
1 **IMPORTANCE OF ADAPTED PHYSICAL AND SPORTING ACTIVITIES IN** 2 **SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES** 3 **IN CONAKRY (GUINEA)**

4 **ABSTRACT**

5 This cross-sectional research aimed to identify the factors explaining the social
6 exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and to demonstrate the importance of sport in
7 the social integration process of this vulnerable group. A survey, conducted through
8 interviews, was carried out with twelve parents or guardians of people with intellectual
9 disabilities and seven sports leaders or managers. The results revealed that genetic anomalies,
10 birth complications, and beliefs related to witchcraft or curses reinforce the stigmatization and
11 isolation of people with intellectual disabilities within community spaces. To deconstruct this
12 phenomenon, the practice of sport promotes socialization, improves their well-being, and
13 transforms perceptions of disability. These results suggest promoting accessible, adapted
14 sports activities for vulnerable individuals, while encouraging them to better understand their
15 own personality within a framework of genuine belonging to a supportive and inclusive
16 community.

17 **Keywords:** disability, intellectual disability, sport, socialization, Conakry

18 **1. INTRODUCTION**

19 In many societies, differences observed at birth have very often constituted a form of
20 social condemnation. Numerous generations of men and women have thus found themselves
21 marginalized due to their perceived mental or physical abnormality (Boué et al. 2024).
22 Disability limits participation in social activities due to functional impairment or deficiency.
23 Thus, according to the World Health Organization, a person with a disability is defined as
24 anyone whose physical or mental integrity is progressively or permanently diminished, either
25 congenitally or as a result of age, illness, or accident, such that their autonomy, ability to
26 attend school, or employment is compromised (Tremblay and Loislle, 2016).

27 In several African regions, the occurrence of disability is sometimes interpreted
28 through the lens of traditional or spiritual beliefs, with some communities associating it with
29 curses, witchcraft, or supernatural punishments (Bas, 2025; Congo, 2025). In these contexts, a
30 person with a disability may be perceived as incapable of fully participating in the economic
31 and social life of the community, thus hindering their empowerment and integration
32 (Abdelhakim and Bennani, 2023). In Guinea, some national statistics indicate that people
33 living with disabilities represent a significant proportion of the population, with a substantial
34 number having intellectual disabilities (National Institute of Statistics of Guinea, 2014).

35 In several Guinean cities, particularly Conakry, disability can be interpreted by some
36 populations as the result of mystical phenomena or curses, thus contributing to forms of
37 stigmatization and even social exclusion of those affected (Nakou et al., 2025; Tchirkov and
38 Ambassa, 2011). Individuals with disabilities may therefore be feared, marginalized, or
39 sometimes hidden away by those around them. This social exclusion can lead to isolation, a
40 sedentary lifestyle, and a reduction in physical and social activity (Berthouze and Reynes,
41 2011; Giudicelli and Bigard, 2025). Despite a gradual shift in attitudes, the integration and
42 empowerment of people with disabilities often remain limited by the lack of inclusive public
43 policies and appropriate support systems (Henrard, 2016; Tchirkov and Ambassa, 2011).

44 The issue of the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities is increasingly
45 integrated into the orientations of public development policies. In this regard, several African
46 states are implementing programs aimed at strengthening access to basic social services,
47 improving training opportunities, and promoting the participation of vulnerable populations in
48 local development dynamics (Kaboré, 2024). Within this framework, governments and
49 specialized organizations are embracing the promotion of inclusive policies that foster the
50 professional integration (Djadou et al., 2025) and social participation of people with
51 disabilities (Nakou et al., 2025).

52 Furthermore, in this inclusive approach, sport emerges as a privileged space for
53 socialization, enabling the reduction of stigmatization and exclusion (de Léséleuc et al., 2012;
54 Nau et al., 2016). Inclusive sports activities can contribute to strengthening the self-esteem,
55 social skills, and community integration of people with intellectual disabilities (Beldame et al.
56 2016). From this perspective, sports activity is a relevant tool for developing human capital
57 and strengthening social cohesion.

58 Although sport is now recognized as an important tool for social inclusion, sports
59 activities for people with intellectual disabilities remain largely invisible in the public sphere.
60 Social perceptions, often marked by prejudice, contribute to limiting their participation in
61 sports activities (Apostolidis and Dany, 2014). Yet, sports participation is an effective
62 instrument for social integration and civic engagement for people with disabilities (Nau et al.
63 2016; Richard et al. 2020). It is therefore essential to further promote inclusive sports
64 activities in order to reduce social barriers and foster the integration of these individuals into
65 society.

66 This research therefore examines the social representations that community members
67 have of inclusive sports practices for people with intellectual disabilities. Its objectives are to
68 identify the factors explaining the social exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. It
69 also aims to demonstrate the importance of sport in the social integration process of this
70 vulnerable group.

71 72 73 **2. METHODS**

74 **2.1. Framework and Type of Research**

75 This is a qualitative cross-sectional study conducted in Conakry, Republic of
76 Guinea. The target population consists of twelve parents or guardians of people with
77 intellectual disabilities and seven sports officials or leaders. The sample of parents or
78 guardians of people with intellectual disabilities was selected using the accidental selection
79 technique. The sample of sports officials was selected using the purposive selection technique.
80 They were chosen because, by virtue of their professional position, they are the ones who can
81 provide information regarding the acceptability of people with disabilities in public spaces
82 and, especially, within sports communities.

83 **2.2. Data Collection techniques and tools**

84 For data collection, an interview guide was used with selected target groups to explore
85 social perceptions of the integration of people with intellectual disabilities through sports. A
86 direct observation grid supplemented the interview data. This direct observation aimed to

87 observe people with intellectual disabilities in action through adapted physical and sporting
88 activities. A Techno Camon CX Air mobile phone with a built-in recorder was used to record
89 the interviews, with the consent of the participants. Data collection took place over two
90 months, from January 27 to March 27, 2026, with the support of interviewers trained by
91 specialists in qualitative data management.

92 **2.3. Data Processing**

93 The interviews, after transcription based on the items in the interview guide, were
94 processed through an analysis followed by thematic grouping to compare the responses
95 obtained with the research hypothesis. To this end, the collected statements were transcribed
96 faithfully and, in their entirety, to focus the interviewees' discourse around different themes
97 defined beforehand by the researchers and recorded in the interview guide.

98 Responses that were more or less identical were classified by area of interest. Indeed,
99 after careful listening to the interview recordings, the units of meaning were identified in
100 order to give content to the themes and sub-themes emerging from all the interviews,
101 according to the objectives. For reasons of confidentiality, no information is given regarding
102 the identity of the respondents; they are referred to by their initials.

103 **3.RESULTS**

104 **3.1 Explanatory factors of social exclusion of children and young people with** 105 **intellectual disabilities in the City of Conakry**

106 Intellectual disability affects intellectual functioning and involves significant
107 limitations that impact learning, communication, and daily life. The causes are varied and
108 include several genetic and environmental factors, as well as complications occurring during
109 pregnancy or childbirth. It is within this framework that an interviewee stated the
110 following: "*He has suffered from intellectual disability since childhood. It was due to medical*
111 *errors that occurred during childbirth.*" (Parent of a child with intellectual disability, D.H.;
112 Father, 45 years old; Madinan; January 2026).

113

114 Another parent confided: "*He has suffered from intellectual disability since childhood. It is a*
115 *problem of malformation.*" (Parent of a child with intellectual disability, D.H.; Mother, 36
116 years old; Sonfonia; February 2026).

117 These verbatim accounts reveal that malformation is one of the main factors
118 explaining the presence of intellectual disability in children. Statements from an interview
119 with one of the sports leaders in the community, primarily in Cobayah, reinforce these
120 assertions, as he declared: "*People with intellectual disabilities often find themselves in this*
121 *situation from childhood. It is indeed linked to genetic factors. This problem is very often due*
122 *to medical errors that occurred during childbirth.*" (Sports leader A.M.; Athletics coach, 38
123 years old; Kobayah; March 2026) The interviewee's remarks highlight the extent of the
124 damage caused by medical errors during pregnancy monitoring or childbirth. Besides genetic
125 factors, others believe that this health problem is related to human disbelief, extending to
126 cases of witchcraft. This is what is justified by the words of an interviewee in this excerpt: "*He*
127 *has suffered from his intellectual disability since childhood. It's human malice; jealousy;*

128 *witchcraft. Beyond all that, it's the will of God"* (Member of the S.C. community; Male, 32
129 years old; Kipé; June 2025).

130 One of the sports leaders interviewed confided in these words: *"It is often said in*
131 *tradition that intellectual disability is perceived as a curse. Okay... That's why a person with*
132 *an intellectual disability is rejected like a cursed child"* (Sports club leader; Father, 40 years
133 old; Gbessia Port; February 2026).

134 This interviewee's words highlight the relationship to societal submission that
135 sometimes leads to the isolation of children with disabilities, which can be described as
136 marginalization. This situation is observable in certain areas where the environment is further
137 polluted by the various prejudices held by different stakeholders. The different perceptions
138 surrounding the phenomenon further reinforce this marginalization observed by some people.

139 **3.2 Life Trajectory of individuals with intellectual disabilities before participating in** 140 **sports**

141 The interviewees shared their perspectives on the stigmatization and restricted spaces
142 they experienced during the socialization process. One parent stated the following:

143 Before participating in sports, he felt isolated; the neighborhood children didn't approach
144 him. It's sad. No neighbor would let their child near them, especially since he wasn't doing
145 well in school and had difficulty expressing himself. Everyone considered him simple-
146 minded. I was often reluctant to let him leave the house.(Parent of a child with an
147 intellectual disability, T.M.; Father, 40 years old; Lambanyi; February 2026).

148 This child was assigned a negative identity, reinforcing his isolation and limiting his
149 social interactions. The isolation he faced only confirms the reasons for exclusion observed in
150 the life trajectories of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, among these
151 vulnerable individuals who are victims of stigmatization, many live in environments that did
152 not foster strong community engagement with safe spaces.

153 This is what a sports leader stated during the interviews:

154 Children have been entrusted to my care for a few years now. Well... before, these
155 children practically stayed home. I have to do home visits. I work with them. It's not
156 easy to create a climate of trust. I have to admit, I'm managing. I really need to take
157 courses in special education, child and youth protection. I recently discovered a course
158 in recreation studies that will strengthen my skills in inclusive leisure activities. (Sports
159 club leader; Father, 40 years old; Sonfonia Port; March 2026).

160 This verbatim statement reflects a life trajectory characterized by limited social
161 participation due to external perceptions. The interviewee here emphasized the importance of
162 ongoing training to strengthen these skills in inclusive physical and sporting activities.
163 Acquiring these new skills will serve as a springboard for better support of people with
164 intellectual disabilities.

165 **3.3 Importance of sport in the social integration process of people with intellectual** 166 **disabilities in the City of Conakry**

167 When asked about the value of sport as a tool for the social inclusion of people with
168 intellectual disabilities, many of the interviewees responded. One of them revealed: "Sporting

169 activities are essential for these people. I think they should allow them to discover
170 themselves” (Handball Coach B.A.; Male, 35 years old; Cosa; March 2026). This statement,
171 recorded during an interview with a handball coach residing in Kaloum, demonstrates one of
172 the benefits of sport for these children, young people, and even adults with intellectual
173 disabilities. Indeed, positive situations related to the management of sports leaders and
174 specialists in the protection of vulnerable groups encourage participation in sports activities.
175 This is what one of the parents interviewed explained when he said:

176 ...I wasn't convinced I'd ever see my child playing and doing sports like other
177 children his age. After a long period of hesitation, I finally sent him to training
178 sessions. He was directed towards athletics adapted to his disability, which is fine! It
179 allows him to be healthy, have fun, and meet other people. I remain amazed by the
180 changes he's seen thanks to his participation in sports. (Parent of a child with an
181 intellectual disability, A.E.; Father, 44 years old; Donka; March 2026).

182 This parent's comments reveal an improvement in physical well-being and an
183 expansion of social relationships following their child's enrolment in athletics activities. The
184 expression of surprise in their statement reflects the potential benefits of participating in
185 sports. The crucial role of sports activities, initially marked by limiting social representations
186 of disability, is increasingly evident in their ability to transform perceptions and beliefs and to
187 foster socialization. Among sports leaders, a club administrator interviewed confided: "There's
188 a child we've been following for a few years who participates in our training sessions. Don't
189 be surprised! I assure you that the activities are highly adapted to him. He's been able to make
190 many friends and do things no one thought he could do: cycling, for example. But we need
191 specialists to facilitate his support." (Club Administrative Manager H.J.; Female, 34 years old;
192 Nongo; March 2026). This speech highlighted the inclusive nature of adapted sports activities
193 in this child's social integration process. His regular participation in training sessions
194 facilitated the achievement of performances previously considered almost impossible. This
195 testimony reinforces the role of sport as a space for dismantling stereotypes. However, there is
196 a need to address the challenges related to the professionalization of coaching teams for more
197 effective and sustainable support.

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199

200 **4- DISCUSSION**

201 **4-1 Explanatory factors of the social exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities**

202 The research results showed that several factors influenced the social exclusion of the
203 individuals concerned. The social exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the city
204 of Conakry is based on several biomedical and sociocultural factors, as well as relational
205 difficulties that structure their life trajectories since childhood.

206 The various statements obtained from the respondents revealed a plurality of
207 explanations for intellectual disability. Some respondents believed that their intellectual
208 disability arose from genetic factors or medical errors. Others adopted sociocultural
209 perspectives, attributing this unwanted situation to witchcraft, curses, or divine will.
210 Consequently, research has revealed that social attitudes, heavily influenced by a lack of
211 information about intellectual disability, give rise to exclusionary practices embedded within

212 an ecosystem of social representations that attempt to legitimize this exclusion (Akiki, 2024;
213 Apostolidis & Dany, 2014).

214 Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the learning and communication
215 difficulties faced by these individuals contribute to the reinforcement of negative identities
216 marked by devaluing attitudes towards them (Djadou et al., 2025). Their participation in
217 social spaces is limited: schools and their immediate environment. The family home functions
218 as their only refuge (Boukala and Lévy, 2025), even if slight stigmatization may be observed.
219 The authors went further, confirming the results obtained (Chatroussat, 2011; Nakou et al.,
220 2025). Social representations of these intellectually disabled individuals—or those with
221 mental retardation considered incapable or abnormal—fuel social relations influenced by
222 marginalization practices (Chatroussat, 2011), thus reducing opportunities for social
223 integration (Nakou et al., 2025). However, studies conducted in Europe have revealed that, of
224 the 80 million people with disabilities in Europe in 2014, including 9.6 million in France
225 between the ages of 15 and 64, inclusion strategies differ significantly from one country to
226 another, without responses commensurate with their technical and financial resources (Ravaud
227 et al., 2002). A mutual effort is therefore desired, with an effort of integration on the part of
228 people with disabilities and an effort by the state of adaptation of society (Plaisance et al.
229 2007).

230 Increased efforts are being made to break down the various socio-cultural barriers
231 associated with this issue. State institutions such as the Ministry for the Promotion of Women,
232 Children, and Vulnerable Persons, in collaboration with relevant organizations, are working to
233 place the protection of children and vulnerable populations at the heart of public policy. Even
234 as stigmatization and acts of imposed individual isolation persist, inclusive initiatives act as a
235 buffer, breaking down barriers of social labeling to provide a safe space for people with
236 intellectual disabilities and all other vulnerable individuals (Chevallier-Rodrigues et al., 2016;
237 Koubi, 2017; Pariseau-Legault and Holmes, 2017).

238 **4.2. The role of sport in the social integration of people with disabilities**

239 The results of the survey of various target groups revealed that sports activities play a
240 crucial role in the social integration of people with intellectual disabilities in the city of
241 Conakry. Indeed, sports have emerged as a safe space for socialization for vulnerable
242 individuals. In addressing the research question, based on statements from both parents and
243 the sports leaders interviewed, participation in sports activities allows vulnerable individuals
244 to strengthen their skills and self-esteem.

245 These interested and motivated individuals actively participate in these inclusive and
246 well-adapted activities. Adapted sport can thus be another way for each member of society to
247 understand the social world (Gaillard, 2007). Playing sports facilitates communication with
248 those around them, and at the same time, it requires autonomy and pushing them out of their
249 comfort zone (Noël, 2012). It is in this process that they discover themselves and rediscover
250 their hidden potential. However, when sport is practiced in a less inclusive environment, it can
251 lead to overcompensation and, in the long term, to abandoning the activity altogether
252 (Marcellini, 2005).

253 The respondents highlighted the socializing framework of sport, which fosters
254 inclusive interactions to strengthen relationships. This framework includes people with
255 intellectual disabilities, peers, the community, leaders, and sports officials. Participating in
256 sport promotes the social integration of people with disabilities, who are often stigmatized and

257 marginalized (Tant, 2014). Research in 2016 revealed that participating in sport can give
258 people with intellectual disabilities, or any other disability, a renewed sense of control over
259 their bodies and increased productivity (Ripoll, 2016). While a person with a disability may
260 experience profound distress at the very idea of being alive, they must simultaneously reclaim
261 their right to live and come to terms with their new body (Ancet and Nuss, 2012).

262 The analysis of the various statements gathered during fieldwork positions
263 participation in sports activities as a way to break the isolation of these vulnerable individuals
264 by facilitating their access to spaces for rebuilding and enhancing their social identity.
265 Specialized centers now offer sports programs to foster the development of competitive and
266 high-level opportunities, such as the Paralympic Games, which are growing in importance and
267 changing social perceptions of disability by overturning stigmas (Marcellini and Villoing,
268 2014). However, people with disabilities remain marginalized and absent from the history of
269 sport, as well as from the history of disability itself (Stiker, 2013).

270 Furthermore, when stereotypes are challenged through participation in adapted sports
271 activities, negative social representations of people with intellectual disabilities or
272 developmental delays become obsolete. The literature indicates that interest in sports also
273 varies according to the cultural, identity-based, and historical construction of disability
274 (Marcellini and Villoing, 2014). Those interviewed emphasized the challenge of training
275 coaches in inclusive sports and the management of adapted and inclusive sports activities. The
276 shortage of educators or specialized skills in inclusive education and recreation, as well as the
277 lack of professionalization among stakeholders, limits the numerous interventions
278 implemented by the Guinean government, non-governmental organizations, associations, and
279 even individuals.

280 The government, various relevant bodies, and federations are working to reduce the
281 separation between able-bodied and disabled people. In his 2024 work, Cheickh demonstrated
282 that the role of the State, sports organizations, local authorities, and private partners is
283 essential to providing citizens, including people with disabilities, with appropriate frameworks
284 that allow them to engage in the physical activity of their choice, according to their ability
285 level.

286 Consequently, the various stakeholders are encouraged to align themselves with the
287 national priorities of the Simandou 2040 Program, particularly through one of its strategic
288 pillars: the health and well-being of the population. Sport, through its various activities,
289 proves to be a strategic tool for social inclusion, capable of dismantling the stigma associated
290 with intellectual disability and transforming the life trajectories of those affected.

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292

293 **5- CONCLUSION**

294 This research aimed to identify the factors explaining the social exclusion of people
295 with intellectual disabilities. It also sought to demonstrate the importance of sport in the social
296 integration process of this vulnerable group. This research revealed a restriction of access to
297 safe spaces for socialization for people with intellectual disabilities. Their life trajectory is
298 characterized by situations of isolation or withdrawal from community spaces. Their social
299 participation is limited by external perceptions. Furthermore, to address this problem, sport
300 appears as a response to these uncomfortable situations, thus contributing to the social

301 integration of people with intellectual disabilities. The results showed that participation in
302 sports activities strengthens their capacity to transform perceptions and beliefs and fosters
303 socialization.

304 The results confirm the research hypothesis, which states that participation in sports
305 activities promotes social integration, access to inclusive spaces for socialization, and the
306 reconstruction of sociocultural frameworks. It is imperative to strengthen communication
307 strategies through interpersonal communication, social mobilization, and advocacy. These
308 strategies, designed to promote individual and collective adoption of adapted and inclusive
309 sport for people with intellectual disabilities, should further strengthen this tool, a powerful
310 indicator of social inclusion, capable of dismantling stigma and transforming the life
311 trajectories of those involved.

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