

## Abstract

In recent years, there has been a trend to include children who have special needs, both in regular society in general and in the education system in particular. “Inclusion” is a term relating to a perception of social equality which sees the differences between individuals as a positive value which is to be supported, encouraged, and cultivated (Ronen, 1988; Gordon, 1995; Margalit, 2000; Stainback, 1989). In 1988, Israel’s Special Education Law was enacted, permitting a child with special needs to be included in a regular education setting in accordance with the decision of a placement committee. Today, nearly thirty years since the legislation of the Special Education Law, it is possible to see children with special needs as an integral part of the social landscape at schools. Likewise, in informal education, we are experiencing the development of inclusion for a child with special needs. As such, this study investigates inclusion and its influence on youth movement members. The current study focused on two youth movements: The Israeli Scouts movement and the Bnei Akiva movement. In 1985, the Israeli Scouts movement established the first “Tsamid Group” for special needs members prior to the legislation of the Special Education Law and the development of inclusion programs in Israel. Later, in 1997, the first “Yuval Chapter” for members with special needs was established in the religious youth movement Bnei Akiva, operating as part of the youth movement just like any other chapter. Previous studies report on an increase in mixed friendships between including and included children (Grenot-Scheyer, Staub, Peck & Schwartz, 1998), and that children who are included have more mixed friendships in comparison with children with special needs who are not included (Fryxel & Kennedy, 1995). In the study by Monk and Klibensky (2009) it was found that most (74%) of the youth

movement members in chapters integrating Tsamid groups agreed that in their chapter the Tsamid members were treated like regular members (mean 3.9, scale of 1-5).

In accordance with these findings, the purpose of the current study is to evaluate the attitudes and the viewpoints of members of the youth movements in terms of personality traits, prejudices, and stereotypical expressions towards members with special needs, as well as their positions in terms of social distance and inclusion, in the religious and secular youth movements in which inclusion of special needs members does or does not take place.

**The sample** included 115 members who participated in youth movements in various locations in Israel. 52 participants were from the Israeli Scouts movement and 63 participants were from the Bnei Akiva movement. Of these 42 were boys (36.5%) and 73 were girls (63%), ranging in age from 11 to 18.

This study included four groups of subjects: 1. 35 subjects participating in the Bnei Akiva youth movement with inclusion groups from special education (Yuval chapters). 2. 28 subjects participating in the Bnei Akiva youth movement without special education inclusion groups. 3. 27 subjects participating in the Israeli Scouts youth movement with special education inclusion groups (Tsamid groups) 4. 25 subjects participating in the Israeli Scouts youth movement without special education inclusion groups.

The study included five questionnaires for the members of the youth movements: Personal Details Questionnaire – the items in this questionnaire related to biographical details of the participant such as gender, age, address, details regarding the extent of their proximity to children with special needs, and whether the youth movement in which they participated had included members with special needs.

Attitudes Questionnaire – This questionnaire is based on the research of Monk and Klibensky (2009) which was supported by the research on Siller's attitudes questionnaire, statistically validated for Israel (Weisel et al, 1988), and which was adapted as necessary for the current study. The questionnaire is made up of two sub-questionnaires: Attitudes Questionnaire – Inclusion with regard to the child with special needs and Attitudes Questionnaire – Personality Traits with regard to the child with special needs. The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine both the attitude of the research participants with regard to the inclusion of the children with special needs in the youth movement, as well as their viewpoint with regard to the personality traits of the child with special needs.

Prejudices Questionnaire – This questionnaire is based on the research of Schwarzwald and Tur-Kaspa (1977) and was adapted as necessary for the current study. The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine the extent of prejudice held by the participants toward children with special needs.

Stereotypical Characteristics Questionnaire and their evaluation – this questionnaire is based on the research of Schwarzwald and Tur-Kaspa (1977) and was adapted as necessary for the current study. This questionnaire includes two parts: In the first part, 12 attributes are presented to the participants (such as: “unintelligent, polite, hostile”). For each attribute, the participants are asked to indicate the percentage of children with special needs who are characterized by the particular attribute. In the second part, which is presented separately from the first part of the questionnaire, the participants evaluate the extent by which each of the 12 attributes is positive or negative. The purpose of this questionnaire is to confirm that members who belong to a youth movement in which there is inclusion of members with special needs will have positive stereotypical expressions toward groups of children with special needs.

Social Distance Questionnaire – This questionnaire is based on the research of

Schwarzfeld and Tur-Kaspa (1977) and was adapted as necessary for the purposes of the current study. This questionnaire examines the willingness of the respondent to behave in a certain way, but not the behavior itself. The questionnaire includes six statements which express different levels of willingness to come into contact with children with special needs (such as: “willing to study with a child with special needs, willing to live in a neighborhood with a family that has a child with special needs”). This questionnaire is intended to confirm that members that belong to youth movements in which members with special needs are included will be more willing to participate in behaviors among a group of children with special needs

**Results:** **The first hypothesis** which was examined in this study dealt with the attitudes and viewpoints of two research groups toward children with special needs.

The research hypothesis held that a more positive attitude would be found among members who belonged to youth movements in which there were inclusion groups of members with special needs, rather than among members who belonged to youth movements in which there were no inclusion groups of members with special needs.

The results of the study reinforced the hypothesis: The averages of the participants who were exposed to members with special needs were higher than those who were not exposed to members with special needs, in terms of the attitudes towards negative personality traits and social distance. The results of the study revealed that members who were exposed to members with special needs had more positive attitudes and a smaller social distance.

**The second hypothesis** dealt with the differences between the two research groups in terms of prejudices, stereotypical expressions, and social distance with regard to children with special needs. The research hypothesis stated that among members belonging to youth movements in which there were no inclusion groups of members

with special needs, more extreme and negative stereotypical expressions and prejudices would be found with regard to the group of children with special needs, as opposed to among members who belonged to a youth movement where there were inclusion groups of members with special needs. The research findings revealed a significant difference: Members who were not exposed to members with special needs had more negative prejudices and stereotypical expressions towards members with special needs.

**The third hypothesis** dealt with the relationship between the research variables. The research hypothesis posited that a relationship would be found between the research variables: personality traits, prejudices, and stereotypical expressions; and integration and social distance. That is, the more negative the personality traits, prejudices, and stereotypical expressions, the less inclination there would be towards inclusion and the greater the social distance would be. The research findings pointed towards a significant positive relationship between prejudices and stereotypical expressions, and social distance and inclusion. It was found that youth movement members who had negative prejudices and stereotypical expressions towards members with special needs also had a greater social distance and less inclination toward inclusion with members with special needs.

**The research question** which was examined in this study dealt with the differences between the two research groups in terms of attitudes towards children with special needs. The research question was "Would differences be found between religious youth movement chapters and secular youth movement chapters where both had groups which included members with special needs?" The results of the current study revealed that the perception of members of both secular and religious youth movements were positive with no significant difference between them in most of the

dimensions which were examined: prejudices, stereotypical expressions, inclusion, and social distance. However, when examining the dimension of personality traits, it was found that members of the secular youth movement perceived members with special needs more positively than did the members of religious chapters.

Based on the literature review on the subject as well as on the findings of the current study it was found that after actual experience with inclusion, the attitudes involved in inclusion become more positive (Avramidis, Bayliss & Buden, 2000). The study by Monk and Klibensky (2009) also found that most youth movement members who were exposed to inclusion of members with special needs stated that they do not distance themselves from the members with special needs at all, and that they wish to help them to a large or great extent. Consistent with our expectations, our study revealed a significant difference between the attitudes of members of youth movements that had been exposed to members with special needs in comparison to those members who had not been exposed, in all three dimensions: viewpoints with regard to negative personality traits, prejudices, and expressions of stereotypes. Similar results were found in Cohen's (2004) study, where research group subjects, who had participated in an intervention program in order to change attitudes towards people with disabilities, expressed more positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. That is to say, over time, subjects' attitudes became increasingly positive as more information about disabilities was received and as subjects came into greater contact with people with disabilities. Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis supports these studies. According to this hypothesis, as the contact between groups increases, the inter-group prejudices, anger, and tension decrease. Additionally, there is a significant reduction in inter-group prejudices, tensions, and conflicts when interactions occur between individuals from different groups. This theory also

supports the second research goal of the current study which deals with attitudes among members of youth movements towards inclusion and social distance with regard to members with special needs in chapters which have members with special needs versus those that do not. Our study revealed that, in chapters where the members of the movement were exposed to members with special needs, there was less social distance and a greater willingness to interact with groups of members with special needs, as opposed to chapters where there was no exposure to members with special needs.

In our study the research question examined whether differences would be found between the religious and secular youth movements with regard to the attitudes of the members towards members with special needs. Ethical social values are an integral part of the mottoes of both youth movements, and include giving, social involvement, and acceptance of the other. The current study did not reveal significant differences between the youth movements in terms of willingness to participate in inclusion and social distance. Likewise, significant differences between the two movements were not found among the measures that were examined: prejudices, expression of stereotypes, and evaluation of personality traits. Both youth movements which participated in the study provide structured and adapted training for leaders of groups that have members with special needs. Research points out that the more that training and resources are provided, the more that the attitudes of the leaders and the members become positive toward members with special needs (Avramidis, 2000). Only one significant difference was found in terms of the dimension of attitudes regarding negative personality traits: It was found that among members of the secular youth movement there were more positive attitudes in terms of negative personality traits than among members of the religious youth movement. This difference can be

explained by the greater experience in inclusion activities for members with special needs. The secular movement has been operating inclusion activities for approximately 12 years longer than the religious movement.

Prejudices and stereotypical expressions, social distance and inclusion: In the current study a relationship was found between the exposure of youth movement members to members with special needs, and the attitudes and viewpoints with regard to these members with special needs. It was further found that a significant positive relationship exists between prejudices and stereotypes, and social distance and inclusion; that is, it is possible to say that subjects who had negative prejudices and stereotypes towards youth movement members with special needs also had a greater social distance and were less inclined towards inclusion with members with special needs. Additionally, subjects who were in favor of inclusion of members with special needs had a smaller social distance. That is to say that these members had a greater willingness to participate in behaviors and activities among groups of children with special needs.

Age and gender of subjects: In our study it is possible to see that significant differences were found between age groups in terms of: negative personality traits, prejudices, stereotypical expressions, social distance, and inclusion. This was in such a way that as the age of the subject increased, he had less negative attitudes with regard to personality traits of youth group members with special needs. As such, these subjects directed less prejudices and stereotypical expressions toward youth group members with special needs. Likewise, as the age of the subject increased, the social distance was smaller and the readiness for inclusion increased. Additionally, a significant contribution was found for gender. It was found that the social distance



among females was smaller and that their attitudes towards inclusion were more positive

**To summarize**, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of including a child with special needs in the various youth movements in order to reduce negative attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors among the members of the movement. The attitudes and viewpoints of members in groups where inclusion occurs were found to be more positive than those among members who were not exposed to inclusion. The importance of the study is social-educational: the study is likely to contribute to a deeper understanding of inclusion and its social consequences in the informal education system. Perhaps the phenomenon of inclusion in informal education will develop among the rest of the youth movements, leading to additional children with special needs participating in leisure activities to which they are not currently exposed, broadening their limited social circles and thereby raising their quality of life and giving them the respect and equality which they deserve.