A Study on Practical Models for Family Empowerment of the Handicapped

Yang, Sook-Mee

Abstract

This study is to examine the unique experiences that families with the handicapped and to review the practical possibility of those family empowerment as a supporting approach. Recently it is an increasing tendency to consider the right and responsibility of protecting as their duty for reducing the caring expanse. So this paper is to suggest some ways which are based on many preceding studies for the purpose of reducing their burden and empowering them.

First of all, I will examine the burden and desire that the handicapped families have experienced, which will be especially concentrated on the influences on their direct family members. Next, I will explain the background from which the family empowerment model has been intended and examine its practical characteristics. Third, I will suggest some plans, guiding principles, means, and supporting services when applying the family empowerment model directly to the families of the handicapped. Lastly, I will study the meaning and significance of this support model.

Key Words: family empowerment, family of the handicapped

* This work was supported by 2005 Namseoul University Grant.
** Associate Professor, Department of Child Welfare in Namseoul University
Corresponding Author: Yang, Sook-Mee Dept. of Child Welfare, Namseoul University 21 Maaju-ri, Seonghwan-eup, Cheonan-city, Choongnam, KOREA 330-707 E-mail: smyangc@nsu.ac.kr
I. Introduction

The handicapped usually have difficulty in performing various developmental tasks and crises for their lives. It is essentially required that their parents and brothers or sisters, who are related most closely with the handicapped members, should support and cooperate with them to succeed their tasks. In particular, they need continuously to be supported through all their lives. For the older they will be, the harder they will get to adapt themselves to society (S. M. Yang, 2000).

Family members tend to deepen their recurring helplessness and stress, for they have kept accumulating confusion, difficulty, and exhaustion since their handicapped child was born. Their psychological exhaustion and helplessness from endless caring works can lead to weaken their motive of rehabilitation and education for the handicapped children and to take a languishing attitude to them (Kirkham, 1993). This exhaustion caused by too heavy burden for supporting them could to the extreme degree give rise to abandoning them. Besides, social imputation on those families may eventually impose a heavy burden and economic stress on them and result in providing only fragmented services to the handicapped children (Leon, 1999). Disability needs the concentrated and integrated supporting services through one's whole life. So it will be a severe damage to the quality of their services to give up taking care of the handicapped children, which would in the end cause society and nation to pay still larger social and economic cost (Abramowitz, 1988). Therefore, it is more urgent to relieve the family's burden and develop a variety of social support services than anything else.

This study is to examine practical ways to apply the family empowerment model of other preceding studies actually to families with the handicapped. For this purpose, it will be concerned with the following matters as concretely as possible: First, what are the unique problems and desires that these families have gotten from caring and supporting their handicapped members? This research can make us know what kind of support services are really necessary for them. Second, why has the family empowerment model been emphasized in the trend of social work services for the handicapped? Third, what are the practical principles when applying the model? For this I will suggest several practical plans and desirable ways. The last question is what are the good effects of the models to the families.