership in a disability consequence prevention characterises statistically significant higher partnership evaluation to respondents that are living in cities ( $0.045 < 0.05$ ). In a rural area orientation to the traditional relationships with professionals in which families are information receivers than coordinators (Skinner and Slifkin, 2007) prevail. It can create the barriers to family education development and introduction in rural area environment although present situation confirms a necessity to activate and use family resources in the rural area.

The collaboration with professionals must have new characteristics, knowledge accordingly to society technological opportunities. Development of favourable infrastructure in rural areas can be a further perspective but the usage of technological opportunities – today's opportunity. Information obtained in e-environment, e-communication with specialists and online consultations, family education organisation in a type of e-course are some of future potentials (Zaidman-Zait and Jamieson, 2007).

Surveying the respondents from e-solutions that could increase family autonomy and with disability compared difficulties prevention of knowledge mobility, searching in the internet is accepted for information searching and searching of problem solution in rural areas ( $M=9$ ). Other solution types of e-communication (mails, skype etc.) with professionals in order to obtain the information or do online consultations are more acceptable in families that are living in cities. It is necessary to talk with rural area inhabitant about importance of e-opportunities, showing advantages of information and decreasing family isolation.

#### **Conclusions**

1. The essential steps in political action are made in the last decade, including family education content the family consulting and education and also marking platform of institutional realisation. But in reality, there is lack of coordinate institutional mechanism that provide efficient but simple and understandable family education algorithm with clear divided institution and professional responsibility sector and reasoned functions.
2. In family education concept it is necessary to include aspects of knowledge and possibilities that help families and their members to deal efficiently with physical, social and psychological consequences that disabilities have created and turn to family autonomy and development of decision making.
3. Family partnership with professional is differentiated from other environmental structure collaboration forms, underlining an involvement of political and institutional resources, interaction of family and school, medical care and rehabilitation specialists to equal partnership and activity bases.

4. Family orientation to traditional relationship with professionals in rural area where families are information receivers but not coordinators, social isolation is determined as a value that protects from social intolerance, comprehension that could make a risk to family isolation in the rural area where children are with special needs.
5. Technological opportunities of knowledge society can develop new solutions in family

educations that could be economically suitable and attainable with infrastructure improvements, using existent professionals and activating family resources. Information obtained in e-environment, e-communication with professionals and online consultations, family education organisations as e-courses can be future opportunity potentials.

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