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EDITORIAL

The challenge of mental disability

Prevalence of mental disability in the general population –roughly two percent– is significantly high. It is likely even higher in broad sectors in developing countries primarily due to both deficient perinatal care as well as malnutrition and exposure to toxic environmental pollutants at critical times of brain development during early childhood. This figure suggests that mental disability is a problem of great importance not only for public health but for countless other social concerns, such as education, employment and human rights, as well as for those issues that may seemingly be distant from this problem such as judicial or economical matters.

Among the many disabilities that can affect humans, mental disability is one of the most significant since it affects the most sophisticated of all human attributes. Thus, society must make every effort to improve and facilitate the capacity for performance, adaptation and human satisfaction for any person whose mental abilities are diminished. The brain being the source of countless abilities, it is of paramount importance to design multidisciplinary approaches within the field of mental disability research to improve the integral participation of subjects with mental disability in the huge machinery of modern society; so varied is the society and demanding of different abilities that a proper place

can be found for everyone, including those with very limited skills; it is an ethical obligation to find a place for everyone in the overall context of an harmonious and ideal community.

The editors of this special issue of *Salud Pública de México*, Drs. Katz, Rangel and Lazcano are to be congratulated for bringing together so many experts in so many aspects of mental disability, making it possible to cover a wide range of issues, including broad concepts –such as definitions, perspectives, services, classifications and prognoses– as well as specific concerns such as sexuality, education, autonomy and rehabilitation. I anticipate that this text will be a reference for anyone interested in mental disability, and particularly for those from developing countries as the experience of mental disability in very different cultural organizations in both developed and developing countries from various continents is another valuable contribution of this text. Moreover, I believe that advances by professionals working in the field of mental disability will be of great use to those dealing with the decline in mental abilities associated with aging, another worrisome concern for modern public health.

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