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Parenthood and reproduction of
persons with intellectual disability:
ethical-descriptive comparative
research probe into the moral
preferences of professional staff of
social service homes and teachers of
special primary schools

Abstract

In this article, we present a part of data from two researches that focused on attitudinal and behavioural attributes of sexuality of people with intellectual disabilities and their socio-cultural and ethical contexts. This article represents a comparative research probe into the moral preferences in area of parenthood and reproduction of people with intellectual disabilities, and of professional staff of social service homes and teachers of special primary schools in Slovakia. As a research tool, we used part of standardized Attitude Questionnaire ASQ - Attitudes to Sexuality Questionnaire (Individuals With An Intellectual Disability) from authors Cuskelly, Gilmore (2007). The results demonstrate that the moral preferences of reproduction and parenthood of persons with intellectual disabilities are mostly negative, even though teachers of special primary schools more morally accept rights of reproduction and parenthood, compared to professional staff of social service homes.

Key words: Reproduction. Parenthood. Intellectual disability. Sexuality. Morality. Special primary school. Social service homes.

INTRODUCTION¹

The question of parenthood and reproduction of people with intellectual disabilities belong to the morally controversial topics. In Slovakia, the scientific discourse in this area is marginal and in practical level, the professional staff that provides services to persons with intellectual disabilities, as well as pedagogical staff or parents, are forced to solve moral dilemmas without an adequate expert analysis or help.

Several studies in this area point to the fact that sexual and reproductive rights of individuals with intellectual disability are violated. For instance, Frohmader and Ortolev (2013) state that this is happening through practices such as forced sterilization, forced birth-control, limited or no birth-control options, focus on menstrual and sexual repression, forced abortions, termination of parental rights, denial/or forced marriage and other forms of torture and violence, as well as system exclusion from services in the area of sexual and reproductive health service.

These procedures of rights abuse are formulated in the context of traditional social attitudes and stereotypes that continue to characterize disability as a “personal tragedy”, the load suitable for medical care and rehabilitation (Frohmader and Ortolev, 2013). Several authors (Walter, 1980; Bazalová, 2009; Mikulec, 2009 and others) agree that barriers and prejudices, sexually hostile environment at home and school create “secondary social disability” that affects subjective well-being of the individuals with intellectual disability far more than their primary intellectual disability. According to Walter (1980), sexuality of people with intellectual disabilities and their individual sexual behaviour primarily depends on tolerance and range of moral attitudes and bans of parents and caregivers.

RESEARCH

In this text, we present a small segment of the results of two broader researches that were conducted in the years 2011 and 2014 and were aimed at attitudinal and behavioural attributes of sexuality of the individuals with intellectual disabilities and their socio-cultural and ethical contexts. We specifically focus on the comparison of the results on moral preferences in the area of reproduction and parenthood of the persons with intellectual disabilities according to professional staff of social service homes (research in 2011) and teachers of special primary schools (research in 2014).

RESEARCH METHODS

Overall, we have combined both, qualitative and quantitative approach and have used various research methods. Moral preferences of the research participants in the area of parenthood and reproduction of men and women with intellectual disabilities were (among others) studied by means of the standardized attitudinal questionnaire ASQ – Attitudes to Sexuality Questionnaire (Individuals with an Intellectual Disability) by Australian authors Cuskelly, Gilmore (2007). Since we have

¹ This article was created with the support of VEGA grant 1/0286/14: *Behavioural and attitudinal attributes of youth with mild intellectual disabilities in the context of risk and prevention.*

focused this report on the area of reproduction of the individuals with intellectual disabilities, each part of the questionnaire - Attitudes to sexuality questionnaire (Individuals with an intellectual disability: ASQ – ID) was modified according to topic to these areas: reproduction, partnership, sexuality and sex education. In the following text, we present research findings that covered the topic of reproduction.

RESEARCH GROUP²

The first research group was composed of professional staff of social service homes from Prešov and Košice Self-governing Region. The research was conducted among 259 professional staff of social service homes in 2011. The second research group consisted of teachers of special primary schools (n = 322) and the research was carried out in 2014. None of the research group was a representative selection.

RESEARCH FINDINGS³

The differences in the responses of professional staff of social service homes, as well as the responses of teachers of special primary schools to the questionnaire items of *Attitudes to sexuality questionnaire* (Individuals with an intellectual disability: ASQ – ID) regarding the area of reproduction and parenthood of the individuals with intellectual disabilities will be described in more details by means of percentage (graphs 1-8) and average.

Through Mann-Whitney U test, we have tested statistical significance of differences in the responses of professional staff of social service homes and teachers of special primary schools to the items being monitored. Based on the results of Mann-Whitney U test (not published here), we have found out a statistically significant difference on 5% significance level in the responses of professional staff of social service homes and teachers of special primary schools to all items of the questionnaire, apart from this one: “Women with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to get married providing that either them or their partners were sterilized.”

Percentage representation of the responses related to moral preferences of professional staff of social service homes and the teachers of special primary schools in relation to the items being monitored in the *Attitudes to sexuality questionnaire* (Individuals with an intellectual disability: ASQ – ID) in the area of reproduction are presented in the graphs 1-8 below.

Their analysis begins with this item: “With the right support, women with intellectual disabilities can raise well-balanced children” (graph 1.A). Most frequently, professional staff of social service homes “disagreed” (34 %) with this statement and 27 % of them responded that they “rather disagree”. The average was 2.3. These results indicate that professional staff of social service homes rather disagree with this item of the questionnaire.

² For detailed characteristics of research groups, see in: Marková, Lištiak Mandzáková (2015).

³ For more detailed results concerning attitudes towards reproduction of the persons with intellectual disabilities in ethical contexts, see in: Marková, Lištiak Mandzáková (2013, 2015).

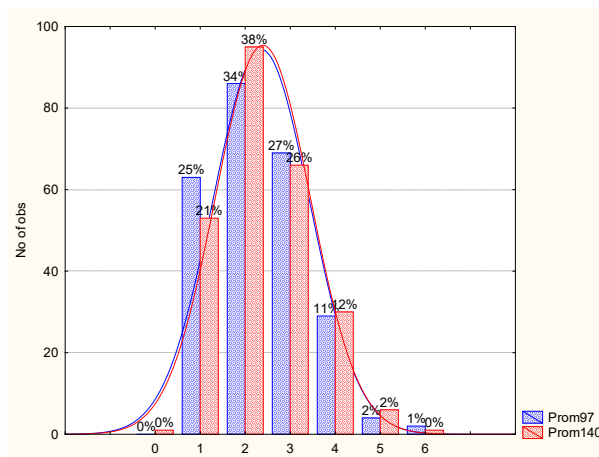
According to the responses of professional staff of social service homes to the item: “With the right support, men with intellectual disabilities can raise well-balanced children” (graph 1.A), 38% of them “disagreed”; 26 % of our research participants “rather disagreed” and 21% of them “strongly disagreed”. The average was 2.36. As can be seen from the results concerning both, men and women with intellectual disabilities, professional staff of social service homes rather disagree with this item.

Following the analysis of responses given by teachers of special primary schools to the item: “With the right support, women with intellectual disabilities can raise well-balanced children” (graph 1.B) it is shown that our research participants most frequently responded that they “rather agree” (stated by 27% of them) and another 27% “rather disagreed” with this item. The average was 3.4.

Regarding men with intellectual disabilities (graph 1.B), teachers of special primary schools most frequently responded that they “rather agree” (32 %) and 25 % of them “rather disagree” with this statement. The average was 3.3. According to teachers of special primary schools, regarding men and women with intellectual disabilities, their responses are quite dispersed.

Based on our findings, teachers of special primary schools more morally approve parenthood of individuals with intellectual disabilities if they get the right support, in comparison with professional staff of social service homes.

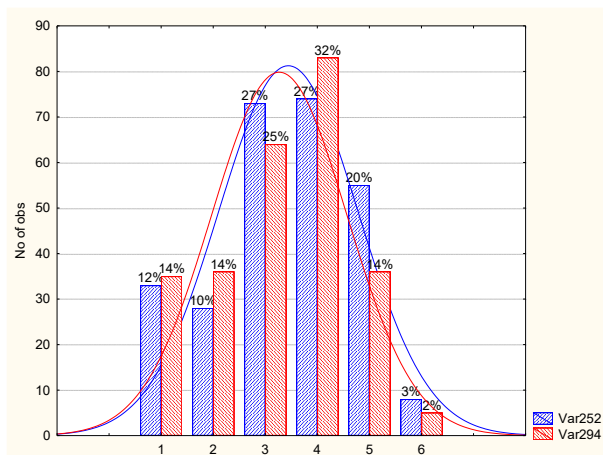
Graph 1.A: With the right support, women/men⁴ with intellectual disabilities can raise well-balanced children (professional staff of social service homes)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

4 First column of each graph in this article always refers to women with intellectual disabilities, while the second one refers to men with intellectual disabilities.

Graph 1.B: With the right support, women/men with intellectual disabilities can raise well-balanced children (teachers of special primary schools)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Regarding the statement that “Women with intellectual disabilities should be legally prohibited to have a child when they get married” (graph 2.A), majority of professional staff of social service homes included in our research “rather agreed” with this statement – according to 30% of the respondents, and 28% of them “agreed” (average 3.9).

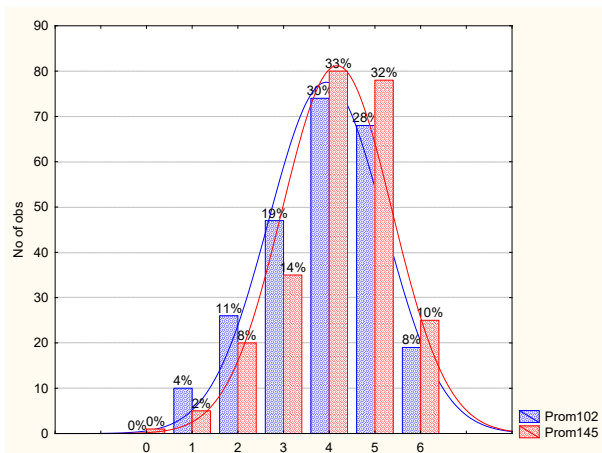
In relation to men with intellectual disabilities (graph 2.A), professional staff of social service homes most frequently responded that they “rather agree” – 33 % of them and 32 % of the respondents “agreed” (the average 4.1). The responses presented here indicate a predominant moral approval of legal prohibition to have children for both, men and women with intellectual disabilities, according to professional staff of social service homes.

21% of special primary schools’ teachers included in our research “rather disagreed” with the statement that “Women with intellectual disabilities should be legally prohibited to have a child when they get married” (graph 2.B), 21% of them “disagreed” and another 21% stated that they “rather agree”. The average was 3.1.

“Men with intellectual disabilities should be legally prohibited to have a child when they get married” – special primary schools’ teachers most frequently responded that they “rather disagree” with this item of the questionnaire (35 %), as it is shown in graph 2.B. 22% of them “disagreed” and 21% of them “rather agreed”. The average was 3.2.

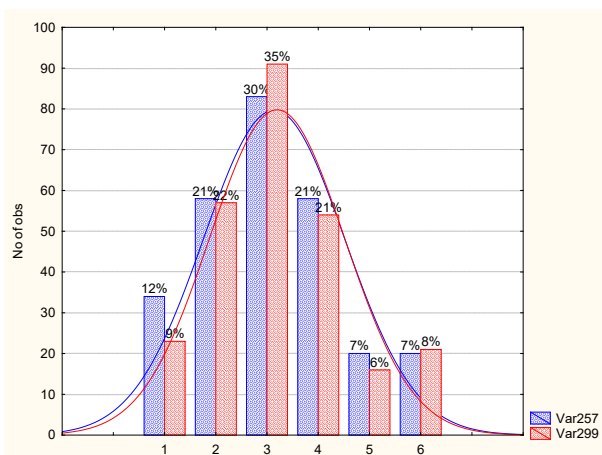
As the results indicate, teachers of special primary schools more morally approve parenthood in the marriage of individuals with intellectual disabilities, in comparison with professional staff of social service homes.

Graph 2.A: When women/men with intellectual disabilities get married, they should be legally prohibited to have a child (professional staff of social service homes)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Graph 2.B: When women/men with intellectual disabilities get married, they should be legally prohibited to have a child (teachers of special primary schools)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Regarding the statement that “Women with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to get married only provided that, either them or their partners have been sterilized”, professional staff of social service homes responded that they “rather disagree” with this item (29% of them) - as shown in graph 3.A. The average was 3.08. The responses to this item however, were quite differentiated.

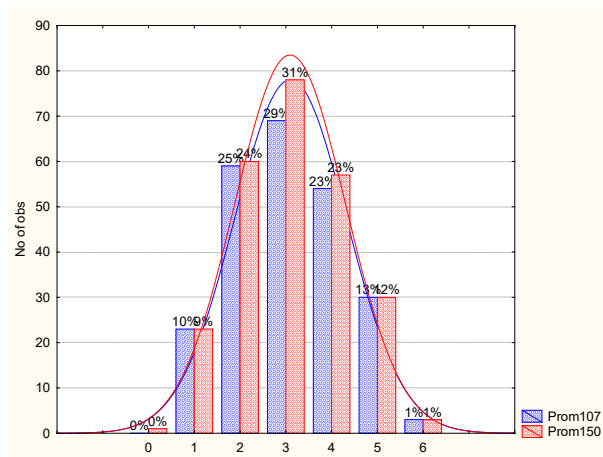
Based on the responses to the item that “Men with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to get married only provided that, either them or their partners have been sterilized”, professional staff of social service homes most frequently stated that they “rather disagree” – 31 % of them and 24 % of the respondents “disagreed”. Another 23% of the individuals included in this research “rather agreed” with this

item (the average 3.07). The answers to this item were relatively dispersed - considering both, men and women with intellectual disabilities.

According to the responses of teachers of special primary schools' teachers, 31% of them "rather disagreed" with the statement that "Women with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to get married only provided that, either them or their partners have been sterilized". 33% of them "rather disagree" with the statement that "Men with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to get married only provided that, either them or their partners have been sterilized", which was their most frequent response (graph 3.B). In relation to this item, the average 3.3 referred to the assessment of women with intellectual disabilities, the average 3.4 to the assessment of men with intellectual disabilities.

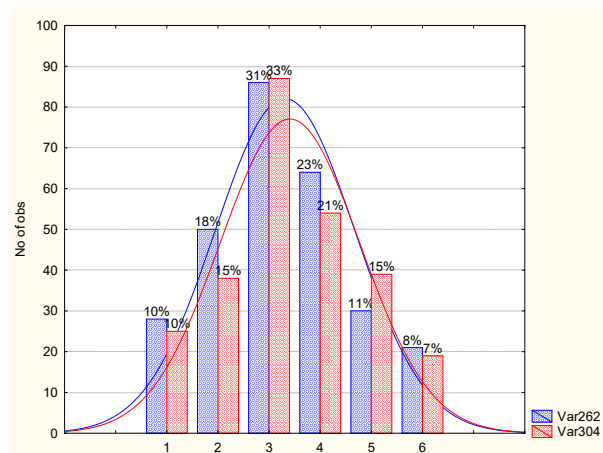
We have not determined any statistically significant differences in the responses of professional staff of social service homes, as well as teachers of special primary schools to the item that "Women with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to get married only provided that, either them or their partners have been sterilized" through Mann-Whitney U test. To sum up, teachers of special primary schools more morally approve marriage of men with intellectual disabilities (providing that at least one of the partners has been sterilized), in comparison with professional staff of social service homes.

Graph 3.A: Women/men with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to get married provided that, either them or their partners have been sterilized (professional staff of social service homes)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Graph 3.B: Women/men with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to get married provided that, either them or their partners have been sterilized (teachers of special primary schools)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Professional staff of social service homes most often reported two answers: “I rather agree” (38 %) and “I agree” (38 %) to the item that “Staff providing services and parents should discourage women with intellectual disabilities from having children” (graph 4.A). The average was 4.41. Even the responses to this item show rather negative moral preferences of professional staff, regarding reproduction of women with intellectual disabilities.

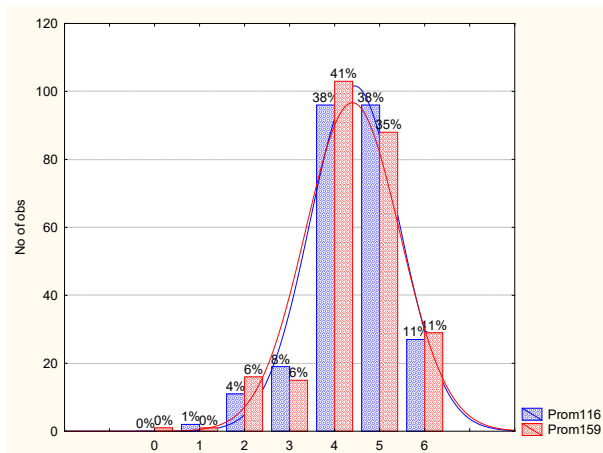
In relation to men with intellectual disabilities, professional staff of social service homes responded to the same item that “Staff providing services and parents should discourage men with intellectual disabilities from having children” by two most frequent answers – “I rather agree” (41 %) and “I agree” (35 %), as it is presented in graph 4.A. The average was 4.36. Similarly, as with women with intellectual disabilities, we can see rather negative views of reproduction of men with intellectual disabilities, according to our research participants.

32% of special primary schools’ teachers most often “rather disagreed” with the item that “Staff providing services and parents should discourage women with intellectual disabilities from having children” (graph 4.B). 25% of them “rather agreed”. The average was 3.5.

“Staff providing services and parents should discourage men with intellectual disabilities from having children” – teachers of special primary schools most frequently “rather disagreed” with this item (36 %), as it is presented in graph 4.B and 28 % of the respondents “rather agreed”. The average was 3.5.

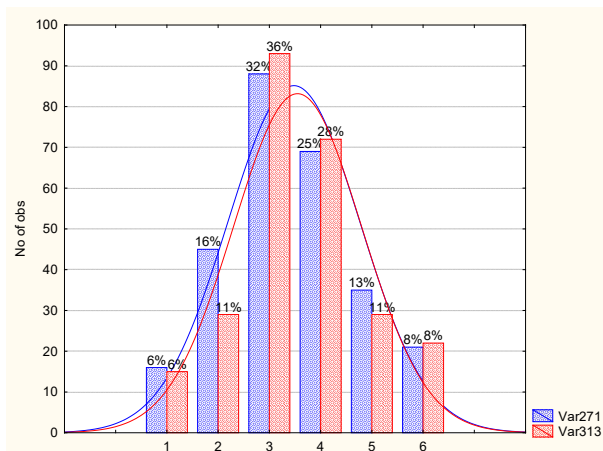
Based on our findings, teachers of special primary schools more morally approve parenthood of the individuals with intellectual disabilities than professional staff of social service homes.

Graph 4.A: Staff providing services and parents should discourage women/men with intellectual disabilities from having children (professional staff of social service homes)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Graph 4.B: Staff providing services and parents should discourage women/men with intellectual disabilities from having children (teachers of special primary schools)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

“If possible, women with intellectual disabilities should be involved in decisions on their sterilization.” The responses of professional staff of social service homes to this item, as well as their percentage representation, are presented in graph 5.A. The average was 3.54 and our respondents most frequently stated that they “rather agree” (25 %) with this item; 25% of them “rather disagreed” and another 25% “agreed”.

Graph 5.A presents percentage representation of the responses of professional staff of social service homes to the item that applies to men with intellectual disabilities – “If possible, men with intellectual disabilities should be involved in decisions on

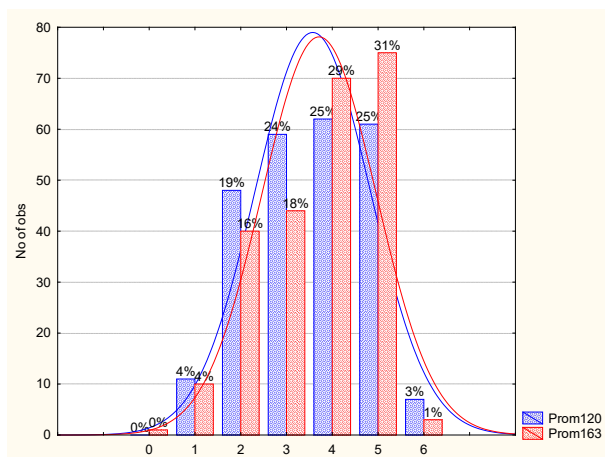
their sterilization.” The majority of our respondents (31%) “agreed” with this item, 29% of them “rather agreed” (the average 3.68). However, the responses are quite disperse.

Based on the responses of special primary schools’ teachers to the item: “If possible, women with intellectual disabilities should be involved in decisions on their sterilization” (graph 5.B), the analysis shows that our respondents “rather agreed” (33%) and another 21% “agreed” with this item. The average was 3.9.

Regarding men with intellectual disabilities (graph 5.B), the most frequent answer stated by teachers of special primary schools was “I rather agree” – chosen by 32% of the respondents and 27% of them “agreed” with this statement. The average was 4.0.

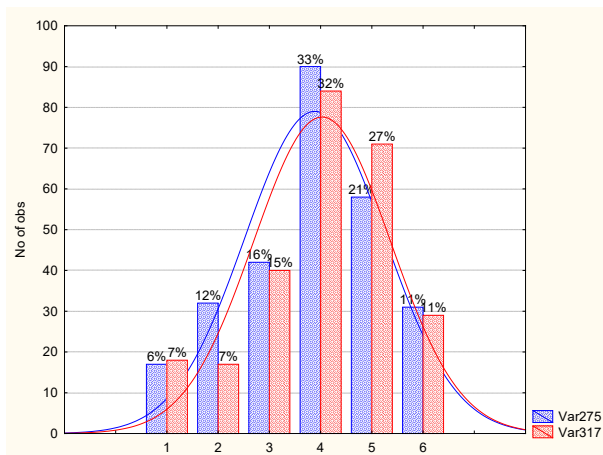
The responses related to involvement of the individuals with intellectual disabilities in decisions concerning their potential sterilization are quite disperse, according to both groups of research participants. Comparing the results, however, it can be concluded that teachers of special primary schools more morally approve involvement of persons with intellectual disabilities in decisions concerning their potential sterilization than professional staff of social service homes.

Graph 5.A: If possible, women/men with intellectual disabilities should be involved in decisions on their sterilization (professional staff of social service homes)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Graph 5.B: If possible, women/men with intellectual disabilities should be involved in decisions on their sterilization (teachers of special primary schools)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

The responses “I agree” (41 %) and “I rather agree” (36 %) dominated when asking professional staff of social service homes about the following item: “Guidance on birth-control should be fully available for women with intellectual disabilities whose disability level allows of sexual activity.” (graph 6.A). The average is 4.37.

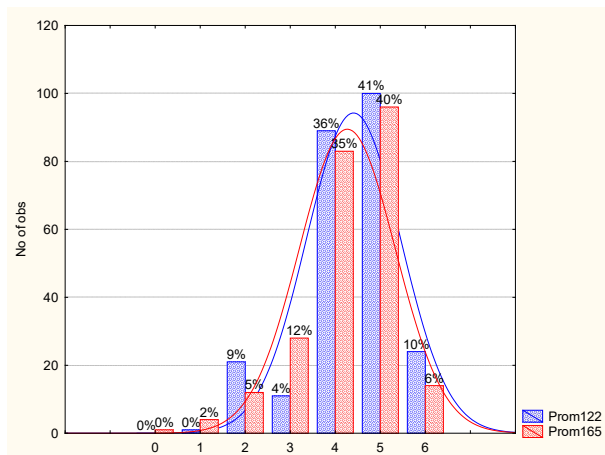
As can be seen in graph 6.A, the responses “I agree” (40 %) and “I rather agree” (35 %) dominated when responding to the statement that “Guidance on birth-control should be fully available for men with intellectual disabilities whose disability level allows of sexual activity,” according to the responses of professional staff of social service homes. The average was 4.2.

Teachers of special primary schools most frequently “strongly agreed” – 32% of them, and “agreed” – 28% of them, to the statement that “Guidance on birth-control should be fully available for women with intellectual disabilities whose disability level allows of sexual activity” (graph 6.B) - average was 4.6.

Considering men with intellectual disabilities, 42% of special primary schools’ teachers “agreed” and 25% of them “strongly agreed” with the statement that “Guidance on birth-control should be fully available for men with intellectual disabilities whose disability level allows of sexual activity”, as presented in graph 6.B. The average was 4.7.

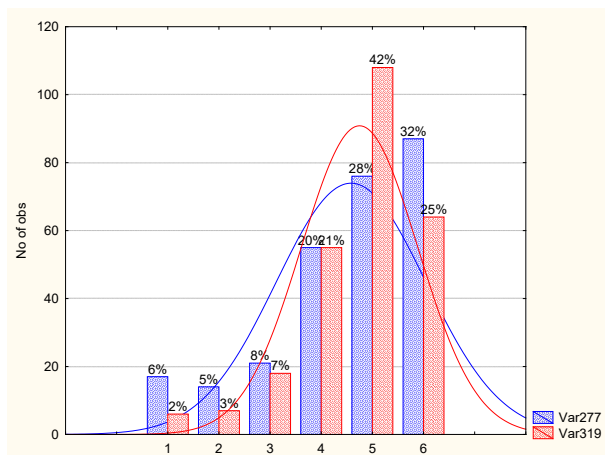
An analysis of the responses of professional staff of social service homes, as well as teachers of special primary schools indicate that guidance on birth-control is rather highly morally approved considering men/women with intellectual disabilities, even though it is more morally approved by teachers of special primary schools, in comparison with professional staff of social service homes.

Graph 6.A: Guidance on birth-control should be fully available for men/women with intellectual disabilities whose level of disability allows of sexual activity (professional staff of social service homes)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Graph 6.A: Guidance on birth-control should be fully available for men/women with intellectual disabilities whose disability level allows of sexual activity (teachers of special primary schools)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

The following item - “Sterilization is appropriate (desirable) for women with intellectual disabilities”, is most frequently approved by professional staff of social service homes (graph 7.A). The majority of them “agreed” and “rather agreed” (29%) with this statement. The average was 4.04.

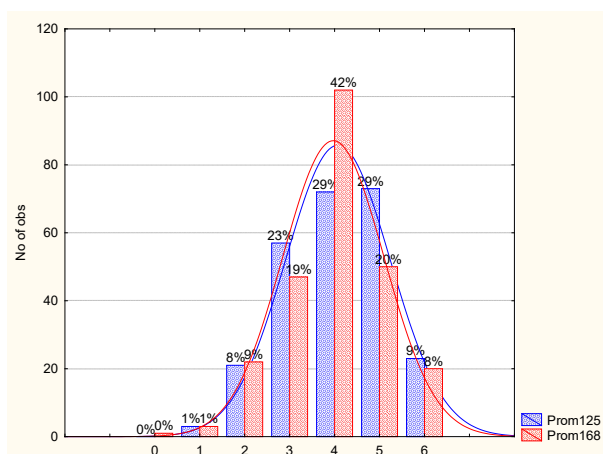
As far as men are concerned, the responses to the item that “Sterilization is appropriate (desirable) for men with intellectual disabilities” are presented in graph 7.A, as well. 42% of professional staff of social service homes “rather agreed” with this statement, with the average of 3.94.

Based on the responses of special primary schools' teachers, 30% of them stated that they "rather agree" with the statement that "Sterilization is appropriate (desirable) for women with intellectual disabilities", as presented in graph 7.B. The average was 3.6.

As can be seen from graph 7.B, 36% of special primary schools' teachers "rather agreed" and another 25% of them "rather disagreed" with the statement that "Sterilization is appropriate (desirable) for men with intellectual disabilities". The average was 3.6.

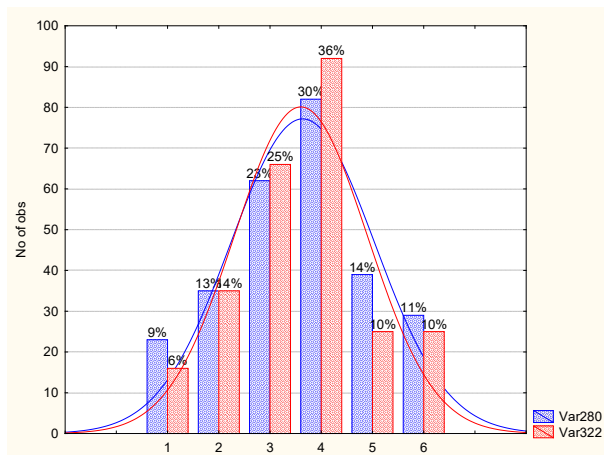
Based on the comparison of our results we can sum up, that teachers of special primary schools morally disapprove sterilization of the individuals with intellectual disabilities more than professional staff of social service homes.

Graph 7.A: Sterilization is appropriate (desirable) for women/men with intellectual disabilities (professional staff of social service homes)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Graph 7.B: Sterilization is appropriate (desirable) for women/men with intellectual disabilities (teachers of special primary schools)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

According to percentage representation of the responses presented by professional staff of social service homes, there is prevalence of “I disagree” responses (38%) to the statement that “Women with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to have children in marriage” (graph 8.A). Overall, the results show disapproval of this statement, stated by majority of professional staff of social service homes included in our research (average 2.3).

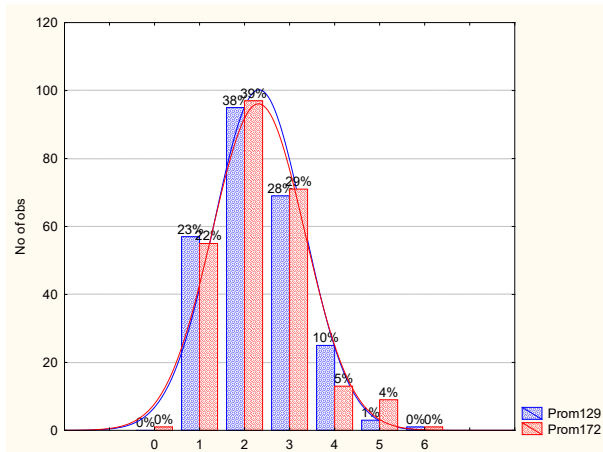
The same applies to the responses of professional staff of social service homes to the statement that “Men with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to have children in marriage”, presented in graph 8.A in percentage. There is a predominance of “I disagree” responses (39%), followed by “I rather disagree” (29%) and “I strongly disagree” (22%) responses. The average is 2.29. To sum up, according to the responses of professional staff of social service homes, they rather disapprove the statement that men or women with intellectual disabilities should have children in marriage.

Based on the responses of special primary schools’ teachers, they “rather disagreed” – 36% with the opinion that “Women with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to have children in marriage”, while on the other hand, another 23% of them “rather agreed” with this statement. The average was 3.3.

Regarding the statement that “Men with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to have children in marriage”, teachers of special primary schools most frequently “rather agreed” (32%), as it is presented in graph 8.B. 28% of them “rather disagreed” with it. The average was 3.2. The responses of teachers of special primary schools to both statements are quite differentiated.

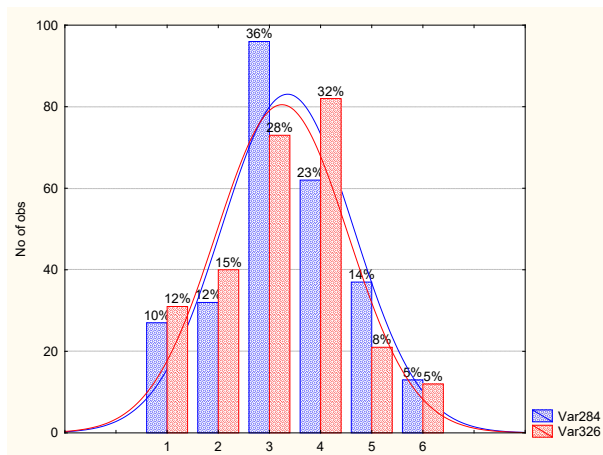
Based on our findings, teachers of special primary schools more morally approve parenthood in marriage of individuals with intellectual disabilities, in comparison with professional staff of social service homes.

Graph 8.A: Women/men with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to have children in marriage (professional staff of social service homes)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

Graph 8.B: Women/men with intellectual disabilities should be allowed to have children in marriage (teachers of special primary schools)



Legend: 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I rather disagree, 4 = I rather agree, 5 = I agree, 6 = I strongly agree.

CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that moral preferences in the area of reproduction and parenthood of the individuals with intellectual disabilities are mostly negative, following the responses of professional staff of social service homes, as well as teachers of special primary schools. Based on the comparison of moral preferences of our research participants, teachers of special primary schools prefer the rights

for reproduction and parenthood more than professional staff of social service homes.

Specifically, our research findings demonstrate that teachers of special primary schools, in comparison with the responses of professional staff of social service homes, more morally approve:

- parenthood in marriage of individuals with intellectual disabilities, with the right support of their environment,
- involvement of individuals with intellectual disabilities in decisions on their potential sterilization,
- marriage of men with intellectual disabilities under the condition that one of the partners will be sterilized,
- education of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the area of birth-control (in case it is possible regarding level of intellectual disability).

On the contrary, teachers of special primary schools, in comparison with professional staff of social service homes, more morally disapprove:

- legal prohibition to have a child if women/men with intellectual disabilities get married,
- sterilization appropriateness of individuals with intellectual disabilities,
- the fact that staff providing services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, as well as parents, should discourage such individuals from having children.

On the other hand, our research findings indicate that part of special primary schools' teachers agree with the appropriateness of sterilization of individuals with intellectual disabilities, and their overall moral preferences in the area of reproduction and parenthood are rather negative. This is in compliance with our findings (Marková, Lištiak Mandzáková, 2015), that the least positive approaches according to the responses of professional staff of social service homes, as well as teachers of special primary schools, were identified in the statement concerning right to parenthood of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

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