



ROMA MOTHERS' VIEWS ON THE CONCEPT OF DISABILITY: AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH

Sotiria Papaisidorou¹ⁱ,

Evanthia Tsaliki²

¹MA in Special (Inclusive) Education

²Visiting Research Associate,

International Centre for Intercultural Studies,

UCL Institute of Education, University of London, UK

Abstract:

The present research sought to explore Roma mothers' views on the concept of disability and through the trends which emerged it investigated the extent to which they have been influenced by the dominant culture on disability. The research focused on the study of the views of Roma mothers living in a specific region in Greece. One of the characteristics of the minority group in which these Roma mothers belong is their permanent installation in this region for many years. The research was undertaken through the qualitative approach and more specifically with the use of semi-structured interviews with Roma mothers. The main findings of the survey suggest that the influence of the dominant culture on disability upon these mothers is remarkable. Disability is recognized by those as something different from the majority in terms of respect and understanding. However, as the research revealed, they cannot interpret this differentiation, in relation to the education that every mother of the sample has received. At the same time, disability constitutes undoubtedly a link between their race and the dominant groupⁱⁱ, thus the dominant culture. Finally, the combination of Roma minority and disability in the context of intercultural education is projected as a key issue of social inclusion.

Keywords: minority; inequality; Roma women; disability; intercultural approach; inclusive education

1. Introduction

In today's societies, there is an increasing reference to issues such as multiculturalism, multicultural education, cultural diversity, minorities, identities, racism and

ⁱ Correspondence: email soti_pp@hotmail.com

ⁱⁱ For the purposes of this study, the term 'dominant group' does not imply the group which exercises power, but the majority and under this sense it is used throughout the whole text.

marginalization. In recent years, a particular interest seems that has been developed in the Greek society on 'romiki'/'gypsy'/'gyftiki' identity due to various initiatives that arise regarding the Roma, such as their education. The aforementioned terms for their classification vary and there are variations and self-determination within their group. In Greece, although there is a confusion between the terms of 'Gypsy' and 'Gyftos', due to the differentiation of subgroups in this socio-cultural group, the 'Roma' characterization is principally used. In this article, the term Roma is used for the mosaic of all different groups for reasons of consistency.

Given that contemporary educational reality has been shaped by students of different cultural identity, the integration of intercultural dimension in education is considered to be a result of the above fact. Therefore, the implementation of intercultural education is necessary. Regarding the Roma, they constitute a social group that shares a different lifestyle from that of the majority. According to Parthenis & Tseliou (2015), the integration of Roma children in the educational system constitutes a priority nowadays, as well as the duty of every modern society to educate responsible, active and moral citizens who intend to live in an environment of justice and democracy. Of course, it is worth noting the position that there is little interest of Roma parents in the progress and the proper preparation of their children in school, thus leading to the lack of cooperation between Roma and school.

The study of stereotyped roles comprise part of our daily life and the identification and elimination of some of these stereotyped roles is the duty of every responsible society that operates on the basis of equal opportunities. A typical example is the problem of stereotypes and prejudices towards persons with disabilities that works as a multi-factorial problem that can be seen under different aspects, such as the anthropological level, the economic and socio-psychological level, the legal level and moreover the traditional and moral level. As far as the category of vulnerable social groups is concerned in which people with special educational needs and the Roma belong to - in which exclusion mechanisms derive from dominant groups who have developed social inequality - one might wonder whether the dominant culture has affected the relationship between these two groups. At this point, it is noted that in the context of this study the term 'dominant group', which derives from the term 'dominant culture', indicates the group which constitutes the majority and not the one that exercises power.

Special Education is an important field of contemporary pedagogy which includes theoretical and research considerations as well as practical applications. The basic strategies of the educational policy of equal learning opportunities for all students cover the assessment of pupils, teacher training, the approach of apocalyptic learning, information to parents regarding their participation in the educational process of their children, as well as the construction of the entire school unit. Moreover, the philosophy of today introduces a new conception of Special Education, that of Inclusive Education, which aims at providing effective education not only for children with special educational needs, but also for all children who have the right to be respected and be appreciated as individuals. Failure to understand leads to a failure to overcome the

regime hitherto subordinating and devaluing children with special educational needs and their supporters. If, however, there is a clear philosophy, the integration will continue to remain stagnant in the rhetoric of our situation bringing us back to normalization and assimilation of integrative practices (Liasidou, 2007).

Starting, then, from the social reality of Roma and based on contemporary educational reality the present research study attempts to investigate the identity of Roma pupils through their immediate family which will reveal the views of Roma mothers for the issue of disability which may relate to their own children. In turn the data collected will indicate new policies, practices and specialized educational interventions in a field that lacks research and should concern every state or local authority that intends to help the community of Roma.

2. The main purpose of the survey

The main aim of the research study is to explore the views of Roma in Greece on the concept of disability. An attempt is made to explore whether they have embraced the values of the wider community and meet the standards proposed by the dominant culture on disability issues. Moreover, whether they consciously choose their adaptation to the dominant class's concept of disability or they shift from this concept is investigated. In particular, the attitude of Roma mothers was investigated in relation to Roma children with disabilities or people with disabilities in general, as well as the effect of gender on the above behavior. This piece of research attempts to answer the question of whether Roma's resistive forces towards maintaining their own traditional values continue to affect assimilation attitudes towards particular awareness raised by the dominant culture of modern Greek state with regard to disability. These forces may define how Roma perceive the concept of disability, or even whether different kinds of disability are considered natural and they do not require special treatment.

Therefore, the main research question of the study is as follows:

- a) How do Roma mothers perceive the concept of disability?

A number of subsidiary research questions have been developed to answer the main research question:

- b) Is each type of disability considered as something normal by Roma mothers in the municipality of Santa Barbara?
- c) Have Roma mothers been affected by the views of the dominant culture on disability?

3. The 'special' case of Roma in Greece

Since centuries ago, Roma are people who live permanently in villages or constantly move as nomads and semi-nomads. However, this fact does not ensure their harmonious social integration in the respective societies. The culture of Roma has remained the same for centuries, the values and traditions of which were maintained by their spoken language as the Roma language does not exist in written form (Hemseloet,

2012). The exact number of Roma in Greece is difficult to be estimated, and this is attributed both to the different sets of data provided by official sources and the existing mechanism of the Greek state, which overrides any cultural differences and features of each person living in Greece, as Greek (European Center for the Rights of the Roma, 2004). As people of oral tradition, Roma function as an enigma concerning their origin and history, because many reports have been written for those related to a distorted picture of their reality (Terzopoulou & Georgiou, 1996).

The case of Roma in recent decades has seriously occupied the state, as they are characterized as one of the unresolved 'problems' of modern Europe, despite the efforts at national and regional level (Dragoi, 2013). Despite their Greek citizenship and their permanent residency in various parts of Greece, Roma still face a systematic violation of their human rights (Noula et al., 2015). The disadvantage Roma face concerns all social and cultural fields and until recently, they had hardly been recognized as a distinct ethnic, linguistic and cultural group, against those who render, consciously or unconsciously, stereotypical images (Liegeois & Cheorghe, 2002). It is difficult for Roma themselves to provide an answer for all these processes and their longitudinal marginalization by the dominant group. For decades housing problems, employment, social care, education and training of Roma in Greece remain unresolved and no substantial action of the Greek state has taken place that actively seeks to integrate Roma in the country, within the framework of Greek citizens utilizing democracy (Exarch, 1998).

It would not be reasonable for a state that maintains inactive and marginalized population groups, such as Roma, to require from them high standards in social and cultural level for their smooth integration into it. Education and illiteracy are some of the problems which Roma living in Greece face. For instance, a research study conducted in the area of Santa Varvara, a western region in the prefecture of Attica, Greece from 1994 to 1996 aiming at highlighting Roma's attitudes in social integration processes undertaken in school, revealed that while they were permanently installed and according to them all admit the necessity of education. According to the same research, very few attended school and Roma children had the most absences from school (Lidaki, 1998). In Greece, like all other countries Roma have received poorer education and living standards. They also do not have the experience of writing and of their own cultural identity and although in most countries are indigenous, are still considered as 'foreigners' (Vasileiadou et al., 1987).

3.1 About Roma women

The meanings and interpretations of the term 'Roma' multiply with the addition of 'Women' characterization; an addition worth to be discussed. Racist practices and distinctions based both on gender in general and because of the nature of their 'race' are existent within the nature of Roma women. The combination of 'Roma' and 'woman' identity constructs an indivisible personality (Magyari-Vincze, 2008). Gender and race constitute heritage identities shaping the future of each person, but at the same time in each person these identities function as a means of cultural diversity, in terms of which

the respective society creates hierarchical distributions, according to social expectations and cultural prejudices (Magyari-Vincze, 2006). Roma women face multiple discrimination at a general societal level. They also face discrimination within their own race and culture, which is based on a patriarchal tradition that creates additional discrimination and restrictions on females (Ravnbol, 2010).

For some time raising awareness on gender issues did not characterize the Roma community, although the key role of Roma women is considered to be within the reproductive process (Vincze, 2014). Nowadays their role seems to be determined according to the criteria set by their community. Nevertheless, their role is catalytic not only in terms of home and children's care, but also on economic or professional issues as well as their role as carriers of the customs and traditions of Roma (Kotrotsiou, 2014). Thus, Roma woman with her characteristic 'Gypsy' way of dressing, defying every stereotyped behavior of her social environment, is the person who illustrates better the diversity of her culture (Lidaki, 2013).

Consequently, Roma women are born and brought up in a society where people's voice and choices are overshadowed by a tradition that defines as 'power' the birth of many children (Magyari-Vincze, 2008). Nonetheless, this is a situation that gradually seems to vary. This is, also, confirmed by recent literature, and literature written by Roma women themselves. This fact indicates that they have not been trapped into their own tribe and its culture, without at the same time having forgotten that historically they had a central mediator role between their family and the dominant culture, for instance, via their contact with the school of their children (Ravnbol, 2010). Based on the above, this study will focus on the 'multiple' views of Roma women and mothers on disability issues, through which the understanding of Roma reality and relationships developed with the 'others' and the wider society of today is attempted. At this point, it should be noted that Roma men's views on the issue are not considered irrelevant or meaningless but their views are not within the scope of this specific study.

3.2 Minorities and Roma

The Muslim population of western Thrace, immigrants from the Balkans and the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and Roma living in various regions in Greece are considered some of the main minority groups living in Greece (Tsilingiris et al., 2015). Cultural diversity is considered a dynamic situation for a society. However, it may also be considered a situation involving moral decay (Zachos, 2013).

Reference to Roma, seems to vary depending on how they are perceived in every European state. For example, in some European countries Roma are recognized as a minority, while in others, such as France they are not considered as a minority as the concept of minority is not an accepted term (Gynther, 2007). However, as a linguistic minority and people of oral tradition, inevitably Roma are ignorant of the reality of their history and are surrounded by disparities, prejudices and negative stereotypes (Liegeois & Cheorghe, 2002).

It is supported that people with special educational needs constitute a minority group (Tsilingiris et al., 2015). They could be considered minorities, because their

population is smaller than in other groups of people and in this sense, they are attached to this description. Nevertheless, according to intercultural education they do not constitute a minority. It is just a group with its own characteristics, like any social group, and these features are in no way inferior to those of other social groups. In this piece of research, people with disabilities are not considered a minority group, but a group with different characteristics and in any case, they are not inferior in the light of intercultural education.

This study focuses on Roma, who constitute a typical example which represents both the sense of mobility and their movement for financial support of their families in various local communities (Liegeois, 2007). It also seeks to explore their views on the meaning of disability within a society which refuses to understand the special characteristics of people with some kind of disability, thus leading them to social exclusion (Tsilingiris et al., 2015).

3.3 Special (Inclusive) Education and Roma

Low school performance in combination with and the detection of learning difficulties in any child may contribute to the development of behavioral problems in the classroom, especially when related to Roma pupils who already have experienced social rejection and on which the label of 'low achieving pupil' would be more convenient to be attached leading to ignorance and proliferation of learning difficulties for Roma pupils, thus perpetuating the existent situation (Lidaki, 1998). Of course, the dominant view which considers that Roma pupils lag behind in school performance should not be overlooked (Lidaki, 2013). Thus, the difficulties they face in the school are attributed to learning difficulties or mental disabilities without considering that these difficulties may appear due to the lack of the reference to their culture in the curriculum (Flouris, Giotis, Parthenis & Miligou, 2013).

It is also noted that the assimilation policies followed by the educational system structures, attach to Roma pupils evident disadvantage and alleged 'special social needs', classifying them in classes of pupils with special educational needs and/ or disabilities which are incompatible with the needs of Roma students (Liegeois, 1999). It is, also, worth noting that according to Law 3699/2-10-2008 for 'Special education and training of people with disabilities or special educational needs', students with poor school performance, which is causally linked to external factors such as linguistic or cultural differences, do not fall into the category of students with disabilities and special educational needs, but into the category of people with special educational needs. It is therefore easy to understand that schooling in the case of Roma students seems to contradict the philosophy of special classes, which promotes their operation based on the needs of students and their continuous adaptation to them.

In addition, it has been noted by researchers that the parents of children with disabilities, who have greater social support, state that their children have fewer behavioral problems than that reported by the parents who do not receive appropriate social support. Social support, personal and family well-being are related to the characteristics of the behaviors of a child with disabilities, and its progress (Dunst &

Trivette, 1990). Therefore, it is obvious that the socio-economic and educational level of parents, responsibilities and relationships between family members, and the problems and difficulties that disability causes in family's daily routine, are important factors which must be considered in assessing and addressing the needs of the child and the parents themselves. Taking into consideration of the above, it is worth mentioning the example of an ethnographic study which examines the way that Roma children in Greece learn to participate in the financial support of their family. More specifically, a group of Roma was observed for two months during their tour in various parts of Greece so as to investigate how Roma parents educate their children to cope with the local economy of Greece. The intense reflection point is the reference to the 'art of begging' and the finding that children who had some mental or physical disorder, such as spinal deformity, often were trained by their parents to beg, so as to contribute financially to their family (Christianakis, 2010).

The research for Roma in Greece is limited and there is no concern on their interaction with Special Education. Therefore, it is especially important to approach such a research framework which will probably cover research gaps and provide proposals and reconstruction of the educational process.

By studying the relevant literature, one can find similarities between Roma and non-Roma, since the former does not cease to be people with physical, mental and spiritual needs. Furthermore, as there are non-Roma with special educational needs and/ or disabilities, Roma constitute personalities which represent different social groups at the same time.

In recent years, the notion of 'Inclusive' Education in school schedules stresses the fulfilment of the educational needs for children with disabilities, through adaptations of the curricula not only in the various modules, but also with expansion in teaching skills related to each category of pupils. The concept of Inclusive Education (education for all) aims at promoting the welfare of all students, eliminating social injustice and considering the school as a factor contributing to integration rather than exclusion and classification of them. The provision of equal educational opportunities in a 'school for all', regardless of any special need or characteristic that differentiates pupils' national, cultural or social identity is always the main goal. The inclusion of all children, including those of Roma with special educational needs and/ or disabilities, is a process that requires the implementation of a series of activities aiming at changing the legislation, resources and social security, the way of thinking and the educational approach, which is actively supported by the parents and the state.

3.5 The need for intercultural approach in the case of Roma pupils

One of the basic principles of intercultural education is the equal treatment of different cultures and the provision of equal opportunities for children of all cultural and linguistic minorities. More specifically, it means that historical minorities, such as Roma and generally minorities in the various educational settings as well as their individuality should be recognized and respected. However, this individuality should

not be over-emphasized, but generally be in interaction with the others in shaping united perceptions (Hatzinikolaou, 2005)

Greece constitutes a democratic country and society. However, such a characterization is shaken since for long periods of time perpetuated stereotypes and social segregations against Roma are produced by the members of the dominant group, including the educational community (Parthenis & Gundara, 2015). The dominant education is not synonymous with otherness, as it is configured according to the dominant language and culture, thus making it inaccessible for minorities such as Roma (Noula et al., 2015). Moreover, the design of the Greek curriculum regarding teachers' training, with the pedagogical approaches and the promotion of attitudes and values that does not take into account the diversity of Roma children, in terms of economic background, health status, culture and family environment should not be overlooked (Igarashi, 2005). Thus, the Greek school institution meets all the conditions for centrifugal education, which defines the education of Roma pupils as a 'problem' and focuses on their diversity as a race considered marginal (Liegeois, 2007).

Based on the above, the fundamental and universal right of education seems to be, in the case of Roma, a kind of oppression and an obligation. Roma until now constitute the display of a series of issues concerning the multicultural character of nowadays (Liegeois, 2007). The transformation of the educational system into a communication channel between the Roma and the dominant culture is a difficult but promising venture.

4. Method

4.1 Methods and procedures used for data collection

The research question and subsidiary research questions of the present study were investigated with the use of semi-structured interviews with Roma mothers – which constituted an opportunistic sample – of different social classes living permanently in a western region of the prefecture of Attica, Greece. The access to the sample was achieved with the help of partners and Roma ombudsmen participating in the research programme titled: 'Education of Roma children'. The research programme was undertaken by the National University of Athens, in which I had been involved as a kindergarten teacher. At this point, it should be noted that the authors have no commercial associations that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article.

4.2 Sample

The issue that this research sought to investigate was approached through the study of Roma mothers living in a western region of Attica, which is an indicative area of permanent Roma installation for many years. The selection of this specific sample in terms of their permanent residency raised a more holistic picture of the issue. In total eighteen (18) semi-structured interviews with Roma mothers were undertaken in the region, two (2) of which were part of the pilot survey. The ages of the interviewees

ranged from 27 years to 59 years, which allowed a range of answers in the data collected regarding the issue under investigation.

This study should be perceived as an attempt to explore the trends which will arise from Roma living in this specific region of Attica. It is not claimed that the results of this research study can be generalized for all Roma living in Greece or elsewhere. They can be generalized to a certain extent and only for Roma people who have similar characteristics in terms of their living with Roma of the sample.

4.3 Data collection Tools

In this qualitative approach, the research tool used is the interview, as it is thought to be appropriate to investigate the personal views of the participants, thus answering the subsidiary research questions (Saldana, 2011). It is important to denote that the investigation concerns Roma with the following characteristics: the participants are female, are mothers and live permanently in the region having accommodation with the basic facilities. Roma mothers in this study do not represent all Roma living in Greece but they may be considered as those Roma persons who are more integrated into the mainstream culture.

Before the conduct of the survey, a pilot-study had been undertaken in order to avoid possible weaknesses of either the organization or the understanding of the interview questions.

The conduct of the interview took place each time with one participant of the research, in space and time appropriate and suitable for the interviewee. Each interview lasted approximately twenty (20) minutes. In order to prevent potential ethical issues in this investigation, before the beginning of the interview the interviewee and the researcher were asked to sign an informed consent protocol informing them on the frame of the study and commitment of confidentiality from the researcher to the participant. In the very beginning of each interview, certain social and demographic characteristics of each interviewee were recorded, in order to check whether there is a correlation between the social and demographic data and the mothers' answers. The interviews were recorded with the consent of mothers. The recording process facilitated the transcription and the analysis of the data collected. Furthermore, within the framework of the above process the researcher followed the basic ethical rules both during the interviews and later on during the analysis of the data. Actually, the conduct of the interviews constituted a challenge on the researcher's part as she had to provide the interviewees with continuous encouragement for answering and to create a positive climate, particularly in cases of mothers who showed hesitation or uncertainty in answering the questions.

4.4 Data analysis

The transcription of the semi-structured interviews was followed by the analysis of data which was collected via the interviews in order to investigate the research questions. A matrix analysis was established through which the data was distilled, analyzed and presented systematically. More specifically, the study of the transcripts of the

interviews and of Roma mothers' responses led to the formation of the various categories, which were consolidated with consecutive numbering on the transcripts. All the different answers to every question of the interview schedule were defined as a category. If any of the words or meanings referred to two or more categories, they were listed in the relevant categories according to the researcher's judgement. Based on the analysis of the data table, the code was placed in each box so as to control the frequency. In other boxes, some of the words were transferred unchanged, because they thought to be very important or special, or other data was formulated by the researcher instead of code, as they facilitated reading, counting and understanding. In particular, an effort was made to detect the absence and presence of significant data, and even the frequency it appears as well as its relationship with demographics or among the answers on the same question. Additionally, some issues, such as gender discrimination in Roma community, were codified. They did not seem to answer directly the subsidiary research questions, but they were considered that related importantly and interestingly with the social phenomenon investigated and lent an integrated view of the research topic. Finally, some of the answers were related to more than one question of the interview schedule. In this case, the code which was created was put in every corresponding question.

5. Findings and Interpretation

Through the analysis of the data collected regarding the views of Roma mothers on disability issues, their personal assessments for the health of their family members, their attitudes towards the concept of disability, the values they attach to the school institution as well as, beliefs and knowledge on the education of persons with disabilities and their references to deeper reflections on the studied subject emerged.

The values and attitudes of Roma mothers towards disability were judged to be related to their social position which also affects the degree of their understanding of culture in the wider society. The general picture formed for Roma mothers who participated in this research, is characterized by a low economic and educational level (Noula et al., 2015; Liegeois, 1999; Exarchos, 1998; Vasiliadou et al., 1987). The ages of them range from 27 to 59 years of age, which provides space for variation in the data collected for the issue under investigation. As a whole, they are unemployed as the professional opportunities that are provided to them are minimal or zero. However, most of them seem to have regretted not having completed their basic compulsory education. The fact that the social group of Roma has a negative attitude towards schooling and education is undoubtedly confirmed by this sample of Roma women, behind which there are various parameters. However, the focus of this research is less on what lead them not setting education as a priority, but more on interpreting this behavior through their attitudes and awareness of the issue of the disability of Roma or non-Roma people.

Regarding the first subsidiary research question, referring to whether Roma women consider disability a normal situation, it was found that those women who are

permanent residents of the region distinguish any form of disability, considering it as something different that does not reflect the majority and what is considered to be 'normal'. More precisely, most mothers appreciated the health status of their family members as 'good' or 'very good'. However, there were mothers who rated the health status of their family members as 'moderate' or even "poor" as they face disability issues. In particular, from the sixteen (16) Roma mothers whose participation in the present study was purely a matter of chance, six (6) of them claimed to have a personal experience of disability, either through their own children or through their relatives, as disability does not differentiate and refers to all mankind. Therefore, even in the sample of this study, which is the result of luck, coming from the Roma community, a 37.5% of disability cases appear, suggesting that this minority is equally important.

The contact created with the above mothers during the interviews was frank and positive, and their willingness to express their personal experience on the sensitive issue of disability, they may face themselves, reveals that their differentiation from the dominant culture does not stand as a barrier to the issue of disability, but a common point. It was also noticed that as the age of the mothers grows, there was no less awareness or ignorance of disability issues, as usually happens with Roma education. This finding is different from the reports of Drydakakis (2012) whose surveys have shown that younger Roma women have higher graduation rates in secondary education than older Roma women.

Regarding the second subsidiary research question through which the impact factors of the dominant culture on disability in Roma mothers was investigated, it was found that the attitude that Roma mothers develop towards the issue of disability is characterized by a) awareness and recognition of disability as a matter of the culture developed in each society, b) respect for the equality and human rights in the context of disability, c) a common connection point between the Roma community and the dominant culture within a framework of acceptance and understanding, and d) a self-denial tendency on their words about their beliefs regarding the diversity of people with disabilities compared to the rest. In short, the influence of the dominant culture regarding disability in this particular study group of Roma women is characterized by a remarkable awareness, a considerable respect of diversity, but a limited interpretation of this difference that emerges from the disability of people, probably due to lack of information, but also due to the lack education of each one of them.

It turns out that disability is an issue for Roma mothers which does not refer to the majority and therefore does not consist something 'normal', but needs differentiated treatment. However, the different forms of disability and the way they appear to every person of any social group, which is still something 'frightening', seems to be a matter of concern for them, as it was revealed via their references during the interviews. Of course, it is of great importance that, generally speaking, mothers seem to embrace, even in their words, the proclamation of the dominant culture on disability, to protect the rights of the disabled from being underexamined expressing the belief that disability is a matter of mentality and not a problem for the humanity.

The value which Roma mothers attribute to the school institution, is great and the only points to question this claim are the phenomenon of school leakage and the sense of being different from the 'others' as a tribe, according to their own words and arguments. This convergence of their views on the role of school is likely to be interpreted by their personal view that their illiteracy has played a catalytic role on the unemployment they face, among other consequences that may arise. This is a situation that they would not like for their children to face. Consequently, through the negative feelings that may arise from this, the value they attribute to education may have an influence on those on the sensitive concept of disability, which seems to be a connecting factor between Roma and the dominant culture, and at the same time a promising step for their social integration.

It is also remarkable that special awareness was revealed by the mothers who have personal experience with dealing with the issue of disability via their relatives or even their own children. They expressed their views on special education and also criticized the social context of people with disabilities and their education, with the use of relative arguments. It should not be overlooked, however, that what appears to be of great concern for them about the education of people with disabilities is the provision of welfare by the state, particularly for families with a low socio-economic background, as happens to them. They argue that the main reason for their absence from school or the deprivation of their right to education, specifically in special education, is the lack of family welfare. The concern is whether the value they attribute to their claims for the education of people with disabilities prevails over their disadvantage as a race that is predominant among the lower social groups, setting as a priority their education and not their financial support.

From the analysis of the data issues arose which, although did not answer the subsidiary research questions, were considered to be worth mentioning and discussing. The fact that this research study refers only to Roma mothers, is due to the fact that the female gender of the Roma combines a variety of forms of discrimination thus making them the most suitable mediator who can combine the concept of minority with the concept of disability.

The analysis revealed that Roma women, apart from the various forms of exclusion they experience because of their race, they also face gender-based exclusions stemming from their own race. This finding is in line with the report of Ravnbol (2010), according to which Roma women do not only represent multiple discrimination in the dominant society but also in an 'inner' level, within their own race and culture, based on the patriarchal tradition which promotes further discriminatory restrictions on females. More specifically, the report of a mother revealed her tendency to escape from Roma culture (Magyari-Vincze, 2008) in terms of virginity, the main consequence of which, as it turns out, is the deprivation of their right to education, apart from the rest. The question is how this can be ascertained and whether these trends are also being pursued by all Roma women, to ensure a better quality of life and reduce the multiple discrimination they suffer from. Moreover, there is also the thought of how in-depth research may be conducted regarding their tradition to reproduce in young age.

There is also a convergence of their views on the issue of their eliminated or non-school attendance. They admitted that they lack the necessary knowledge and skills. This inadequacy is the main reason they have been deprived from important aspects of life, as they reported. In addition, through their personal expression and verbal and non-verbal communication with the researcher, mothers revealed an insecurity stemming from their belief that they lag behind in a cognitive level during the interviewing process. There were also Roma mothers who claimed they did not want to participate in this research because they did not feel they have the necessary knowledge of the issue.

The case of Roma mothers living in this specific region and who were interviewed could be argued that constitutes a subgroup of the Roma community, which is considered to be quite well integrated into modern Greek society. This conclusion emerged from both their attitudes, beliefs and knowledge on the issue of disability, which are encountered by some of those in a family base, and from their attitudes and concerns about the value they attach to the school institution and education of all individuals regardless of social, cultural or any other kind of diversity. In particular, emphasis was given on the education of persons with disabilities, which was considered by them as a means of ensuring the basic human rights to education and entertainment. They also stressed the need for equal treatment in the field of special education and training and the provision of quality education to people who are in need of differentiated confrontation, which is not less than that provided to the rest of pupils. At the same time, emphasis was given by them on their illiteracy and the diversity they encounter within their breed due to their gender and the existing patriarchal tradition, depositing responsibility in their own culture. This realization is a promising step towards their social integration, transforming probably the value they attach to education a link between the Roma community and the dominant culture or/and the Roma minority and the concept of disability.

6. Recommendations

Through this research study, it is concluded that on the one hand the sensitive social issue of disability constitutes a major issue which raises Roma mothers' diversity both outside and within their tribe. On the other hand, the co-existence of disability with other minority issues deteriorates their deprivation from social state goods and services. The education of Roma women is a crucial issue on how positively they experience diversity and in this case the issue of disability. Therefore, the Greek State needs to take some measures to ensure the completion of compulsory education of Roma women in order to reduce the dropout phenomenon particularly for Roma women who are forced to leave school. The education of Roma women is imperative not only for their attitude towards disability, but also in order to improve and plan their life in general. Moreover, as data revealed most of Roma mothers interviewed consider that education is beneficial. As they mentioned through their participation in seminars they could be trained thus contributing more effectively to the upbringing and the

education of their children, so as they can, in turn, be integrated into the dominant lifestyle, without, of course denying their particular cultural characteristics.

The exploration of Roma women's views on the issue of disability who live in other parts of Greece, both in camps and in cities would be of particular interest, in order to undertake a comparative study of the various Roma mothers' groups across Greece and to determine whether these views are related to their lifestyle (camp or mobile or permanent residence). Furthermore, this research would be interesting to investigate the views of Roma fathers with regard to this issue, in order to see whether their views converge or diverge with those of women. Additionally, the issue could be approached from the perspective of teachers so as to explore their views on how Roma mothers deal with this issue and how they respond to co-operating with teachers in case they have a child with disabilities.

7. Conclusion

Roma living in Greece constitute the most distinct minority, notable for a different way of perceiving life comparing to that of the majority's. Of course, the educational policy of Greece should not ignore the existing multiculturalism in every educational level and be confined to short-term solutions that are not consistent with the values of intercultural education. Or even references on 'intercultural approach' should not exist, since the contradictory points between Roma and the dominant culture have not been defined, in a context of fruitful dialogue not only for minority groups but also the dominant group. The existing diversity in the Greek state should serve as an opportunity to modernize the Greek educational system and design interventions on key issues, such as the combination of the minority of Roma and the concept of disability. The Greek state could also encourage relevant research in higher education highlighting the diversity of Roma as an intercultural medium for their social integration.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was for Sotiria Papaisidorou a time consuming and arduous 'journey' to knowledge. Her companions, however, on this trip were some persons who we have to thank. If we had to thank someone for the completion of our 'journey' to knowledge, would not be no other than Roma mothers and the partners of the Programme: 'Education of Roma children', implemented by the University of Athens, without whom this research would not have taken place. We would also like to extend our thanks to her Roma pupils participating in the programme. Her interaction with them was a motivation and a challenge for the preparation of this research study.

About the Authors

Sotiria Papaisidorou

Ms. Sotiria Papaisidorou studied Sciences of Preschool Education and of Educational Design in the University of the Aegean, Greece and continued training on the field of

special education attending the Specialization Program (duration of 500 hours), entitled 'Special Education: Learning Difficulties - Dyslexia, dyscalculia, disorders of Conduct - Hyperactivity, Mental disorders, Autism, Parental Guidance', organized by the Research Center on Psychophysiology and Education of the University of Athens. She furthered her studies by obtaining a Master's degree in Special (Inclusive) Education by the European University of Cyprus (2016). She has worked as a kindergarten teacher in the Program: 'Education of Roma Children', implemented by the Intercultural Education Centre of the Department of Pedagogy based on the Philosophical School of Athens. Her involvement in this programme contributed both to the choice of the Roma minority as a research sample for her research study within the framework of her master thesis and raising awareness in minority issues, and the development of personal interest in intercultural education and training.

E-mail: soti_pp@hotmail.com

Evanthia Tsaliki²

Dr Evanthia Tsaliki has got a fifteen-year teaching experience in primary school. She acts as a visiting research associate based on the International Centre of Intercultural education in UCL Institute of Education, University Colleges London. She has made presentations in national and international conferences as well as publications in national and international journal. She has acted as a trainer of newly qualified teachers and her role as a reviewer in national and international conferences as well as in international journal, such as the International Journal of Multicultural Education and 'Educate' journal is in due course.

E-mail: inka140@hotmail.com

References

1. Christianakis, M. (2010). Lessons for Life: Roma Children, Communal Practices, and the Global Marketplace, *Perspectives on urban education*, 8(1), 11-18.
2. Dragoi, C. (2013). Social Inclusion of children from vulnerable groups in the context of modern migration – a challenge for the child – care system, *Journal Plus Education*, 9(1), 53-62.
3. Dunst, C.T. & Trivette, C.M. (1990). Assessment of social support in early intervention programs. In S.J. Meisels, & J. P. Shonkoff (eds.). *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (pp. 326-349). New York: Cambridge University Press.
4. Gynther, P. (2007). *Beyond Systematic Discrimination: Educational Rights, Skills Acquisition and the Care of Roma*. Lieden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
5. Hemelsoet, E. (2012). How to make sense of the right to education? Issues from the case of Roma people, *Ethics and Education*, 7(2), 163-174. doi:10.1080/17449642.2012.733603

6. Igarashi, K. (2005). Support programmes for Roma children: Do they help or promote exclusion? *Intercultural Education*, 16(5), 443-452. doi:10.1080/14675980500378508
7. Liasidou, A. (2007). Inclusive education policies and the feasibility of educational change the case of Cyprus. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*. 17(4), 329-347.
8. Liegeois, J. P. (2007). Roma Education and Public Policy: A European Perspective, *European Education*, 39(1), 11-31. doi:10.2753/EUE1056-4934390101
9. Magyari-Vincze, E. (2008). Romani Women's Multiple Discrimination through Reproductive Control. In H. Harbula & E. Magyari-Vincze (ed.). *Anthropo – Lenyomatok*. Amprente. Imprints. 299-317. Cluj: EFES.
10. Magyari-Vincze, E. (2006). Social Exclusion at the Crossroads of Gender, Ethnicity and Class; a View of Romani Women's Reproductive Health. Hungary: Open Society Institute.
11. Noula, I., Cowan, S. & Govaris, C. (2015). Democratic Governance for Inclusion: A Case Study of a Greek Primary School Welcoming Roma Pupils, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63(1), 47-66. doi:10.1080/00071005.2014.984654
12. Parthenis, C. & Gundara, J. (2015). Balancing unity and diversity in a European context. Has multiculturalism favored the 'others'? The case of the Roma children in Greece. In G. Nikolaou (ed.). *Cultural Diversity Equity and Inclusion; Intercultural Education in 21st century and beyond* (no pages). Ioannina: Ergastirio Apodimou Ellinismou & Diapolitismikis Ekpaideusis, University of Ioannina.
13. Parthenis, C. & Tseliou, E. (2015). Intercultural Education: The vehicle for promoting educational integration and social cohesion. The case of the programme 'Education of Roma children'. In G. Nikolaou (ed.). *Cultural Diversity Equity and Inclusion; Intercultural Education in 21st century and beyond* (no pages). Ioannina: Ergastirio Apodimou Ellinismou & Diapolitismikis Ekpaideusis, University of Ioannina.
14. Ravnol, C. I. (2010). The Human Rights of Minority Women: Romani Women's Rights from a Perspective on International Human Rights Law and Politics, *International Journal on Minority and Group Right*, Vol. 17, 1-45. doi:10.1163/157181110X12595859744123
15. Saldana, J. (2011). *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
16. Tsaliki, E. (2015), Diversity in Greece: The Necessity of Implementing Intercultural Education. *Theory and Research in the Sciences of Education*, 4/2015, 65-84. Retrieved from <http://periodiko.inpatra.gr> last retrieval 15/9/2015
17. Tsilingiris, A., Iatroudis, K., Tsiouris, C., Petropoulou, O., Preza, V. & Soulis, S. G. (2015). Minorities and disabilities: same or different? In G. Nikolaou (ed.). *Cultural Diversity Equity and Inclusion; Intercultural Education in 21st century and beyond* (no pages). Ioannina: Ergastirio Apodimou Ellinismou & Diapolitismikis Ekpaideusis, University of Ioannina.

18. Vincze, E. (2014). The racialization of Roma in the 'new' Europe and the political potential of Romani women, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 21(4), 443-449. doi:10.1177/1350506814548963

Greek references

1. Chatzinikolaou, A. (2005). *Literacy of Roma children through teaching human rights: Possibilities and Limitations*. Doctoral thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
2. Cleaning businesses. *The exclusion of Roma in Greece. Series of Countries' Exhibitions No. 12*. (2004). European Center for Roma Rights. Greek Monitor of Helsinki.
3. Exarchos, C. (1998). Social exclusion of Gypsies. In K. Kassimatis, K. Dimoulas, G. Exarchos, L. Mousourou, A. Moisisidis, S. Robolis, D. Tsousis, G. Tsiakalos & I. Psimmenos (eds.), *Social exclusion: The Greek experience*. (pp. 213, 215). Athens: Gutenberg.
4. Flouris, G., Gioti, L., Parthenis, C. & Miligou, E. (2013). *Lifelong Education and Training of Teachers in the Context of Intercultural Perspective. The Programm "Roma Children's Education" as a starting point for new theoretical and empirical approaches*. Athens: National Kapodistrian University of Athens, School of Philosophy, Center for Intercultural Education.
5. Kotrotsiou, S.A. (2014). *Interconnection of the psychological and social characteristics of Gypsies with the quality of their life and the effect of them on their health care*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Thessaly.
6. Liegeois, J. P. & Cheorghe, N. (2002). Roma/ Gypsies: A European minority. Papanikolaou, N. (eds.). *Roma/ Gypsies: A European minority*. (trans K. Gini). Athens: Greek Minority Right Group.
7. Liegeois, Z. (1999). Roma, Gypsies, Travelers. The Gypsies of Europe. Chatzisavvidis, S. (eds.). *Roma, Gypsies, Travelers. The Gypsies of Europe*. (trans A.A. Sipitanos). Athens: Kastaniotis.
8. Lydaki, A. (1998). *The Gypsies in the City. Growing up in Agia Barbara*. Athens: Kastaniotis.
9. Lydaki, A. (2013). Gypsy Women. In A. Lydaki (ed.), *Roma. Faces behind stereotypes*. (pp. 154-157). Athens: Alexandria.
10. Terzopoulou, M. & Georgiou, G. (1996). *The Gypsies in Greece. History - Culture*. Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs. Athens: General Secretariat for Education.
11. Vasiliadou, M., Gianataki, E., Drosos, A., Kotsionis, P. & Marcelos, B. (1987). *Study on addressing the educational problems of Gypsies*. Athens: Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, General Secretariat of Popular Education.
12. Zachos, DT (2013). Nationalism, Politics and Intercultural Education in Greece of crisis. *New Pedagogue*, (1), 45-57.

Sotiria Papaisidorou, Evanthia Tsaliki
ROMA MOTHERS' VIEWS ON THE CONCEPT OF DISABILITY:
AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).