

## THE ROLE OF PERSONAL ASSISTANT IN YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of the paper is to examine the need for a personal assistant in young people with disabilities. The sample of respondents consisted of young people with disabilities, chronologically aged 18-35, both genders, 50 of them, selected by random selection method from the Tuzla Canton area. The data obtained by the research were processed using the method of parametric and nonparametric statistics. Frequencies, percentages and measures of central tendency are calculated (arithmetic mean, standard deviation). The results obtained showed that there is a need for a personal assistant for young people with disabilities.*

**Keywords:** *young people with disabilities, personal assistant*

### INTRODUCTION

From birth to the stage of becoming independent, every man has the desire to become independent in all aspects of life (Anić, 2002). A person with disabilities is like any person with a different physical or mental condition or a disease that permanently disables the meeting of personal and social needs in everyday social and economic life (Žunić, 2001). Activities of everyday life include tasks for which a person is regularly prepared or as an addition to participate in his or her social roles and work in everyday life (Trombly, 1995). Managing social interactions is one of the most complex tasks people do (Masty and Schwab, 2006). An individual is one who does not depend on others

or does not want to depend on others, which does not mean that he/she does not need or does not want them (Husić-Đuzić, 2016). According to prudence about him/herself, the person sets the expectations of him/herself (King et al., 1993). These expectations can be real, but they can be lower or higher than what can really be achieved in a situation (Seligman, 2007). Self-esteem in people with disabilities is defined by the assessment of their own capacities for functioning in the social environment (Omolayo, 2009). The philosophy of independent living is the result of advocating the movement of persons with disabilities to regard the issue of disability as a matter of human rights, and not pity and exclusively social protection (Vučenović & Mastikosi, 2011).

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The personal assistant implies that the support of an assistant is aimed at meeting the needs of only one particular person with disabilities. This ensures the highest quality service, because it is provided according to the specific and individual needs of each user (Dinkić & Momčilović, 2005). The model of long-term person-oriented services for people with disabilities includes the following elements: rights and responsibilities of service users, individualized planning of services according to user needs, user choice, training and supervision of service providers, limited supervision by medical workers, flexible benefits - which include personal assistance, auxiliaries, environmental adjustments, user education, friends / allies, individualized funding of services through cash payments to users or authorizing users to pay for services through an agency or fiscal intermediary and monitoring service quality (Powers, 2003). A survey conducted by Rajkov and Ljubinković (2001) shows that people with disabilities mostly need support in movement and transportation, support related to the procurement of household work, support for social contacts, support for maintaining personal hygiene, assistance in education, support for performing professional duties, nutrition support (Rajkov & Ljubinković, 2001).

## **AIM OF THE PAPER**

The aim of the paper is to examine the need for personal assistants in young people with disabilities.

## **METHODS**

### **Sample respondents**

The sample of respondents consisted of two sub-samples. The first sub-sample consisted of young people with disabilities, chronologically aged 18–35, both genders, 50 of them. The second sub-sample consisted of young people without disabilities, chronologically aged 18–35, both genders, 50 of them, selected by random selection method from the Tuzla Canton area.

### **Method of conducting research**

The research was conducted over a period of two months during which field testing was carried out. Each respondent answered independently after previously having received instructions from the inter-

viewers. Respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement, or the degree of agreement or disagreement with the views expressed in the assertions. Young people with disabilities are interviewed individually. The time that was scheduled for the interview with each respondent is 15–25 minutes. Young people without disabilities are interviewed in groups. The time required to complete the questionnaires provided by this study is 15 minutes. All respondents were familiar with the research goal and were informed about how to complete the questionnaire.

## **Measuring instruments**

For the purposes of this research, the Questionnaire was used to examine the needs for a personal assistant (Bratovčić & Mehmedinović, 2015) containing 10 assertions, and examining the following problem areas: Would you be satisfied with the fact that you have a personal assistant?, How much would a personal assistant contribute to your independence? , How much would a personal assistant make it easier for you to participate in daily life activities?, Would you feel less useful or worthy to have a personal assistant?, Does your family act overprotective towards you?, How much would the presence of a personal assistant allow you to do the job activities that were previously unavailable to you?, How important would it be for you a personal assistant to be of the same gender as you?, Would the presence of a personal assistant interfere in personal contacts?, If you had the financial ability, would you pay personal assistance services yourself? , Do you think that financial assistance for the work of a personal assistant is exclusively a duty of the state? The respondents' task is to evaluate the degree of agreement on the scale from 1 to 5 with assertions related to their need for a personal assistant, 1 means that it is very bad and 5 means that it is very good.

## **Data processing methods**

The data obtained by the research were processed using the method of parametric and non-parametric statistics. Frequencies, percentages and measures of central tendency are calculated (arithmetic mean, standard deviation). The data is shown in the table. The data was processed in the statistical package SPSS 16 for Windows.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the data related to the age of the respondents, where we can see that in the sample of young per-

sons with disabilities, 31 of the respondents are aged 18–25 and 19 are aged between 26–35 years. In the group of persons without disabilities, 25 respondents were aged between 18 and 25 and 25 were aged between 26–35.

Table 1. The structure of the respondents by age

Age	People without disabilities		Disabled people	
	f	%	f	%
18-25	25	50.00	31	62.00
26-35	25	50.00	19	38.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.00</b>

According to the results shown in Table 2, it can be seen that women in the group of persons without disabilities represent 82% of the respondents, while

the group of persons with disabilities is approximately equal in gender: 52% male and 48% female respondents.

Table 2. The structure of respondents by gender

Respondents	Male		Female		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
People without disabilities	9	18.00	41	82.00	50	100.00
Disabled people	26	52.00	24	48.00	50	100.00

Based on the results from Table 3 it can be seen that in the sample of persons with disabilities the most represented persons are the ones with cerebral palsy (40%),

then multiple sclerosis (24%), spinal column injuries (16%), muscle dystrophy (10%), multiple disorders (4%), amputations (4%) and visual impairment (2%).

Table 3. The structure of respondents by type of disability

Type of invalidity	f	%
Multiple sclerosis	12	24.00
Cerebral paralysis	20	40.00
Muscular dystrophy	5	10.00
Amputations	2	4.00
Visual impairment	1	2.00
Spinal cord injury	8	16.00
Multiple disturbances	2	4.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.00</b>

According to the results shown in Table 4, it can be seen that in the group of persons without disabilities, the highest percentage of respondents are with a high professional education (76%), while in

the group of persons with disabilities the highest number of respondents are with completed secondary school in the regular curriculum (72%).

Table 4. The structure of respondents by the degree of professional education

Respondents	PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION											
	Elementary School		High school education		High school education - special program		College education		High qualification		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
People without disabilities	0	.00	11	22.00	0	.00	1.00	2.00	38	76.00	<b>50</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Disabled people	1	2.00	36	72.00	4	8.00	3.00	6.00	6	12.00	<b>50</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The results of the assessment of the need for a personal assistant for young people with disabilities are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Perception of the need for a personal assistant for young people with disabilities

Ordinal number	QUESTIONS	The total or partial disagreement		The total or sufficient agreement	
		f	%	f	%
1.	Would you be satisfied with the fact that you have a personal assistant ?	7	14.00	43	86.00
2.	How much would a personal assistant contribute to your independence?	8	16.00	42	84.00
3.	How much would a personal assistant make it easier for you to participate in daily life activities?	10	20.00	40	80.00
4.	Would you feel less useful or worthy to have a personal assistant?	42	84.00	8	16.00
5.	Does your family act overprotective towards you?	33	66.00	17	34.00
6.	How much would the presence of a personal assistant allow you to do the job activities that were previously unavailable to you?	21	42.00	29	58.00
7.	How important would it be for you a personal assistant to be of the same gender as you?	48	96.00	2	4.00
8.	Would the presence of a personal assistant interfere in personal contacts?	45	90.00	5	10.00
9.	If you had the financial ability, would you pay personal assistance services yourself?	45	90.00	5	10.00
10.	Do you think that financial assistance for the work of a personal assistant is exclusively a duty of the state?	3	6.00	47	94.00

By looking at the results shown in Table 1, it can be seen that most young people with disabilities want to have a personal assistant (86%); (84%) also think that a personal assistant would contribute to their independence, and 80% of the respondents feel that the personal assistants would facilitate their participation in the activities of everyday life. Also, most respondents, about (94%) of them think that financial assistance for the work of a personal assistant should be exclusively within the competence of the state. How-

ever, more than half of the respondents (58%) think that the presence of a personal assistant would enable them to deal with activities that were previously unavailable to them. Most young people with disabilities (84%) would not feel less useful or worthy to have a personal assistant, while (96%) of the respondents do not care if their personal assistant is of the same gender as themselves, and (90%) of the respondents consider that the presence of a personal assistant would not interfere with personal contacts.

## DISCUSSION

Support received by young people with disabilities from friends and parents can be one of the drivers of a successful and independent way of life. The desire to be independent and lack support from the immediate family and the people surrounding them is a barrier that young people with disabilities can face (Husić-Đuzić, 2016). Although the development of technology and access to the Internet enables and facilitates communication between people and the creation of wider social networks, however, social life on the Internet cannot meet the needs of the person for support and social belonging either in quantitative or qualitative terms (Rakić-Bajić & Hedrih, 2012). Research conducted by Bratovčić and Mehmedinović (2015) suggests that young people with disabilities have fewer opportunities to develop social relationships, networks and social interaction with their peers because they do social interaction indirectly through parents, family members and, in particular, the Internet. Social support does not always have to mean positive experience, especially in the context of independence (Karačić, 2012). Accepting help from other people can create a sense of addiction or inferiority in some, and these are cases where social support can be harmful because it does not allow recipients of social support to develop their own resources to handle stressful situations (Arsenović & Pantelić, 2014).

Bratovčić and Mehmedinović (2015), in a survey conducted with young people and their families, have come to the conclusion that most of the young people with disabilities and their parents considered that they need a personal assistant. If they were able, a high percentage of young people (80%) and their parents (70.5%) would pay for the services of a personal assistant. Also, (87.5%) of young people and (100%) of their parents consider that financial assistance for a personal assistant should be exclusively the obligation of the state. However, parents of young people with disabilities identify with a personal assistant and feel that they are doing the best work, and for them a personal assistant is someone who could replace them when they no longer exist. The results of this research indicate that young people with disabilities and their parents are not familiar with the role of personal assistant or the real benefits of personal assistance service for the independence of persons with disabilities. The results point to the need to undertake actions aimed at strengthening the capacity of young people with dis-

abilities and their families in terms of education and information on the rights of persons with disabilities and the strengthening of the personal and social skills necessary to fight for their rights. According to a survey related to the support of other people in carrying out activities of daily life, the results showed that, out of the total number of respondents, (92.2%) answered the question that relates to the support of others in carrying out activities of daily life. More than half of these people believe that they do not need any support from other people in performing these activities (63.3%). Among respondents who stated that they need support in daily life activities, they mostly refer to performing administrative work, leaving the place of residence, doing housework, moving and transport (Ljubinković, 2009). The results of the survey show that people with disabilities often need the following types of support: support in movement and transportation, support related to the procurement of household work, support for social contacts, support for maintaining personal hygiene, assistance in education, support for performing professional duties, nutrition support (Rajkov & Ljubinković, 2001).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the obtained results of the research itself, the following conclusions can be made:

- most young people with disabilities want to have a personal assistant,
- they believe that a personal assistant would contribute to their independence in the activities of everyday life,
- financial assistance for the work of a personal assistant should be exclusively the obligation of the state,
- the presence of a personal assistant would allow them to deal with activities that were previously unavailable to them.

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