

# Services Rendered to the Disabled in the ECWA Region

## Who are the Disabled ?

Literature published on the problem of disablement classifies the disabled as follows :

- a. The physically disabled who are categorized into :
  - 1) the crippled and the amputated,
  - 2) the blind,
  - 3) the deaf,
- b. The mentally disabled comprising
  - 1) the feeble-minded or mentally retarded,
  - 2) the mentally disordered, sometimes called insane.

In the study made by Dr. Mounir Khoury, mentioned elsewhere in this issue, the total number of disabled and mentally retarded persons in the world is estimated at around 450 million and their approximate number in the Arab World is close to 20 million.

In developing countries, including those of the ECWA (Economic Commission for Western Asia) Region, services rendered to the disabled in general are still in the elementary stage. Reports about these services are very inadequate ; yet we shall try in this article to present a bird's eye view of the efforts that have been made and plans visualized in response to the U.N. Declaration that 1981 will be the Year of the Disabled.

To facilitate the task, we shall treat the topic under two sections : mental disabilities and physical handicaps.

### A. Mental Disabilities

In Iraq, considered as a relatively progressive country

in the field of social welfare, there is only one specialized institution for the mentally retarded, called "Al-Raja Institute", founded in 1955. In it, boys and girls aged 7-15 receive treatment and care from specialized personnel. These children are collected daily throughout Baghdad in the morning and driven back home after 1 o'clock. In 1978-79, the number of male and female students reached 330, divided into 26 groups, according to age, and distributed over eight vocational training projects. Al-Raja Institute, like other social welfare centers in Iraq, is a government subsidized project.

Another institution is the "Waziriyeh Vocational Rehabilitation Center" opened in 1971 and considered the largest rehabilitation center in Iraq. It is a multi-service center, including the rehabilitation of the feeble-minded who count around 25% of the total trainees, mostly from the city of Baghdad.

Five other institutions serve the so-called "insane", whose number in these institutions reached 152 in 1977.

It is clear that the above classification into "mentally-retarded" and "insane" is deficient, because it does not consider the various types of mental retardation and mental disorder.

In Jordan, there were, in 1977, seven centers that served mentally retarded persons, created through the joint efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations. According to a booklet recently published<sup>(1)</sup>, about 400 mentally retarded children are

(1) Project Proposals of the Queen Alia Jordan Social Welfare Fund, Jordan, 1980.



being taken care of by these organizations. The booklet referred to contains descriptions of a number of welfare projects proposed for the near future. They include the establishment of a training center and three service centers for the treatment of only moderately mentally retarded children. Three age groups will be beneficiaries of the centers: group A: 2-6 year-old children; group B: 6-14 years; group C: 14-18 years. The center will consider offering adequate services to the more severe cases in due course.

In **Lebanon**, the war conditions persisting since 1975 paralyzed many activities that existed before the war. The pressing need, however, imposed the reactivation of already existing institutions and the creation of new ones when possible. "The Lebanese Association for Mentally Handicapped Children" was founded in 1965 as a voluntary agency. Between 1965 and 1975 it was able to perform a number of activities including: regular use of information media, holding regular meetings with parents, publication of a quarterly magazine, "Awladuna" (Our children); direct services given by a training center which was opened in 1970; organization of camps and recreational activities, translating into Arabic the book: "When a Child is Different", written by Dr. Maria Egg.

Around 1970, there existed in Lebanon nine institutions for the training of mentally retarded children. By 1972, approximately 350 children and youth attended those institutions. Most of them have resumed their activities but the need is far greater than the effort displayed. According to Dr. M. Khoury, it is estimated that the number of mentally disabled persons of all sorts is around 30,000. Only a small number of them is receiving any treatment.

In **Syria**, adequate information about the topic of mental retardation is not obtainable. We know of the existence of two government hospitals for the mentally retarded: one near Damascus, with a 600 bed capacity, the other in Aleppo, with a 200 bed capacity. Voluntary organizations receive financial support from the government. There are five in all and, according to the Annual Statistical Bulletin of 1977, were providing services to around 152 persons.

In **Saudi Arabia**, an institution created in Riyadh in 1974 provides rehabilitation for both the mentally and the physically handicapped. A recent development plan aims to build another such institution, expanding the capacity of the Riyadh institution to accommodate 240 instead of 80 patients.

In **Bahrain**, the various ministries and private associations concerned with the disabled, have been preparing for the International Year of the Disabled, 1981, in a joint effort to effect a change in the public attitude toward them, and to translate words into action.

In a decree proclaimed by the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, a national committee for the disabled will be formed, presided over by the director of social affairs, and including delegates of the various ministries and private organizations concerned.

The Committee has already prepared a plan of action for 1981, approved by the Director of Social Affairs in 1978 (See An-Nashra ad-Dawriyah, no. 16, 1978). The plan divides the disabled into 4 categories: 1) the mentally

retarded, 2) the physically disabled, 3) the emotionally disturbed, 4) the psychophysically disabled.

#### Aims of the Project:

1. Taking care of 61 disabled children whose names have been on the waiting list since 1972.
2. Determining the number of the disabled and studying their cases in all the Bahraini districts.
3. Providing them with sanitary, social, recreational, educational and material services.

The districts included in the project were: the cities of Issa, Sitra and Muharriq. Other districts are under study.

The project would be subsidized by both local and foreign help.<sup>(2)</sup>

#### B. Physical Disabilities

In the ECWA region, mental disabilities are considered shameful, hence they are surrounded by a secretive and tense atmosphere which impedes their treatment. Physical disabilities, on the contrary, are considered more or less natural; projects created for them move in a more relaxed atmosphere; they are more numerous and better equipped.

1. In Iraq which, among Arab countries, gives social service particular attention, there are five rehabilitative institutions for the physically disabled, all government subsidized.

a. The Vocational Rehabilitation Center in Waziriyeh, already referred to, serves different kinds of handicapped people, with the exception of the blind. It provides an initial assessment period which gives the handicapped person an opportunity to choose the occupation that fits him or her. According to Dr. Khoury's study, the center rehabilitated, between April 1971 and May 1975, 1,020 males and 84 females.

b. The Pilot Institution for the Blind, serves 110 blind males and females whose ages range between 5 and 30 years.

c. The "Industrial Institute for the Deaf" and the "Amal School for the Deaf", both provide their students with primary education and special training preparing them to achieve complete vocational training at the Waziriyeh Center.

d. The "Physiotherapy of Baghdad" provides physiotherapeutic as well as prosthetic-orthopedic services for out-patients.

2. In Jordan, the "Project Proposals of the Queen Alia Jordan Social Welfare Fund", published in the booklet already referred to, while they give a detailed plan of projected centers for the mentally retarded, do not mention any projects for the physically disabled. However, it is well-known that voluntary organizations, which are particularly active in the social welfare field, play a significant role in caring for the disabled of all categories and receive financial assistance from the Jordanian government, which helps them carry out their activities.<sup>(3)</sup>

(2) An-Nashra ad-Dawriyah, no. 21, April, May, June 1980, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Bahrain.

(3) Al-Raida, vol. II, no. 8, May, 1979, p. 8.



3. In Kuwait, serious efforts have been made for the purpose of improving the conditions of the disabled. The government provides: 1) two "Institutes for the Blind", 2) two for the "Deaf and Dumb", 3) one "Educational Institute for the Paralyzed", and 4) two "Pre-Vocational and Vocational Rehabilitation Institutes". The government takes charge of all expenses needed by the trainees. Services are rendered to them while they live with their families, unless the family proves to be unfit for the proper care of the disabled person. Suitable employment opportunities are made available to those who are able to take a job in sheltered workshops.

4. In Lebanon, the war has created at least 5000 permanently disabled people. The services they receive are mainly financed by private organizations, partly helped by the government. Some of them, such as the "Cortbawi Institutes" in Mt. Lebanon, the "Medical Rehabilitation Center" at Ouzai, the "Kafa'at (Potentials) Institute" at Hadath, existed before the war and are still functioning. The same is true of the "School for the Blind" at Baabda, "Father Roberts' School for the Deaf and Dumb" at Suheileh (Mt. Lebanon). Since 1978, in response to new needs created by the war, several new institutions have sprung up: The "Daouha Institute" at Aramoun for developing human potentials, the "Bait-Shabab Institution" for training the physically disabled, the "National Institute for Employment", founded through the cooperation of the "Industrialists' Association" and the "Kafa'at Institute" for the vocational training of the physically disabled.

Due to the large number of the disabled and the limited aid available, we may conclude that many of them have no access to proper care.

5. In Saudi Arabia, mention has been made of the institutions created in 1974 for both mentally retarded and physically disabled persons. Moreover, a social insurance law, established in 1973, protects several types of workers, including those who have been disabled because of an accident. Plans have been laid out for the establishment of a center for the deaf and dumb by 1978-1979 and of a

rehabilitation center for the seriously disabled.

6. In Syria, statistics given by the Social Services Department of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs report the existence of eleven institutes for the blind, serving 200 beneficiaries. The accuracy of this report has to be verified. Voluntary associations involved in the rehabilitation of the disabled receive technical and financial help from the government.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor has laid down plans for the establishment of several new institutes in and outside Damascus for the rehabilitation of the blind, the deaf-mutes and other physically disabled persons.

### Conclusion

It is clear that the above report is neither comprehensive nor sufficiently documented. Sources and statistics about this wide topic are scarce and not easily obtainable. The brief information we have recorded serves to show that much remains to be done by the ECWA countries in the field of services rendered to the disabled. It also shows the existence of general awareness regarding this problem, as we may infer from the plans made by many Arab states for the treatment and rehabilitation of the various types of disabled children and adults.

### References

1. *Al-Raida*, vol II, no. 8, May, 1979, p. 8.
2. *An-Nashra ad-Dawriya* (Periodical Newsletter) no. 16, 1978 & no. 21, 1980, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Bahrain.
3. *Project Proposals of the Queen Alia Jordan Social Welfare Fund*, Jordan, 1980.
4. *Dalil-ul-Musassasat il-ljtima'iya fi Lubnan* (A guide of the social institutions in Lebanon), 2 vols, edited by the Social Training Center, Hadath, Lebanon, 1980.
5. Information provided by Dr. Mounir Khoury, Professor of Sociology at Beirut University College, Beirut.