

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

**Narratives of Life Stories among Adults with
Borderline Intellectual Disability:
Personal Identity, Social Meaning, Quality of Life
and Future Orientation**

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Abstract

The present study dealt with narratives of life stories among 10 adults with borderline intellectual disability in terms of: personal identity, social meaning, quality of life and future orientation.

People with intellectual borderline disability are between one standard deviation to two standard deviations below the mean that represents normal functioning (equal to 100), so that their IQ ranging from 70 to 85. Although this population was not defined in the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) it cannot be ignored that it exists in an incidence of 13.6% of the general population, and therefore needs to be redefined (Wieland & Zitman, 2016).

Borderline disability is congenital and has an impact on the development of the individual, which means that this population is characterized by various difficulties in terms of cognitive, communicative and sensory behavior, and is prone to comorbidities with other disorders (Bertelli et al., 2013).

This study was conducted according to a narrative qualitative paradigm based on the principles of Shkedi (2003) and Tracy (2019), using semi-structured interviews to produce the life story of the subjects, focusing on the research topics. Likewise, the research is based on the three-function model of autobiographical memory (Bluck, 2003).

The main findings of the study revealed:

The personal identity among the subjects who participated in the study is positive, as it is mainly based on abilities of self-esteem and self-belief. Subjects did not present their disabilities as part of their personal identity, and chose to describe themselves through to a positive narrative, of a capable, loved and social self.

Subjects may use psychological defense mechanisms and act in a way of denying and distancing away from their own limitations and social stigmas (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014), and may also have learned how to live with and accept their disability, while at

the same time feeling self-confident among other people defined as their peer group (O'Byrne & Muldoon, 2017).

In terms of **social meaning** no significant difference was found between positive and negative social meaning in the present, but compared to the past there are more positive relationships but also more negative relationships. The theoretical explanation that can be given for this finding is the fact that the subjects live in a partnership life in assisted living and also having social life outside of it as adults (Friedman & Rizzolo, 2018). As human nature, in parallel with meaningful and positive friendships, sometimes there are also social difficulties when living with partners. Therefore, the meaning and social attitude in their adult lives is not unequivocal for positive or negative.

Regarding **quality of life** topic which is based on the sub-topics feelings about the sheltered housing, staff attitude, family attitude, independence and experiences of employment and leisure, it can be concluded that subjects are feeling satisfied and see the present quality of life in a positive way. The "disability paradox" theory explains that people with disabilities have a tendency to report high levels of quality of life (Fellinghauer et al., 2012). It has been found that environmental factors such as social networking, professional support, leisure activities and significant employment are those that help them feel satisfied with their life (Honeybul et al., 2016), all of which are central foci in the current lives of the subjects in this study.

In the subjects' **future orientation**, a focus was found on the issues of independence and intimacy. Although the subjects described their independence in the present in a positive vivid way, they presented an aspiration to continue the experience of independence and a desire to strengthen it in time. This is consistent with the research findings of Sandjojo et al. (2019) in which subjects with intellectual borderline disability who reported a sense of independence and its various opportunities, in addition indicated a strong desire to feel even more independent and at higher levels. Likewise, according to a review by Fulford and Cubigo (2018), the issue of intimacy is a central theme that

arises in qualitative interviews among people with intellectual disabilities, which are desired and aspirate to manage intimate relationships.

From the written above the conclusions of this study emerge, which presents an overall picture of narratives among people with intellectual borderline disabilities. To conclude, the narratives includes both positive and negative experiences. For some subjects the past period is remembered as a period in which they went through challenging and negative life events that included insults and injuries from their family members, and difficulties adjusting to frameworks. Whereas for some subjects their childhood is remembered as a time when family members were therapeutic figures and the feelings in the educational frameworks were positive.

Yet, the present period is perceived in a positive light for most subjects, their personal identity is not affected by the social stigma effect and they do not see their limitations and disability as a dominant element of their self.

The subjects in the study have social life and maintain long-term relationships, but at the same time they experience social difficulties with their partners inside the assisted living. Besides, they would like to expand their social network. Their quality of life is perceived by them as good, when they have expressed satisfaction with the sense of independence given to them in the framework of sheltered housing and consider it of paramount importance. They maintain positive relationships with the staff and experience pleasure and satisfaction from having a job and working outside the framework.

Moreover, current family ties are defined as better compared to the past, and this could be related to the fact that the therapeutic burden, stress and worries have decreased since moving to sheltered housing. Lastly, the subjects' future narrative includes aspirations and desires for opportunities of independent conduct and empowerment, and for finding spouses and managing romantic relationships in order to start family life.