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Astabrak Ali Naji Al-Hamoodi
Ph.D., Department of
Psychiatric and Mental Health
Nursing Branch, College of
Nursing, University of Kufa,
Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf Province,
Iraq

Hussein Mansour Ali Al-Tameemi
Ph.D., Department of
Community Health Nursing,
Faculty of Nursing, University
of Kufa, Iraq

**Ameer Salah-Aldeen
Abdulrazaq**
Ph.D., Department of
Psychiatric and Mental Health
Nursing Branch, College of
Nursing, University of
Babylon, Iraq

Sarah Abbas Ali Shabaa
College of Nursing, University
of Kufa, Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf,
Iraq

Narjis Ali Abdal Ameer Alradhi
Faculty of Nursing, University
of Kufa, Kufa, Iraq

Corresponding Author:
Astabrak Ali Naji Al-Hamoodi
Ph.D., Department of
Psychiatric and Mental Health
Nursing Branch, College of
Nursing, University of Kufa,
Al-Najaf Al-Ashraf Province,
Iraq

Assessing the general mental health of special educators of handicap and special needs children

Astabrak Ali Naji Al-Hamoodi, Hussein Mansour Ali Al-Tameemi, Ameer Salah-Aldeen Abdulrazaq, Sarah Abbas Ali Shabaa and Narjis Ali Abdal Ameer Alradhi

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Abstract

Background: The handicap and disabilities among individuals are a global problem with high numbers among them. The study aimed to detect symptoms of psychological problems among special educators in governmental institutes of handicap children at Al-Najaf City.

Methodology: A descriptive analytic study was conducted in governmental institutes of handicap children in Al-Najaf City. The study sample included all special needs teachers in governmental institutes (38 teachers) teachers who had a licensed to dealing with handicap children. The study instruments had two parts. First part included the demographic characteristics of teachers like age, gender, residence, faculty, academic year, and socioeconomic data. Second part had the general health questionnaire 12-items to detect their general mental health in non-psychiatric persons by self-reported.

Result: The study revealed most of special educators are worked in Al-Noor institute for blindness (32%) from all educators are participated in the study and most of them are a female (81.2%) with aged more than 35 years old. The majority (73.68%) of general health state of special educators is a good general health and residual ratio about (26%) is rated as a poor general health state.

Conclusion: The study concluded the number of special educators in government handicap institutes is a few and most of them are not specialist. About one third of educators were a female and their income was insufficient. Also, one quarter had a poor mental health so the study recommended to support and train them about how deal with stresses and other psychological problems.

Keywords: General mental health, special educators, handicap, special needs teachers, special needs, children

Introduction

The numbers of handicap (disability or special needs) children are continuous rising around the world, the number of them estimated about more than one billion (15%) of global individuals had a one kinds of disability^[1], this percent increase in low income countries^[2]. The expectations about this number are increased for many reasons like aging, impacts of climate and conflict^[3]. Yet, individuals with disabilities have experienced a stigmatization and teasing in most communities or in various settings like home or in family, school or university^[4]; also, they had nicknames^[5]. So, the Congress of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (public law) in 1975 enacted law to able special needs children able to learn and attend school with nondisabled students^[6].

In Palestine there are 294 foundations and institutes related to special needs students most them are not governmental and about more than 11000 teachers introduced educational, caring and rehabilitant services for more than 90000 students^[7]. But in last few years, Iraq had elevating numbers of special needs institutions generally and in Al-Najaf specially, as shown in table (1). There is not have official statistics related to numbers of special needs teachers or children in Iraq. The training of special educators of handicap and special needs children in community facilitators were trainings about (84) when held and included online training for them who had the disability individuals^[8].

The special need institutes must have highly qualified and specialized teachers to training and rehabilitant the children^[9]. Although most of these institutions in Najaf have teachers are not specialized to care and rehabilitation students (beneficiaries), but had training course to do it^[10].

There is difference between general educator and special educator. General (teacher) educator "is the teacher who enable to instruct students are not had any handicap or disabilities. So, The General (teachers) educators usually have experience and contact in instructing students about their disabilities, but usually are not had a special training or formal certificate to do with them. The general educators were defined as a teacher who is enrolled in a general education teacher preparation program and were engaged in the student teaching" [6], but the teacher of experience and special needs students " are a teacher who is able to instruct students with experience or disabilities, and deal with their families and kindred of the special needs students or had disabilities, by including them and using the assistive technology internship [6, 11].

Special needs child or child with handicap is a child has assessed or evaluated during the special education program and had at least one of the following handicap or disabilities: a hearing impairment (deafness), intellectual disability disorder, disturbance of speech and language, had visual impairment (like blindness) or had serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic or physical impairment, autistic spectrum disorder, spinal cord and brain injury traumatic or any other health impairment, deaf-blindness, a specific learning disability or had multiple disabilities, or delay during developmental period (babies who are aged 3 years to 9 years old in NH) or because they had disability or handicap may need to special education program and other related services [12].

A teacher of special needs is a skeleton of educational system and has effective role to achieve the goals learning and rehabilitant students, also has other multitask need much effort put them under stress, tired, burnout, frustrated and other psychological problems exaggerated when teachers feel by lack of motivation, support, enough time to perform tasks and cooperation between them and parents, as well as, job burdens and lack of interesting in job these factors may lead them to more carelessness, pessimism and lack of motivation and creativity [13]. However, diagnosis and description of psychiatric discourse is important part of the public health domain [14].

The study aimed to detect psychological symptoms of mental problems for special (teachers) educators in formal governmental institutes special needs children at Al-Najaf City.

Material and Methods

A descriptive analytic study was conducted in governmental institutes of handicap children (4 institutes) at Al-Najaf City during 20th December 2018 to 10th January 2019. The study sample included all special needs teachers in governmental institutes (38 teachers; 31 female and 7 male) teachers who had training course or licensed to dealing with handicap children.

The study instruments had two parts. First part is related to personal characteristics of teachers such as age, gender, residence, faculty, academic year, marital status. Second part related to scale of general health (GHQ12-items) to detect the psychological impairment in non-psychiatric persons by self-reported. Goldberg (1970) was use GHQ to assess of four domains of psychological well-being (depression, anxiety, social impairment and hypochondria). GHQ12-items has four scores (0-3) start from much less than usual, less than usual, same as usual, better than usual; and reversed in these scores' items (2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12). It has cutoff point 1.5, when a person had ≥ 1.5 that mean had psychological distress, but when a person had < 1.5 that mean had not psychological distress. This scale is a common used in primary health care setting and to achieve the study aims.

Approves the Study

Formal administrative approvals to perform the study were obtained prior to data collection; the official agreement was obtained from the Department of Community Health Nursing after the presentation of the project, then permission from the University of Babylon/College of Nursing/Research Ethics Committee to conduct the study, the reference number of the ethical approval 74, ethical date February 3, 2021. Informed consent "approval was obtained by the participants before the questionnaire began". The study was carried out in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration Principles.

The researcher used only descriptive statistics to describe the data and determine whether the study will achieve their goals or not after checked data from mistakes and missing and used computer programs (SPSS v.17 and Microsoft Office Excel (2010) to demonstrate the results.

Results of the Study

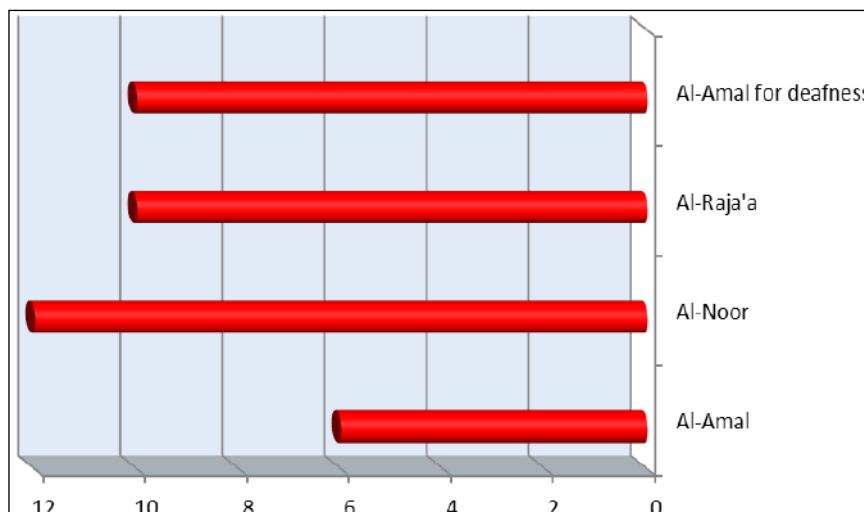


Fig 1: Distributions of special educators in governmental institutes of handicap children

The figure (1) show that most special educators participated in study are worked in Al-Noor institute (32%).

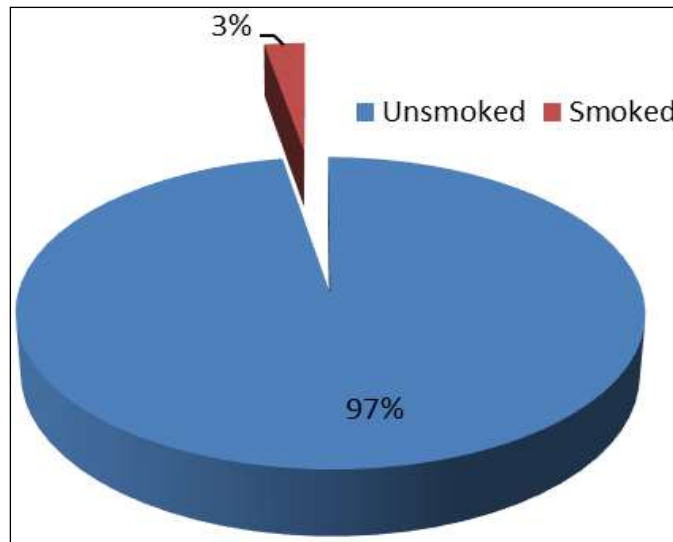


Fig 2: Distributions of special educators according to smoking

The figure (2) show that most special educators unsmoked.

Table 1: Distribution of special needs institutes at Al-Najaf Province

	Specialized of institutes	Number of special needs institutes before 2003	Number of special needs institutes after 2018	Total
Governmental institutes	Children with physical or psychological disabilities	3	1 and specific classes to children with special learning in most primary schools	4
Private institutes	Children with physical or psychological disabilities	0	4 and 1 under establishment	4
Total		3	5	8

Table (1) show that distribution institutes Al Najaf governmental, Number of special needs institutes after 2018 (5) institutes.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of special educators in governmental institutes of handicap children

		N = 38	
		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	7	18.4
	Female	31	81.6
Experience years	1-5 yrs	5	13.2
	6-10 yrs	4	10.5
	11-15 yrs	6	15.8
	< 15 yrs	23	60.5
Age groups	≤ 25	0	0
	26 - 35	5	13.2
	More than 35	33	86.8
Level education	Intermediate Graduate	4	10.5
	Preparatory Graduate	6	15.8
	Institute Graduate	12	31.6
	College Graduate	16	42.1
Accurate specialty of educators	Special educators	2	4.12
	From other specialty and had training course	36	95.88
Total		38	100.0

The table (2) revealed the demographic characteristics of special educators most of them are female about (81.2%) and aged more than 35years

and had experience more than 15years (60%) with Bachelors' degree.

Table 3: Socio-economic status of special educators in governmental institutes of handicap children

		N = 38	
		Frequency	Percent
Residence	Urban	28	73.7
	Rural	10	26.3
Monthly income	< 500 Thousand	3	7.9
	500-750 Thousand	26	68.4
	751 Thousand-1 Milion	8	21.1
	> 1 Milion	1	2.6
Sufficiently income	Sufficient	4	10.5
	Moderately Sufficient	16	42.1
	Insufficient	18	47.4
Marital status	Married	31	81.6
	Widowed	1	2.6
	Single	6	15.8
Number of children normally health state	Not had children	11	28.9
	1-2 child	5	13.2
	3-4 child	13	34.2
	More than 5	9	23.7
Has a child with health problem	Not had a child with health problem diagnosed	38	100.0
Total		38	100.0

The table (3) revealed the socio-economic characteristics of special educators about (73%) residents in urban area and reported insufficient income with monthly income between

500-750 thousand (68%). Most of them were married (81%) and had children between 3-4 children.

Table 4: Level of General Mental Health of special educators in governmental institutes of handicap children

No.	Items	Ratings	(N = 38)		M.	S.D.
			F.	%		
1.	Been able to concentrate on what you're doing?	Better than usual	9	23.68	2.13	0.58
		Same as usual	25	65.79		
		Less than usual	4	10.53		
		Much less than usual	0	0.00		
2.	Lost much sleep over worry?	Not at all	2	5.26	1	0.84
		No more than usual	7	18.42		
		Rather more than usual	18	47.37		
		Much more than usual	11	28.95		
3.	Felt you were playing a useful part in things?	More than usual	12	31.58	2.26	0.55
		Same as usual	24	63.16		
		Less than usual	2	5.26		
		Much less than usual	0	0.00		
4.	Felt capable of making decisions about things?	More than usual	9	23.68	2.05	0.66
		Same as usual	22	57.89		
		Less than usual	7	18.42		
		Much less than usual	0	0.00		
5.	Felt constantly under strain?	Not at all	1	2.63	1.24	0.85
		No more than usual	16	42.11		
		Rather more than usual	12	31.58		
		Much more than usual	9	23.68		
6.	Felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?	Not at all	1	2.63	0.84	0.79
		No more than usual	6	15.79		
		Rather more than usual	17	44.74		
		Much more than usual	14	36.84		
7.	Been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?	More than usual	10	26.32	2.16	0.64
		Same as usual	25	65.79		
		Less than usual	2	5.26		
		Much less than usual	1	2.63		
8.	Been able to face up to your problems?	More than usual	8	21.05	2.11	0.61
		Same as usual	27	71.05		
		Less than usual	2	5.26		
		Much less than usual	1	2.63		
9.	Been feeling unhappy and depressed?	Not at all	1	2.63	0.58	0.76
		No more than usual	3	7.89		
		Rather more than usual	13	34.21		
		Much more than usual	21	55.26		
10.	Been losing confidence in yourself?	Not at all	1	2.63	0.45	0.72

		No more than usual	2	5.26		
		Rather more than usual	10	26.32		
		Much more than usual	25	65.79		
11.	Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?	Not at all	1	2.63	0.42	0.76
		No more than usual	3	7.89		
		Rather more than usual	7	18.42		
		Much more than usual	27	71.05		
12.	Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered?	Not at all	4	10.53	1.08	0.97
		No more than usual	7	18.42		
		Rather more than usual	15	39.47		
		Much more than usual	12	31.58		
Average					1.36	

The table (4) shown (1, 3, 4, 7, 8) items are affected by mean of score for general health state significantly.

Table 5: Overall general health state among special educators in governmental institutes of handicap children

Overall general health state according to G.H.Q	(N = 38)	
	F.	%
Good general health state	28	73.68
Poor general health state	10	26.32
Total	38	100.0

The table (5) revealed the majority of general health state of special educators is (73.68%) were a good general health and residual ratio about (26.32%) were have poor general health state.

Discussion

The increasing in number of teachers of special needs in centers and institutes in the global and in Iraq especially (table 1) is a considered as risk indicators to actual problems and impacts on communities [1, 2]. This increased in number of centers and institutes of handicap means a rising in numbers of special educators because the Iraq is not had official statistics about the actual number of disability and handicap persons [15]. All targeted teachers were willing to participate in the study may due to this topic consent with their field or specialty' this result contrast with study of Bailey (2014) and study of Singh (2011) [16, 17].

This increased indicate responsibilities of psychologist's researchers generally and specialists in psychiatry to conduct studies about the psychological problems and mental health among teachers of special needs. The experiences of educators may have important role in adaptive skills with stresses and improvement the general mental health about (60.5) were have more than 15 years of experience in this field (table 2); this result is consent with study of Williams and Poel (2006) [18] when studied the stress management for special educators and they showed the experiences of them had a vital role to improvement the mental health and management their stress.

The study revealed most special educators were not specialized to care handicap children, but have training course and their monthly income were not enough for them and had affected on their job satisfaction this result is contrasted with study of Castro *et al.* (2010) [19] and Peltzer *et al.* (2009) [20]; while the most of teachers were married and had 3-4 children without any medical or mental problems diagnosed. So that, most of them were not reported had psychological distress may due to their experience in life and have knowledge about how to deal with stress and mental health problems, this result is contrasted with study of Nuri & Uzunboylu (2017) [21].

The majority of special educators were a general health state (73.68%) were have a good general health and residual ratio

about (26.32%) were have a poor general health state may because they are not specialized in this field or not had enough experiences with deal with stress or their life experiences are few; this result consent with study of Parreno and Petry (2018) [22] noticed them had stressed that the lack of resources.

Conclusion

The study concluded the number of special educators in government handicap institutes is a few and most of them are not specialist. Also, about one third of educators were a female and their income was insufficient and about one quarter of educator teachers had a psychological problem and their general health is a poor.

Recommendation

The study recommended the increasing income of teachers of special needs children and supporting them. Establishment special department related to special education and handicap in Iraqi Ministry of Education, edification about the handicap classes and importance of special educators' role in community.

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