

## Examination of the Health Status of Individuals with Mild Mental Disabilities who Regularly Participate in Physical Activities

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**Abstract:** Regular physical activities do not only have positive results on the health problems of disabled individuals. It is understood that non-disabled individuals also do not experience health problems with regular physical activities. The aim of this study is to examine the general health status of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who regularly participate in physical activities. For this purpose, 6 sports clubs that regularly participate in physical activities in Battalgazi district of Malatya center were contacted. Thirty-five individuals with mild intellectual disabilities aged between 11-22 years who regularly attend sports clubs were identified. In addition, 10 individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who did not regularly participate in physical activities within the knowledge of the coaches were identified. Individuals with mild intellectual disabilities are included in the group of individuals with intellectual disabilities. They often have difficulty in fulfilling their self-care needs. They cannot give healthy and conscious answers on issues that concern them. Therefore, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the coaches and families of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who regularly participate in physical activities. Within the scope of face-to-face interviews, the coaches and families were asked " Do individuals with mild intellectual disabilities have health problems in general, can you compare the health status before and after physical activities? Qualitative research method was used as the data collection method. Focus group interviews were used to collect data and semi-structured questionnaires were used during the interviews. Interview technique was preferred among qualitative research methods. The 8 coaches who participated in the interview stated that the general health status of individuals with mild mental disabilities was better after the physical activities and that the individuals did not have any health problems. All of the parents who participated in the interview stated that individuals with mild intellectual disabilities have a healthier and stronger physical structure with regular physical activities. Stating that they often had health problems before physical activities, the families stated that the immune systems of the individuals became stronger with the activities. As a result, as a result of the information obtained from the parents and the opinions of the coaches, it is understood that the general health status of individuals with mild mental disabilities who regularly participate in physical activities is better than the situation before the activities.

**Keywords:** Mild intellectual , Physical activity, health

## Introduction

Individuals with disabilities often have difficulty in fulfilling their daily life skills. Individuals with disabilities who manage to fulfill their daily life skills exhibit a life at peace with themselves. As a result of regular physical activities, individuals' muscular and nervous system, mental and physical reactions, body development (physiological and metabolic) become more regular. Physical activities are seen as a tool that supports the development of the body. Physical activities are also used as a kind of healing tool if done regularly and systematically (Beasley, 1982). With physical activity, the individual's regional muscle groups are strengthened and coordination improves, and they have a better balance. With regular physical activities, the respiratory and circulatory system of individuals becomes healthier. Today, with social awareness, well-planned programs are prepared for the abilities, interests and skills of individuals so that disabled individuals can participate in physical activities more easily. With regular participation in physical activities, socialization and social acceptance begin earlier and easier for disabled individuals. Permanent disability disrupts individuals' approach to themselves. Introversion and irritability occur. Psychological reactions occur, as well as communication problems between family members who are responsible for them. Involvement of disabled individuals in physical activities increases their sense of self-importance.

Individuals with disabilities are intertwined with the society with the positive effect of physical activities and establish better relationships with them (Savucu et al. 2006). For this reason, the support of conscious families should be provided. In addition, since sports activities are of interest to the masses in modern societies, disabled individuals become more social and more conscious thanks to sports activities (Duman et al. 2011). Physical activities have a positive effect on making special education more meaningful. In addition, the effect of physical activities is important in better family life satisfaction (Savucu & Biçer, 2009). The risk of obesity is higher in individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who lead a static lifestyle. Therefore, physical activity activities are more important for individuals with mild mental disabilities. The main reasons that negatively affect the participation of these individuals in physical activities are muscle hypotonia. For this reason, more caution should be taken when physical activity is performed in individuals with mild intellectual disabilities (Pastore et al., 2000). The physical, mental, emotional and quality of life of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who regularly participate in physical activities improve positively and their happiness levels also increase positively. Physical activities discharge the happiness of the individual. As a result of all these, individuals with mild intellectual disabilities are expected to have a positive relationship with their environment (Ceylan et al., 2016; Bağcı et al., 2019; Küçük, 2020).

## Method

The aim of this study was to examine the general health status of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who regularly participate in physical activities. For this purpose, 6 sports clubs where individuals with mild intellectual disabilities regularly participated in physical activities were identified in Malatya Central Battalgazi district. Thirty-five individuals with mild intellectual disabilities aged between 11-22 years who regularly attend sports clubs were identified. In addition, 10 individuals with intellectual disabilities who did not participate in regular physical activities within the knowledge of the coaches were also identified. Individuals with mild intellectual disabilities cannot make consistent comments on issues that concern them at the decision-making stage. For this reason, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the coaches and families of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who regularly participate in physical activities. In addition, observation technique was also used by the researcher. Within the scope of the interviews, the coaches and families were asked the questions "Does the individual with mild intellectual disability have health problems in general, can you compare the health status before and after physical activities?". Qualitative research method was preferred as data collection method. Focus group interviews were utilized in data collection and semi-structured questionnaire was used during the interviews. Interview technique was preferred among qualitative research methods.

## Findings

The 6 coaches who participated in the interview stated that the general health status of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities was better after regular physical activities and that they did not have any health problems. All of the parents who participated in the interview stated that individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who regularly participated in physical activities had a stronger physical structure. Families who stated that they often had health problems before physical activities stated that the immune systems of individuals became stronger with the activities.

**Table 1.** Regular Participation in Physical Activities by Individuals with Mild Mental Disabilities

	Participates in regular physical activity	Does not participate in regular physical activity
Sports Klb.1	6	2
Sports Klb.2	9	1
Sports Klb.3	3	4
Sports Klb.4	4	2
Sports Klb.5	4	-
Sports Klb.6	9	1
Total	35	10

Table 1 shows the number of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who regularly participate in physical activities and those who do not regularly participate in physical activities. While the number of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities who regularly participated in physical activities was 35, the number of individuals who did not regularly participate in physical activities was 10.

**Table 2.** Health problems of individuals with mild intellectual disabilities

	Not experiencing health problems	Experiencing health problems
Coaches	6	-
Parents	12	-
Total	18	-

According to Table 2, 18 people including coaches and parents stated that individuals with mild intellectual disabilities do not experience health problems with regular participation in physical activities.

### Conclusion

Individuals with mild intellectual disabilities lead a static and sedentary life due to their characteristics. Therefore, they are prone to obesity. For this reason, these individuals should regularly participate in physical activities to avoid health problems (Ilkım et al. 2021, Özdemir et al. 2017, Ilkım and Yurtseven 2021). It is stated that as a result of regular physical activities, some positive changes occur in the behavior of disabled individuals (Dörger, 2001; Bruininks & Chvat, 1990:). Stainback 1983, Ilkım et al. 2021) in a study conducted to investigate the developmental characteristics of severely disabled individuals, the development of self-care skills, positive changes and maturation of social behaviors, as well as improvements in some motor skills have a positive effect on reducing behavioral disorders and increasing learning abilities. Similar results were obtained in our study.

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According to Table 2, 18 people including coaches and parents stated that individuals with mild intellectual disabilities did not experience health problems with regular participation in physical activities. We can say that participation in regular physical activities has a positive effect on health.

In his research in 2013, Bulut concluded that physical activities do not require much cost economically and besides, they have a very high positive effect on human health (Bulut 2013). Cengiz and Delen 2019, Arslan et al. 2016, while explaining that physical activities have positive effects on the health of young people, they state that this situation has become a positive habit (Cengiz and Delen 2103. Arslan et al. 2016).

As a result, as a result of the information received from both parents and coaches, it is understood that the general health status of individuals who regularly participate in physical activities is better than before the activities.

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