

**Research about overprotection in the lives of
persons with intellectual disability
in Malta
(Easy-to-read summary in English)**

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Introduction

In Malta, very often persons with intellectual disability experience overprotection from their parents, other family members and those who work with them.



Persons with intellectual disability can be independent. Being independent does not mean that you do everything on your own, but that you decide and have help from other people for those things that you cannot do on your own. Very often, however, persons with intellectual disability do not have this kind of help.

Parents or those who look after persons with intellectual disability very often think that the person will be harmed if they are allowed to decide for themselves. This leads to parents overprotecting their sons and daughters and not allowing them to go out on their own and to go to the places they want to go to.

Since persons with intellectual disability in Malta continue to live with their parents for a long time, they continue to experience this overprotection.



Why we did this research

Research helps us learn more about something, and to talk to different people to learn more. This research was done so that we know more about the following:



- Overprotection by parents on persons with intellectual disability
- Why there is this overprotection
- What can be done to remove overprotection

How we did this research

To have information about overprotection, we held 10 meetings with different people:

- 3 meetings with 17 persons with intellectual disability in Malta and Gozo
- 3 meetings with 14 parents of persons with intellectual disability in Malta and Gozo
- 4 meetings with 18 staff who persons with intellectual disability in Malta and Gozo.



What we learnt from the research

Work

Some persons with intellectual disability who took part in the research work *part-time* or *full-time*, some attend day centres, and some stay at home watching television.

These are the things that help persons with intellectual disability to find a job and keep it:

- During the last 10 years, there are more job opportunities for persons with intellectual disability in places such as hotels and offices.



- Persons with disability can now keep the disability allowance even when they work.
- Since employers now need to employ disabled persons, there are more who are finding a job.

Benefits of working

The persons we spoke to said that you don't go to work only for the pay. There are other benefits too:

- You meet other people and talk to them
- You continue learning after you have left school
- You learn new things, like how to use the bus



It is very important that someone explains to parents of persons with intellectual disability about the importance of work for their sons and daughters.



Different experiences in the world of work

Some of those who took part in the research are happy at work. Others find problems, such as:

- Persons with intellectual disability who are placed on a scheme and works for some time, but when the scheme ends the employer does not keep them on.
- Persons are given work which they find difficult to do on their own.
- Persons are given repetitive work.
- Problems with co-workers, especially for those who have a hidden disability.



Why many persons with intellectual disability don't work

Some of those who took part in the research mentioned many reasons why persons with intellectual disability do not work. Some of the reasons are as follows:

- Persons with disability who have to leave work because they are not treated well by their co-workers.
- They don't find suitable work for them.
- Parents who think that that their sons and daughters are not capable of working or that they will not be treated well if they work, so it is better if they stay at home.



- Problems when persons with intellectual disability cannot go to work on their own, for example because they do not use the bus on their own.
- Problems with employers, who sometimes are afraid of employing persons with intellectual disability or do not treat them well.

Housework

Housework is important because it enables a person to be more independent. Parents who took part in the research said that their sons and daughters do very little housework. Some persons with intellectual disability however help out both at home and at the day centre.

Going out with friends and enjoying yourself

Going out is very important for everyone.



Going out with family



Many of those who took part in the research said that very often persons with intellectual disability only go out with their family because they don't have friends. In Gozo, this happens even more.

Going out with other persons

Those who took part in the research said that few persons with intellectual disability have the opportunity to go out with other persons. This often happens because they don't have transport and don't have enough money to go out.



What parents think about going out

Many parents of persons with intellectual disability worry when their sons and daughters go out and there is no one to take care of them. They also worry when they go out with someone who doesn't have a disability and doesn't work in the disability sector.

Staff who work in day centres said that they organise activities for persons with intellectual disability to become more independent.

Parents of persons with intellectual disability said that they allow their sons and daughters to go out if they know that where they are going will be of benefit to them.

What persons with intellectual disability would like



Persons with intellectual disability would like to do the same things as other people their own age.

Since there aren't many community services, many persons with intellectual disability depend on their family to go out.

Furthermore, many persons with intellectual disability go out with other persons with intellectual disability. They do not always do this because they want to but because other persons don't want to go out with them.



Changes needed in society about going out

There are many things in society that need to change so that everyone is included. For example:

- Those who work with persons with intellectual disability need to continue learning and to involve them more in their work.
- Some persons with disability, such as those who have an intellectual disability and those who use a wheelchair have fewer opportunities to go out and to be accepted.
- There should be more opportunities for persons with intellectual disability to go out, especially in the community.



Public Transport

Knowing how to use the bus is important. Persons with intellectual disability meet the following problems with transport:

- Parents who are afraid of allowing their daughters and sons to use the bus.
- Most of the persons with intellectual disability who took part do not use the bus on their own.
- Many of them don't use the bus because no one has taught them how to use it.
- There are those who don't use the bus because it isn't always good.



Money

- Very few persons who took part in the research use money on their own and parents help them with their money.
- There are parents who help them use money independently and those who keep the money and manage it for them.
- There are persons with intellectual disability who are taught how to use money and also how to use the debit card.



Mobile phonecalls

- The mobile is very important for communication.
- Many persons with intellectual disability who took part in the research said that they don't like it when parents or other people keep calling them when they go out.
- Persons with intellectual disability who don't go out on their own don't have a mobile.



Technology

- Many of those who took part in the research know how to use technology like mobiles, tables and others because they are easy to use.



Intimate relationships

- Personw with intellectual disability who have a boyfriend or girlfriend sometimes have problems to enjoy their relationship, even if they are over 18 years of age.
- There are parents and other family members who interfere in these relationships, especially with those of their daughters. Sometimes they don't let them meet their boyfriend or girlfriend.
- There are some persons with intellectual disability who are afraid of going out with someone because they might get hurt.
- There are many people who do not recognise that persons with intellectual disability can have a serious relationship and keep treating them like children.
- Many people think that persons with intellectual disability do not hae sexual desires.
- There is also a lack of education about sexuality.



How other people behave with persons with intellectual disability

- Many of those who took part in the research said that other people treat persons with intellectual disability well.
- Some persons with intellectual disability said they are afraid of going out with those who do not have a disability because they can make fun of them or ignore them.
- Many people pity persons with disability.
- Persons with challenging behaviour experience more problems being accepted by others.



Wishes for the future

Persons with intellectual disability who took part in the research have these wishes for the future:

- That they have their own home and have someone helping them where they need support.
- Some would like to have a boyfriend or girlfriend or want to get married.
- Some want to find a job.
- Some want to go abroad.
- In Gozo, there are some persons who want to live in Malta or want to have a holiday in Malta.



It is very important that we always listen to what persons with intellectual disability themselves want and that they have more opportunities to speak.

Services for persons with intellectual disability too should work with these persons according to what they want, for example regarding going out and friendship.

There is also a need for these things to change in society:

- Persons with intellectual disability need to become more independent and more respected by others.
- We should not pity persons with intellectual disability.
- There should be more awareness so that people learn more about persons with intellectual disability and learn that everyone should be treated as equal.



Services for persons with intellectual disability

- Services for persons with intellectual disability need to keep improving.
- Services should be adapted to the needs of persons with intellectual disability, and there is a need for them to have more opportunities to go out, and form friendships and relationships.



- There is a need for persons with intellectual disability to live more independently in houses and flats and that they have help to find work.
- It is important that day centres have a small number of clients so that they can give them more attention.
- Education for persons with intellectual disability should continue after the age of 16 and there should be real inclusion.

Overprotection



There are times when parents have good reasons to protect their sons and daughters because they worry that something will happen to them if they are on their own.

Parents need help so that they can then provide their daughters and sons with the help they need and to allow them to be free.

In Malta, parents tend to overprotect all their children, even those who do not have an intellectual disability.

Persons with intellectual disability can learn a lot, much more than many people think that they are capable of.



It is important that persons with intellectual disability learn to speak up for themselves.

A few final words

After we had finished the research, we held a conference to talk about what we learnt about overprotection in the lives of people with intellectual disability in Malta. Two disabled persons who took part in the discussion made the following comments:

One said: 'They don't see what we are capable of. Give the person a chance. It shouldn't always be parents who speak on our behalf.'

And the other said: 'We aren't objects. We are people. We should be accepted not tolerated.'