

UNDEVELOPED POTENTIAL: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF THE GENERAL
POPULATIONS' ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL TREATMENTS TOWARD THOSE
WITH DISABILITIES IN ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of
Texas State University
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for Graduation in the Honors College

by

Amanda Tucker

San Marcos, Texas
December 2014

UNDEVELOPED POTENTIAL: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF THE GENERAL
POPULATIONS' ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL TREATMENTS TOWARD THOSE
WITH DISABILITIES IN ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN

Supervising Professor:

Jessica Dupree, M.S.
Department of Health and
Human Performance

Second Reader:

Megan Haynes, M.Ed., M.S.
Department of Health and
Human Performance

Approved:

Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.
Dean, Honors College

ABSTRACT

People who have mental and/or physical disabilities are often ostracized in the Kazakh culture. Many people with disabilities are placed in orphanages and adult homes, deprived of the liberty to earn an education, often without proper nutrition or care, and denied rights the average Kazakhstani receives. However, according to Kazakh law, those with physical and or mental disabilities are promised many resources such as counseling, therapy, education, and social equality which are often not allocated. By conducting observations in a “Special Needs” Orphanage and an Adult Home as well as interviewing local Kazakhstanis, this thesis investigates the attitudes and views the Kazakh citizens who live in the city of Almaty express towards those with disabilities as well as exploring the conditions the average person born with a physical and/or mental disability experiences in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 3
Map of Kazakhstan	Page 6
History of Kazakhstan	Page 7
History of Almaty	Page 10
Cultural Context	Page 12
Current Standings	Page 15
Overview of Observations	Page 17
Observations at Special Needs Orphanage	Page 18
Observations at Adult Home	Page 43
Observations from Almaty	Page 49
Interview with Family Member of Person with Disabilities	Page 51
Significance	Page 54
Astana Comparison	Page 57
Conclusion	Page 59
Bibliography	Page 61

INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan: A land in Central Asia rolling with mountains and dancing with life. A fusion of diverse characteristics and nationalities, Kazakhstan is composed of unique races and cultures meshing together to create a nation having recently experienced freedom. However, modern civilization now subverts the traditional villages and undeveloped region. Mantras whispering modernization drift through the Americanized malls and costly clothing copied and pasted robotically from the Western catalogs. Meanwhile, the local markets breathe life through their abundant vegetable vendors and corner stores, refusing to surrender to Western culture. Old world originals battle with the new and flashy. The conflict between generations consumes a nation fighting for the details, while ignoring a portion of its citizens. Amidst the conflict lies a people group ostracized from society who are often deemed unworthy and unsuited for both the traditions and the new glam.

Hidden behind tall gates lie children who are abandoned by the vast portion of Kazakhstan. The desolate buildings, caked in bright paint, are a futile attempt to mask the sorrow inside. Adolescents no bigger than toddlers lie in cribs, they consist of only skin and bones because their nourishment is deemed a waste. Children become prisoners in their beds, never to see beyond the ceiling above them and the bars containing them, so the world outside does not have to face them.

Somehow the progressive changes in society override the nuisance of caring for the 'monster children.' An extra finger or chromosome presents too large of a burden to bear. Therefore these young children with physical and mental disabilities are abandoned at orphanages where they receive improper care only to be shipped off to an adult home

upon their eighteenth birthday, left ultimately to die alone. Made outcasts because of their genetics and design, they have their life mapped out before they manage to take their first breath.

Little does the nation know how the children's eyes sparkle when they dance, how they giggle when you tickle their stomachs, how they love to be taken from their rooms if only for a moment to be spun and hugged. The reality of their lifestyle should demand justice. Rather the children stay hidden from all but the government officials and nannies who keep them locked away. A nation so progressive and swallowed by its own debate, they have forgotten the boy overtaken with blindness and the young girl often lost in her own world. Do they know of the cries that have overrun the young and innocent on the other side of their gates?

Here children are pumped full of narcotics to force them into a deep paradoxical sleep so their existence can be ignored. Void of education, nutrition, love, care, therapy, acceptance, and hope, these young are expected to rot away quietly. There can be no plea for innocence when everyone has had a hand in locking them away by refusing to speak up, to question, or to promote justice.

This was my initial impression after my first visit to Almaty, Kazakhstan in August of 2013, a nation I have fallen in love with and desire to understand. Initially I journeyed across the world to work with those who have physical and mental disabilities, by showing them compassion and care. It tore me to pieces to learn of and witness the abuse those with disabilities endured daily and I often left the orphanage and adult home only to cry myself to sleep. Through my experiences I knew my journey in Kazakhstan was far from over. Thus sparked my purpose for this thesis, to be engrossed in a country I

have become passionate about in order to find a place of understanding with the native people of Kazakhstan, concerning the attitudes and treatment of those with disabilities.

MAP OF KAZAKHSTAN



The focus of this thesis is Almaty, Kazakhstan found in the south east region of Kazakhstan near the Kyrgyzstan border.

HISTORY OF KAZAKHSTAN

A nation rich in culture and history, Kazakhstan has battled relentlessly for thousands of years to gain the freedom it dearly cherishes. Through many centuries of diverse rulers and kingdoms, Kazakhstan has become a country influenced by many cultures and people groups. The land forms a melting pot, consisting of inhabitants from Russia, China, Mongolia, Turkey, and Slovakia, amongst other nations.

Originally inhabited by the “nomadic Skythian-Saka civilization,” these people were a simplistic community, living off of the land and practicing pastoralism, taking full advantage of the topography (“The History”). Natives survived on the steppes and terrain, which suited their efficient manner of utilizing their natural resources such as the landscape and vegetation. Much of the multicultural integration dates back to the Silk Road from as early as mid-fourth century B.C.E.; interest in Kazakhstan’s land was primarily because of their progressive practice of domesticating horses and for the Kazakh’s steppes (Christian, 2000).

Other countries’ influence over the Kazakhstanis land became more aggressive and demanding as people groups were no longer content with solely passing through the scenic land as a means of transportation. Instead, kingdoms began overtaking Kazakhstan’s land, and Kazakhstan struggled to begin its long and treacherous route towards independence. Initially, the Huns took control and largely manipulated the geopolitical map, but they were eventually replaced by Turkish tribes who divided the land into large states called kaganats (“The History”). The Turks were then superseded by Genghis Khan in 1221 A.D. who layered additional cultural and societal rules on the Kazakhstanis (“The History”). The Mongolian reign eventually dissipated as the steppe

ridden land divided into nomadic country states under the head of Kazakh Khanate in the early 1600s (“The History”). However the next two centuries would be full of turmoil and a war of rebellion from the Kazakh Khanate, led by the nomadic Jungar tribes (“The History”).

After revolting, the Kazakhstanis would find themselves once again under the leadership of a foreign nation. Russia began spreading its influence into Kazakhstan over the course of the nineteenth century with a more influential rule than other invaders had applied. Russian administration, military power, and language were implemented into school systems and government by Kazakhstan’s northern neighbor (“The History”). This continued until the Kazakhstanis instigated an uprising once more after resentment developed towards Russia during the 1860s. Unfortunately, the Kazakhstanis were crushed after rioting, and they returned to reunite with Russia in 1871 in search of protection from other countries (“The History”). After reintegrating with Russia, the Kazakhstanis worked diligently to maintain their own culture and identity, as they were unwilling to lose their heritage again.

In 1917 another revolution came and went as the Russian stronghold became even more powerful, while increased suppression led to starvation, violence, and unrest (“The History”). Many citizens were starved or killed as there was an increase in aggression, and many prominent philosophers, scholars, and key public figures were slaughtered to oppress spirits and rid the citizens of their identity (“The History”). It seemed as though the Kazakhstanis were defeated after they joined the Soviet Union, and excessive turmoil had been unleashed in the land. Yet after facing the most severe despotism of their time, young Kazakhstanis became eager for mutiny. In Almaty, Kazakhstan during December

1986, mass demonstrations were held by ethnically diverse and angered youth, which lead to dozens of protestors being imprisoned or massacred by Soviet troops (“The History”).

It is not a coincidence that the old Turkish word for Kazakh means “free” or “independent” because, despite many conquerors and warriors who have tried to subvert, the inhabitants, the Kazakhstanis have remained victorious, fulfilling their hopes to be free (“The History”). After extreme trial and tribulation, the revolts primarily from Kazakh youth became fruitful when Kazakhstan declared its independence from the former Soviet Union on December 16, 1991 (“The History”). Despite their freedom, Russian influence is still heavy in Kazakhstan making up 33-50% of the population (Stoner). Despite a large population of non-native Kazakhs consisting of Russians, most of the population is actually mixed from several diverse nationalities. Although many groups of people have taken over Kazakhstan, the Kazakhs have successfully managed to maintain their own unique identity and culture.

HISTORY OF ALMATY

Almaty is a city thriving in a beautiful collision of traditions and the modern twists of the West. Its citizens are a fluent mixture of Chinese, Russian, and traditional Kazakh, which enhance the deeply rooted culture. This relatively financially wealthy community often celebrates with elaborate festivals filled with painted streets and flowers of every color stretching throughout the city. This gentle beauty offsets the sky scraper buildings made of glass mirrors and magnificent malls which populate Almaty's downtown area. Outside of the colossal buildings, Almaty is alive with scenic parks and palaces, while ornamental churches and illustrious mountains line the city's borders.

However, Almaty was not always known for its many architectural accomplishments and impressive scenery. As a stop along the Silk Road, Almaty was originally founded in 1854 as a Russian frontier fort after being destroyed and left to shambles by the Mongolians (Lonely Planet). Almaty became the home of Cossacks and Siberian peasants, yet over a period of a century, it morphed into a place of exile, only to be transformed into the Capital of Soviet Kazakhstan in 1927 (Lonely Planet). With the title and prestige of being the capital of a growing nation, Almaty flourished, gaining wealth and status which it has maintained since.

After separating from Russia and being thrown into the chaos of establishing a new government and nation, Almaty remained the capital of Kazakhstan until it was moved to Astana in 1997 in order to place the capital in a more central location (Weekenberg). Despite losing the position of being Kazakhstan's capital, Almaty continues to be the largest city in the country, by population. The center of commerce and largest banks in the country are found in Almaty, and the city is even rumored to be the

long lost Garden of Eden as referenced in Genesis (Weekenberg). Whether the myths of Almaty's origins are true or not, the city has remained iconic in its own right.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Considering Kazakhstan's diverse ethnic background, it follows naturally that they would have an assorted collection of linguistic, cultural, and religious identities. The nation, ranking 9th largest in the world, is home to over 17,737,000 people, is fairly well developed, and economically stable (Central Intelligence Agency). They hold a poverty and unemployment rate of 5.3%, yet remain rich in oil and grain, which is exported to neighboring nations as a large portion of their income (Central Intelligence Agency). Kazakhstan has come to the realization that sole dependence on their natural resources, such as oil, will eventually lead to their downfall as the natural supplies diminish; so the nation has been exploring other options for income such as "transport, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, petrochemicals and food processing" to increase their revenue and Gross Domestic Product, which stands at \$243.6 billion as of 2013 (Central Intelligence Agency).

Most of the population relies heavily on their faith and religion as a primary source of identity and community. The majority of Kazakhstan's citizens are Muslim, followed by Russian Orthodox at 70.2% and 23.9% respectively (Central Intelligence Agency). The population is split fairly equally between men and women at all ages, and the median age of their population is slightly under 30 years old (Central Intelligence Agency). This shows the country's overall population is young which is reflected in their lack of major life experiences typically recommended to adequately run a country. The nation of Kazakhstan is also nearly uniformly distributed on a scale of urban to rural living preference. While 53.6% of the population lives an urban lifestyle, nearly half of

the country is dispersed over agriculturally abundant land, making unionizing and spreading of ideas and information challenging (Central Intelligence Agency).

Considering how large the country is, Kazakhstan upholds a low sickness rate and a high rate of education compared to other nations. Practically every citizen in Kazakhstan, 15 years or older, can read and write, which is reflected by their 99.7% literacy rate (Central Intelligence Agency). This objective is achieved by having the average Kazakhstani spend about 15 years of their lives receiving an education (Central Intelligence Agency). They also maintain relatively low rates of AIDS infection, obesity, infant mortality, and maternal mortality rates (Central Intelligence Agency). Kazakhstanis help sustain their low disease rate by filtering 98.7% of the water in urban areas and 90.4% of the water in rural areas (Central Intelligence Agency). This data proves Kazakhstan's dedication to having educated and healthy citizens in order to improve the nation's status as a thriving and independent land.

In addition to the noteworthy and impressive statistics Kazakhstan has strived to maintain and improve, they have also developed a deep rooted set of moral and cultural traditions that citizens strictly adhere to. For example, Kazakhstanis highly value hospitality, and most natives welcome strangers as if it is their "sacred duty," making them very open to travelers and explorers alike (VisitKazakhstan.kz). This is practiced by throwing small celebrations for newcomers to help them more easily adapt to the culture, and offering gifts such as edible delicacies, firewood, and water until strangers are settled (VisitKazakhstan.kz). Another standard moral rule the Kazakhstanis place heavy emphasis on is to always be respectful towards the elderly (VisitKazakhstan.kz). Both of

these moral principles exemplify the honorable character the citizens of Kazakhstan are expected to maintain.

CURRENT STANDINGS

While the nation of Kazakhstan combatted extreme change and struggled to develop its own identity, they focused heavily on developing a thriving economy, a powerful work force, and a competitive educational system. With such foundations being the focus of Kazakhstan, some moral standards remain overlooked, and Almaty was no exception to the ethical debate. The treatment of those with disabilities has only recently become a topic of concern. While other people groups receive constitutional protection, there is currently very little constitutional security for those who have disabilities.

For example, Article 27, section 3, of the Kazakh Republic Constitution states, “Able-bodied children of age must take care of their disabled parents.” (“The Constitution”). While Article 28, section 1, states, “A citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan shall be guaranteed a minimum wage and pension, and guaranteed social security in old age, in case of disease, disability or loss of a breadwinner and other legal grounds.” (“The Constitution”). Out of the 98 Articles constructing their constitution, these are the only mentions of protection for those with disabilities.

However, there is a substantial amount of protection that children with disabilities receive through newly implemented laws. These include protection for equality concerning education, health care, counseling, orthopedic care, social support, and employment upon graduation as their limitations permit. (UNICEF). The Kazakh laws established the National Long Term Action Plan in 2012 to ensure these rights are enforced; this decree will be in effect from 2012 through 2018 (Roelen, 2012). There is also a program established for early recognition during the prenatal stage to allow for a

“prevention of birth,” as well as screening for children five years old and younger to diagnose psycho-physical disabilities (UNICEF).

With many laws and documents in place to protect those with disabilities, one would assume that individuals with mental and physical disabilities would be cared for and protected under Kazakh law. This, however, is not always the case. Many orphaned children are in desperate need of care and protection, and are found lacking any form of education or social equality, which is promised under government rulings. These individuals do not receive the rights they are promised, and there has been minimal attempt to implement the change these new regulations demand. This lack of progress is devastating for both those with disabilities and the community as a whole.

OVER VIEW OF OBSERVATIONS

It has been my observation that appearance overrides all else in Almaty. In general, the citizens of Almaty appear to be willing to take bold and radical stands for any behavior which reflects poorly on their nations' presentation. Whether it is a child not sitting up perfectly straight at the orphanage or someone dressed in shorts when it is cold outside, there will likely be intensive interjections from the older generations. And yet the civil injustices, such as a child punching another child or a person being harassed by another person on the street, are ignored.

Perhaps the reason it is so challenging for Americans to understand the treatment of these children and adults with disabilities is because each situation typically causes the opposite reaction from citizens from the United States. From what I have observed, Americans generally value individualism and the choice of each person to decide what they want to wear, how they want to act, how they choose to carry themselves, and other similar options. On the other hand, most Americans consider it their duty and obligation to stop social injustices. If an American sees a person walking on the street in untraditional attire they are unlikely to say anything to the person, where as a Kazakhstani, from my observations, is more expected to interject and inform the individual their radical clothing reflects negatively on their country and needs to be changed. However, if an American sees a child being trampled by a grown adult, the majority would step in and say something or call the authorities. In Kazakhstan, it is much more common for the behavior to be excused and passed by without saying or doing anything. Of course neither of these principles are inclusive towards everyone, but through my own experiences, I find they do reflect the general mindset of Almaty.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE ORPHANAGE

Tucked away towards the back of a dirt road in Almaty, Kazakhstan, is a home for children who may not be able to speak, walk, or process at the same rate as their peers. It is a place that would ideally be a safe haven for unwanted children whose parents are either no longer alive, unable to care for their children, or simply parents who have no desire to keep their children or acknowledge their life due to the heavily present shame culture heavily infiltrated in Kazakhstan culture. Children, ranging from ages two to eighteen, are kept in a large building painted teal and pink and towering over the neighborhood houses at a staggering three stories tall. The robust home is full of roughly 150 children, divided into about ten groups, consisting of approximately fifteen children of the same age group and gender.

The children begin their day with breakfast, followed by two hours of play time from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm. They then proceed to lunch followed by a nap, and more play time from 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm. They conclude with dinner and bed. Not all children are allowed to play outside due to being “medically fragile” or in “quarantine;” these children sit in their room and during the course of their childhood, they will seldom leave their designated room, save for trips to the bathroom or an occasional doctor’s visit.

In one half of the room where the children live are beds laid side by side, and the other side consists of an open space for the children to sit in or play. The patients usually have TVs in their rooms and occasionally have toys. Last year I had access to information on what the children were watching; it was often inappropriate for their age, and the television programs often seemed to be what the nannies wanted to watch. This type of influence is not beneficial to the children’s behavior and often impacts the way they interact with one another. Studies show that watching violent television from a young age

can lead to an increased level of aggression later in life, much like the behavior witnessed in the orphanage (Huesmann). However, the director had said that they are trying to change what is played in the children's rooms to make it more appropriate for children.

The children's medical diagnoses are often broad and generic, if they exist at all. Some of the children merely have a physical deformity in their hand or foot, with no cognitive or emotional disabilities attached to their condition. Others have visual or hearing impairments; some use wheel chairs, while others can run circles around their caretakers for days. A handful of these children have social disorders which hinder them from communicating with others, but the majority of children are social butterflies who have never met a stranger and long desperately for new playmates. Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, and many other conditions are all labels the children wear. In addition, many are undiagnosed, dropped off at the home because they looked or acted differently from their peers.

As you walk into the home, you see a playground in the back, complete with seven gazebos painted bright colors where the children are often required to sit while outside. This is where I was allowed to visit with the children three mornings each week, for two hour increments, over the course of three months. Upon my arrival at 10:00 a.m., children would begin to pile out of the orphanage, led by the nanny in charge of their group. Out of the 150 children at the orphanage, there were anywhere from 35 to 50 children allowed outside to play.

Ideally, this outdoor area should be a sanctuary for these children. In a world that has forgotten them, a playground should be a place of freedom and release from the captivity they typically experience. Often times this is not the case; there are many

occasions where a child is slammed to the ground, pummeled into submission for no apparent reason. It is atrocious to watch someone who cannot help themselves be overpowered by their care taker, the one who is intended to keep them safe and allow them to thrive.

A particular group of young boys are often isolated from other children. The boys' nanny has been observed to pick a child, bring them into a tiny play house, already crammed full of children, and proceed to pick them up and slam their head against the wall, pick them up and repeat the beatings with aggression until the child is nearly knocked unconscious. This process repeated on cycle nearly every day during the first month of the observations.

It is pleasantly surprising to hear this treatment is considered abusive by Kazakh standards, and this behavior is not what has been observed to be the average treatment towards those with disabilities. However it still happens on occasion. Bribery and corruption are pervasive throughout the orphanage system, particularly where accountability and hiring practices are concerned. Bargains are made for eyes to be turned away and to gain job positions, which has compromised the orphanage, and much of the social infrastructure in Almaty, which makes it challenging to hold nannies liable for their actions. Because Kazakhstanis tend to act as bystanders, most turn blind eyes to the abuse and do not reprimand the cruel nannies, perhaps for fear of losing their job, or perhaps for lack of concern, but it is likely the former.

Honor is highly valued in Almaty, and there is no pride in caring for children whose own parents did not find enough value in them to keep them. Most of the nannies working at the orphanage are trying to pay rent and provide food for themselves. This job

is seen as a means to survive, not as a tool to climb up the corporate ladder or improve the care of the children. This gives insight into the logic behind the poor care the children receive. Very few citizens are aware of these children's existence, let alone their level of treatment. Because there is so little accountability, and so few citizens in Almaty care about these children, it allows the nannies to evade punishment for their negative treatment, because there is often no one to take notice of or defend the children.

There is no honor gained in working with a child who has disabilities, and establishing rules for the nannies to improve the children's capabilities and excel in society is often seen as a waste of time. In fact, there is no known training that the nannies must go through in order to work at the orphanage. The only personnel with any degree of training are the teachers and medical professionals, and even with these individuals, they do not need special certification to work with children who have disabilities. If the nannies were trained, they could better understand why the children act in the manner they do, and they would likely not be as abusive towards the children. For example, when a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder runs off, it is typically not due to them trying to misbehave, but rather to escape from being overstimulated. With simple knowledge like this, the nannies would know not only how to better manage the children, but how to have a deeper level of understanding of the children.

Despite the lack of training, there are nannies, exhausted from the challenging and undervalued job they hold, who show affection for the children they work with and, at a minimum, tolerate and provide basic care for the orphans. Younger nannies with more energy will play catch with the children and show favor and genuine concern for the children under their care. This is not to say there is no abuse taking place behind closed

doors and inside the rooms while no one is watching, but from a visible standpoint, it appears some of these nannies treat the children well.

Although the children occasionally receive kindness, they maintain a negative attitude towards their peers. The children will whip one another with jump ropes, pound each other on the back and head, pull hair, slap each other in the face, make obscene gestures towards one another, and act with cruelty towards their comrades. There is ample opportunity for such cruelty because the children are placed in groups with roughly fifteen other children, who all live in a single room together, often left without supervision.

Because the children are left to their own devices majority of the time, they have learned they can behave in any manner they please with little to no punishment. The children often hit, bite, and yell at one another and the volunteers who work with them. It is clear that they are taught this behavior by example. They are also not reprimanded for this negative behavior, although they are punished for nearly everything else. In fact, poor behavior towards one another or towards volunteers is often ignored, or even worse, at times encouraged.

When a child is mean to another child, some of the nannies order the child who was attacked to hit and kick the other child, while holding the instigator down. The children at the orphanage are taught to fight violently with one another and to return a hit in retaliation of abuse. This often leads to more violence, which is already so common from the nannies. Many children sport new black eyes, cuts and bruises each day. This physical evidence of harassment and abuse apparently raises no eyebrows and turns no

heads; in this facility, it is accepted as normal and not as an issue which needs to be confronted.

On many occasions, children fight against one another. One time in particular, a teenaged boy with disabilities punched one of his group mates straight in the mouth to the point of bleeding. This boy is his equal; they are the same age and have suffered the same past together. They have many factors opposing them: a likely heavy history of abuse and a society that does not care for them. They respond by fighting against one another, for no purpose and to no glory or gain. The boy who was hit, an orphan himself, looked up with blood swelling up from his gum. Moments later another boy the same age came up to the bloodied teenager and kicked him repeatedly in the stomach; the injured boy fell to the ground and cried out to his abusers. They are peers who bully one another and children even younger than themselves while their caretakers watch and ignore.

Although appalling activities transpired that day, it was surprising when, the following day, the same boy who had been abused recognized the only person who had come to his aid, and held on to them for a full 15 minutes. The boy who was injured cradled the face and stroked the hand of the person who had comforted him the day before, all the while smiling at his helper, refusing to leave their side. It was clear the boy was incredibly thankful that someone had intervened, and it is possible that he had never experienced such compassion before. It was incredible to experience his reaction and appreciation for simply acknowledging the fact that he was a human with emotion and feelings who did not deserve to be used as a punching bag for the enjoyment of others.

Often times when such abuse takes place, the nannies will stand two feet away from this behavior and not bat an eye to the obvious and vile abuse the children inflict on

one another. There is exception to this ignorance and disdain; the guards at the orphanage are typically wonderful to the children. They give the children hugs and respond with love as the children call them their 'papa'. Some days they are the only ones observed to have shown love for these children besides the volunteers.

Even with the numerous volunteers who come in, which ranges anywhere from two to six volunteers a day, there is very limited access to the children. Volunteers are seldom allowed inside the building, and are even more restricted from entering the children's rooms, where many children are confined. Even when outside, there are certain children that volunteers are not allowed to play or interact with. There are also many days where all the children are 'quarantined,' and volunteers are not able to see any children. This happened six times during my stay, and we were often told that all of the children were sick, or there was an infection spreading throughout the city they did not want the kids to catch. This does not include the rainy or snowy days when there is no access to playing with the children because they are forced to stay inside, or the week long government inspection where volunteers could not visit the children.

Occasionally a director will desire to change an aspect of the children's care, such as the amount of interaction volunteers can have with the children. However, changes of this nature have always proven to be difficult, because the leadership in the orphanages is often changed. The frequent change in directors makes it exceedingly challenging to maintain constant care of the children and the rules that need to be abided. Even during my short stay of three months, there was at least one change in directors without notice.

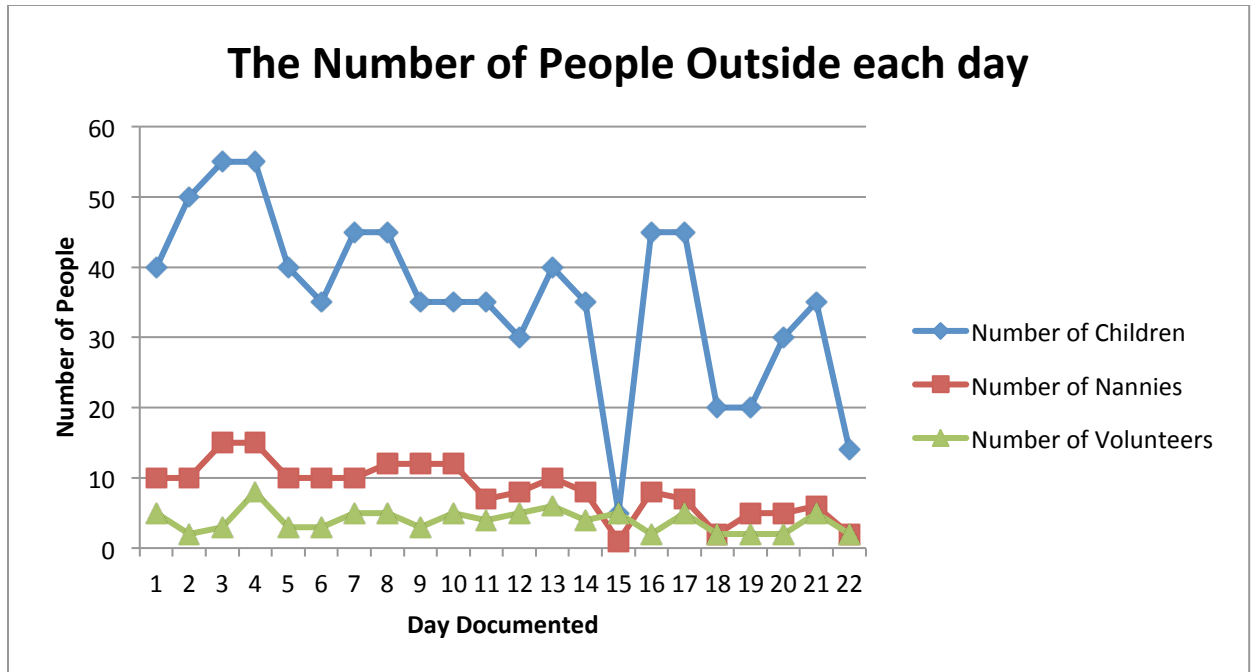
There is also very little accountability in following through with the rules each new director makes. It is challenging for new volunteers who come in with the desire to

care for the children at the orphanage because, with each new director, a new relationship must be formed, which requires an exceedingly large amount of time and intentionality. This also creates a lack of incentive for nannies to treat the children with love and care, because so few directors remain in their positions long enough to levy much effect for the nannies working for them. In addition, even if a director and remaining upper management kept their position for prolonged periods of time, there is very little involvement between the upper management positions and the children. Most of the directors appear to care for the children on some level, but because they are so removed from the daily life of the institution, it is hard for them to create a system of accountability or have much of an influence in the children's lives.

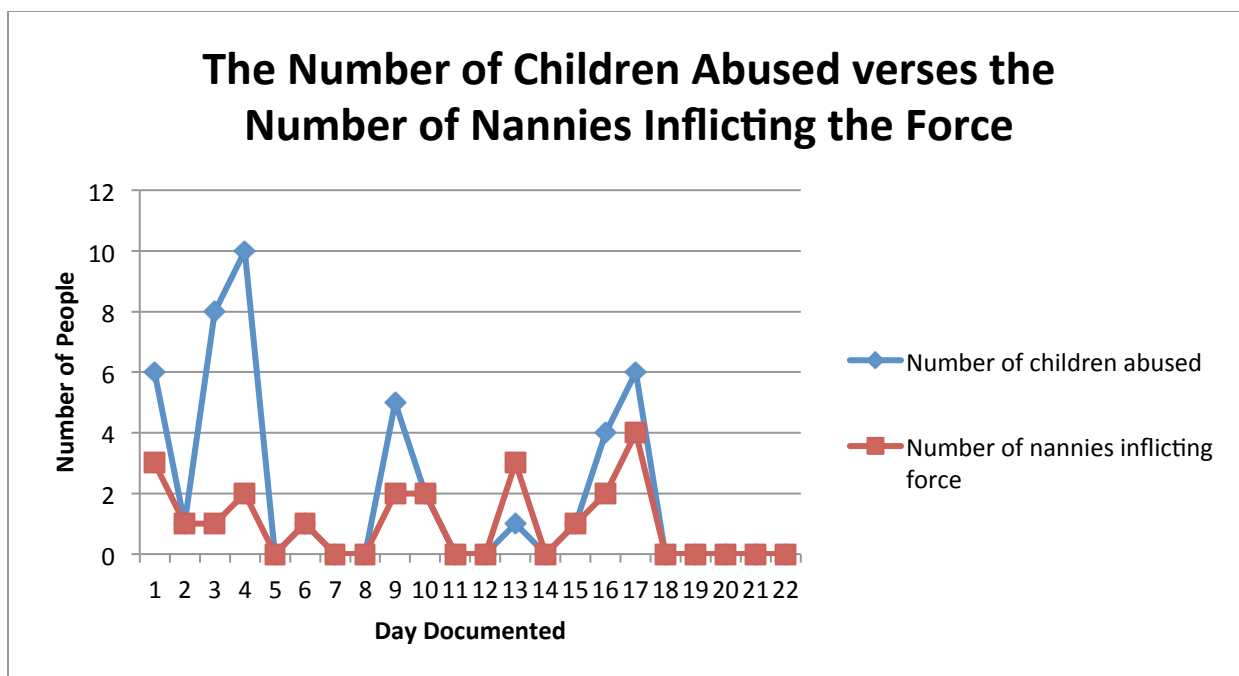
Despite all of the factors against the children, there is now renewed hope for children with disabilities in the orphanage with the announcement of the recent adoption opening between the United States and Kazakhstan. This ensures that Americans can now adopt Kazakh children. If there is more value placed on these children from parents in the United States who are not only willing to tolerate them, but who desire to put in the immense amount of time and money to legally adopt and care for them for the remainder of their lives, then perhaps Kazakhstanis will hold more value for those who have disabilities. Americans have a large level of societal standing in Kazakhstan because they are seen as a country of wealth and prosperity, so if Americans see these children as valuable and capable, then there is a larger potential that Kazakhstan's societal value towards those with disabilities may increase.

Throughout the three months at the orphanage, there was a total of twenty-two times when I was able to observe the children while they were outside. There was an

average of 34.86 children outside each day, with the numbers ranging anywhere from five to fifty-five children. Accompanying the children were their nannies; there were an average of 8.41 nannies outside with the children, with the lowest amount being one nanny outside, and the most being fifteen. On average, there was a ratio of 4.14 children per nanny while the children were outside. In addition to the nannies and the children, there were often volunteers outside as well. An average of 3.91 volunteers were present during each visit, with a minimum of two, and a maximum of eight volunteers.



The graph above shows the number of children, nannies, and volunteers during each day of observation. Overall, there is a correlation between the numbers of children, compared to the number of personnel working with them. As the number of children outside increased, the amount of nannies outside with them increased; the opposite occurred when there were less children outside. The groups of children are divided into roughly equal group sizes between the nannies, based on age and gender. Seeing that there is no way for volunteers to determine how many children will be outside on a given day, there is no predicted correlation between the amount of volunteers as compared with the number of children or nannies.

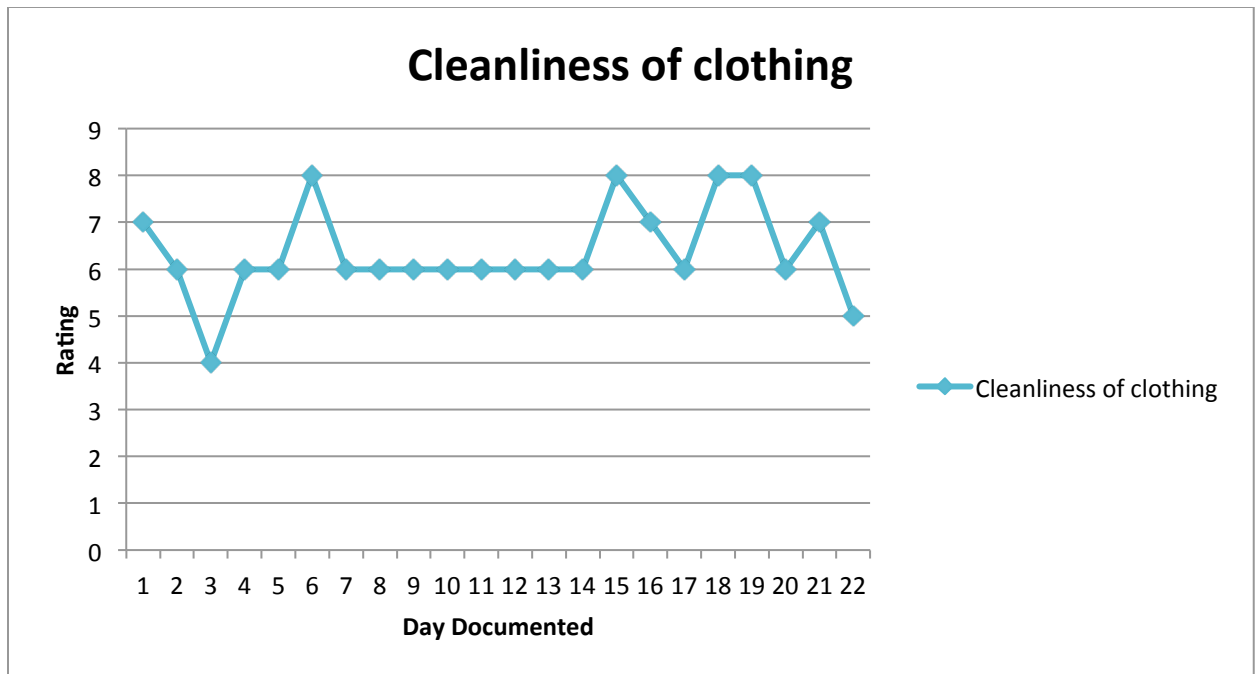


During this time span, totaling 37 hours, there were 45 cases of abuse with 22 nannies that inflicted the force. Each day that I was able to observe, there was an average of 2.04 children abused, with an average of 1 nanny perpetrating the abuse each day. Eleven days out of the twenty-two I observed, there were no children who were abused, and there was a maximum of ten children abused in a two hour time frame. Anywhere from one to four nannies inflicted the abuse on any given day where abuse occurred.

The abuse the children experienced consisted of being hit, having their head slammed against the wall, being screamed at, being hit with a stick while cowering in the corner, isolated, stuck in a play house, slapped in the face and on the back, being taken into a room and kicked, hit, and punched, having their arm grabbed and yanked aggressively, as well as being tied to benches with jump ropes and belts. The events which lead up to the abuse ranged from taking a phone out of a backpack, holding a stick, not sitting up straight, lying down, standing up, crying, wandering off, moving too slowly, not listening, or opening the door to the director's car. Only two cases out of the

45 cases of abuse are correlated to intentional and dramatic misbehaving; the rest are a combination of not sitting perfectly still or similar minute behaviors. During one of the instances where a child intentionally misbehaved, a young boy had taken a phone from a volunteer's backpack and began calling the contacts listed. The other case occurred when a boy opened a door to the director's car. There are also several times when a nanny would abuse a child with no observable reasoning.

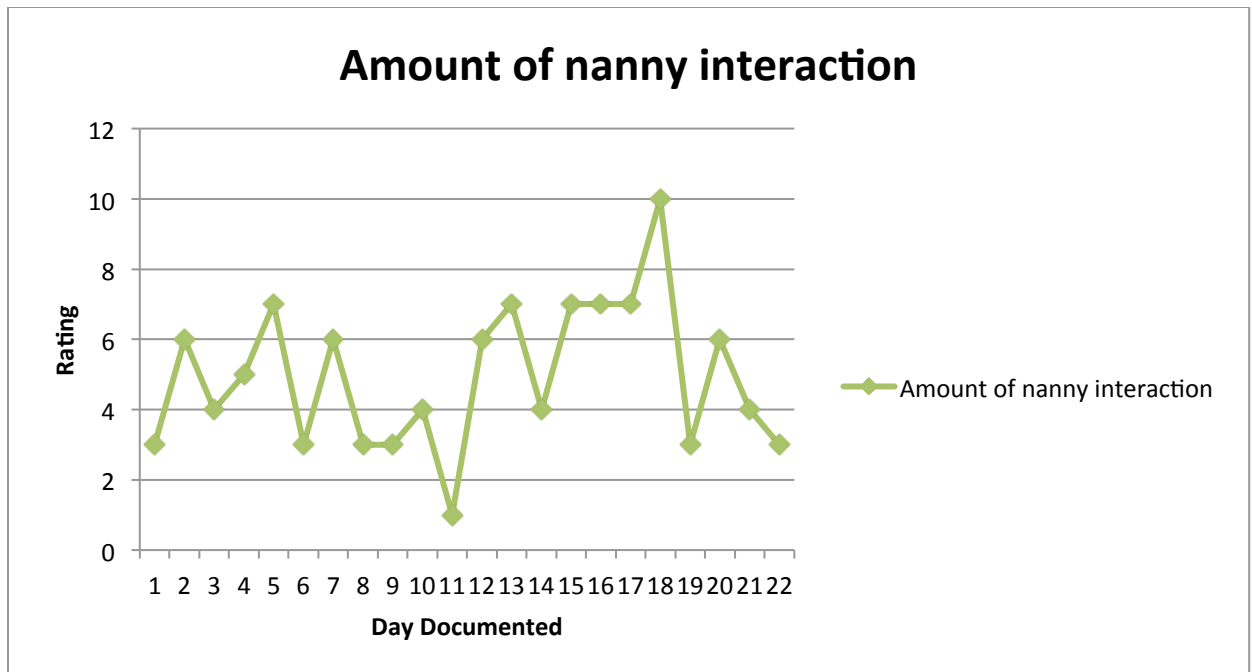
The outcome of the force was often negative. The children would react by crying, cowering in fear, numbly accepting what was happening to them, sitting up straightly, shaking, flinching, as well as an immense amount of marks and bruises often covering the children's faces. One of the worst cases involved a young girl who was allegedly taken into a room by three nannies and beat, kicked, and punched until she was finally allowed out. I was not present in the room while it happened, but, rather, found her after the incident, when she could not control her body and proceeded to heavily shake for 30 minutes, presenting with signs of shock. Another boy from the orphanage gestured to me what the women had done to her, and when I entered the room, there were three of the care takers laughing and casually chatting as if nothing had occurred. There were also 30 cases when a child appeared to be over medicated in order to be put in a sedated state. This was determined from children who strayed drastically from their typical behavior in a dazed and noninvolved manner.



The cleanliness of the children's clothing was rated on a scale from zero to ten, with zero being the dirtiest and ten being the cleanest. The average cleanliness was scored as a 6.36, ranging from a four to an eight on the scale. I rated the cleanliness of the clothing and the children themselves after each time I was able to observe the children. A score of four or lower was given when the children were poorly groomed, wearing clothes with major stains or bodily fluids on them, or when they smelled as if they had not showered. A score of six or higher was awarded when the children appeared to have showered within the past three or four days and had decently clean clothes on.

Although the children were always reasonably clean, they typically had an unpleasant odor to them which did not match the generally clean, average citizen or worker. The children often wore the same clothes day after day, without being washed, but they were never filthy or caked in dirt or fluids. Often times, the children wore clothing which matched those of the same gender and age group. Yet, there were other times when the children wore clothes that were often paired with the opposite gender.

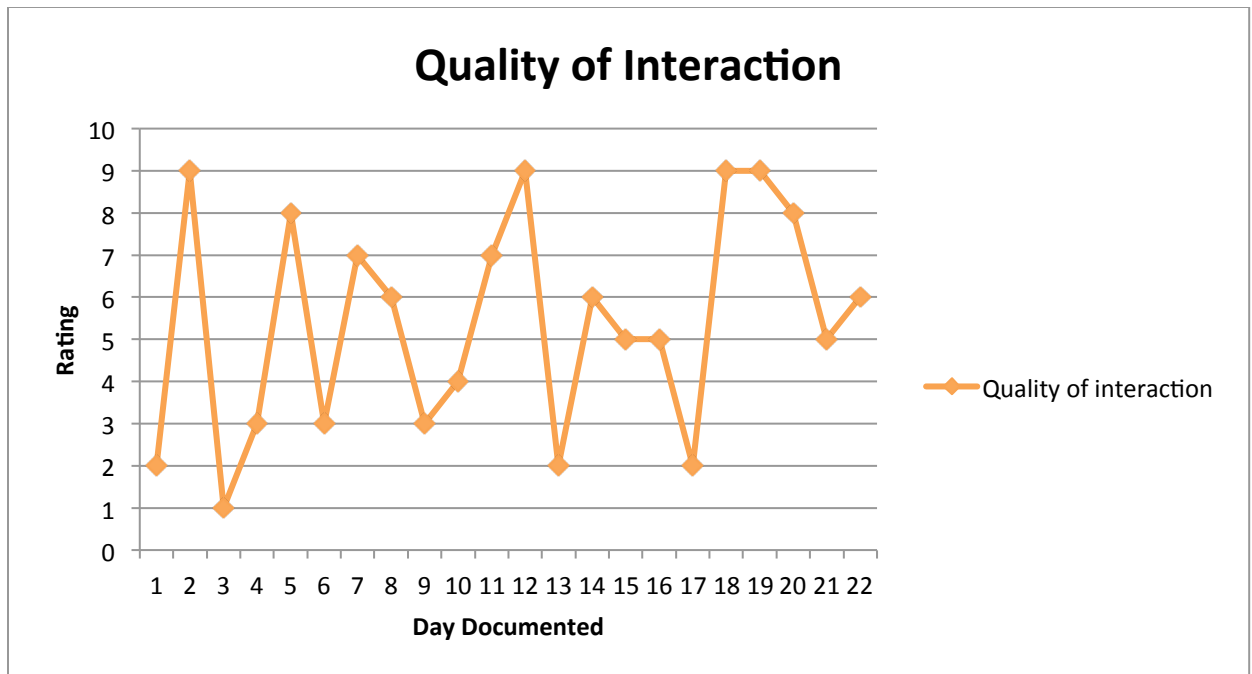
Many of the little girls resembled little boys, with their unanimously shaved heads and boyish clothing. Despite the children's unideal level of hygiene, they maintained a decent level of cleanliness. The cleanliness of the children's clothing and persons reflects highly on their physical care and cleanliness. Because the children were, overall, well groomed, it insinuates that their caretakers took notice of their physical hygiene and invested the time and resources necessary to maintain the sanitary health of the children.



The amount of nanny interaction was rated on a scale from zero to ten, with zero representing minimal contact and ten being extensive interaction with the children. The average score was a 4.95, ranging drastically from one to ten. A score of zero to four was given when the nannies spent anywhere from zero to twenty minutes total, out of the two hour time frame, interacting with the children. To earn a rating of a six through a ten, the nannies were required to spend between thirty minutes to the full two hours interacting with the children. These ratings were given solely based on how much interaction occurred and were not affected by whether the interactions were positive or negative.

There were many days when the nannies would sit under a gazebo and not interact at all with the children, maintaining distance between the children both physically and mentally by ignoring the children all together. This behavior is understandable in the sense that the nannies often work long hours with an average of fifteen children under their care. As the children play outside, the nannies would often take this time to chat with the other nannies and take a break from their demanding days. At other times, the

nannies would be heavily involved with the children, sometimes in a very positive manner, playing and caring for them, and at other times in a negative manner, focusing, rather, on abusing or heavily disciplining the children.

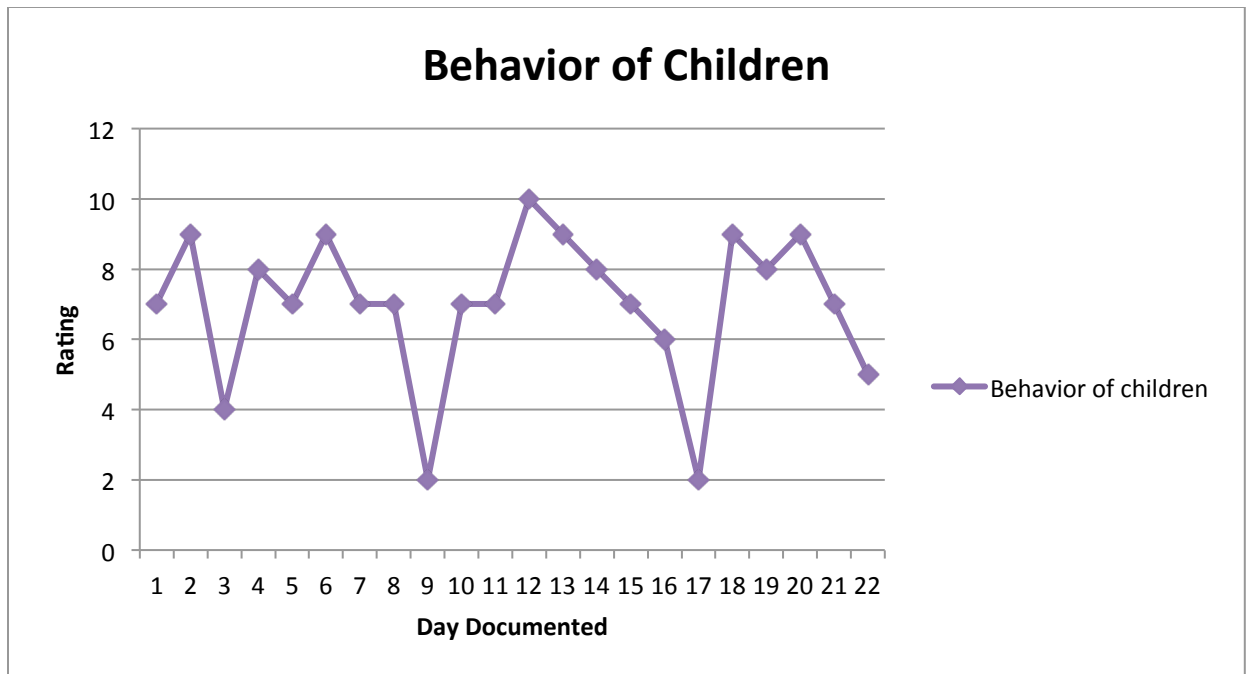


The scale for the quality of the nannies' interaction with the children ranges from zero to ten, with scores closer to zero representing negative interactions and a score closer to ten showing positive interactions. The quality of the nanny's interaction scored an average of 5.41 ranging from one to nine. The nannies scored a zero through four, concerning the quality of interaction with the children, when they enacted abuse towards the children, yelled at them, or displayed other negative behaviors. The nannies were awarded a six through a ten for their quality of interaction when they would play with the children, act kindly towards them, or exhibit other positive behaviors.

Many days the nannies would not interact with the children outside of heavy punishment. There were times when the only interaction a nanny would have with the children was to beat their head against a wall or to slap them across the face. There were other aggressive actions, such as reprimanding children for asking to go to the bathroom and forcing them to go outside in the grass. In addition, there were several occasions

when the nannies would encourage the older children to beat the younger children when they misbehaved or when the nannies felt the children needed to be punished.

Other times, the nannies were kind in their interactions; although these were not usually the same nannies inflicting the abuse described previously. Some of the nannies would stand with the children while they danced; others would walk around with the children. There were many sweet moments when the nannies would show compassion towards the children under their care. They would toss a ball back and forth with them and help the children jump rope. One day when adults who had once lived at the orphanage came to visit from the Adult Home, they were welcomed back with open arms and laughter. In moments like these, it is clear that some of the nannies have invested heavily in the children under their care and have genuine affection for them. There were also nannies who would help the children with crafts if volunteers organized an activity for them.

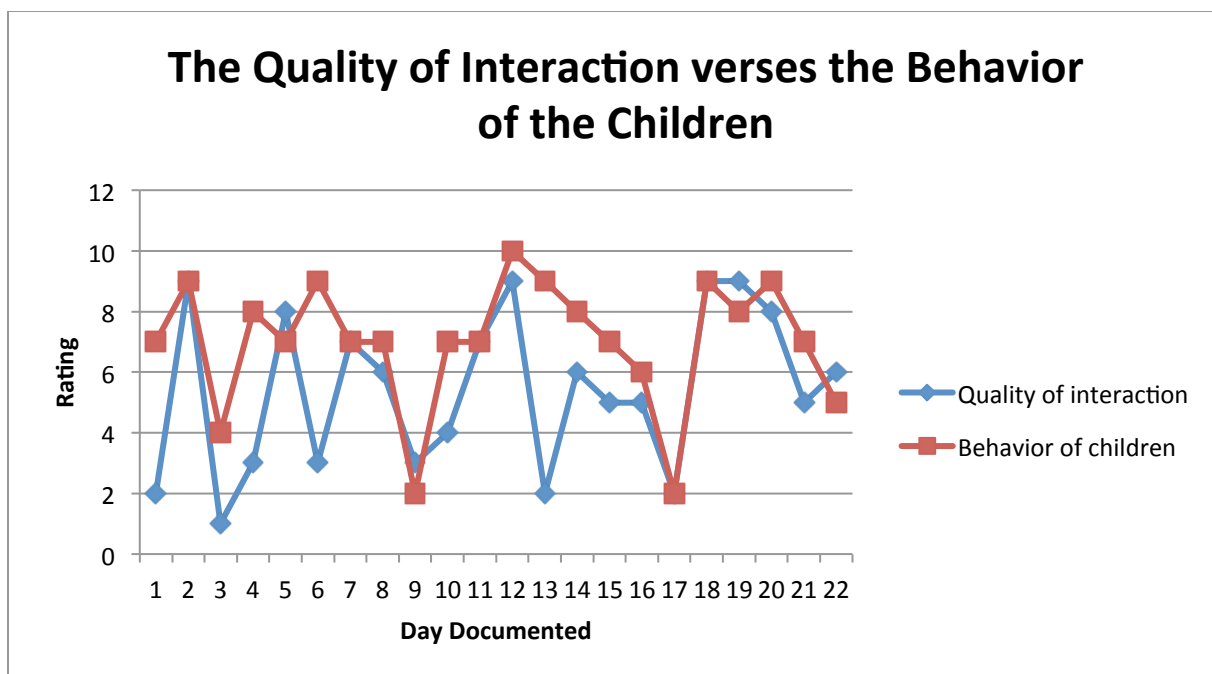


The ratings of the behavior of the children are on a scale from zero to ten, with zero being the worst behavior and ten being the best behavior. The children received an average score of seven, ranging from two to ten. The data was documented as a zero through four when the children were misbehaving, not listening, hitting one another or the volunteers, screaming, or exhibiting other negative traits. In order for the children to score a six through a ten, they needed to be well behaved in the sense that they obeyed the nannies, were kind towards one another, and took the initiative to care for one another.

The majority of the time, the children were very well behaved. They were often attached to volunteers while being wary of the nannies. Those who had freedom would spend their time dancing, climbing on the jungle gym, and walking around the pathway surrounding the outdoor area. They were sometimes protective of one another and would take turns holding hands and walking around in pairs because they were often forbidden to wander off on their own. The children delighted in being held and picked up, and they

loved the attention they received from a volunteer and occasionally a nanny. Some of the children were exceptionally hungry for attention and would cry or throw a temper tantrum when they were set down after being picked up by a volunteer, or when attention was given to a different child.

Although the children maintained an overall positive behavior, there were moments where they would act out primarily against each other and occasionally towards the volunteers. They would pull one another's hair, bite, hit, slap, kick, and gesture obscenely towards one another. These actions proved to be a part of the culture of the orphanage and never came as a shock to the nannies or the other children. In fact, the children were never reprimanded or punished for this negative behavior; in truth, it was occasionally encouraged. There were also several boys and girls as young as four who would make inappropriate sexual advances towards volunteers and other children alike, by grabbing at their breasts, looking down shirts and touching their rears. Even after being reprimanded by volunteers, they would continue to make the same inappropriate actions without being reprimanded by the nannies.



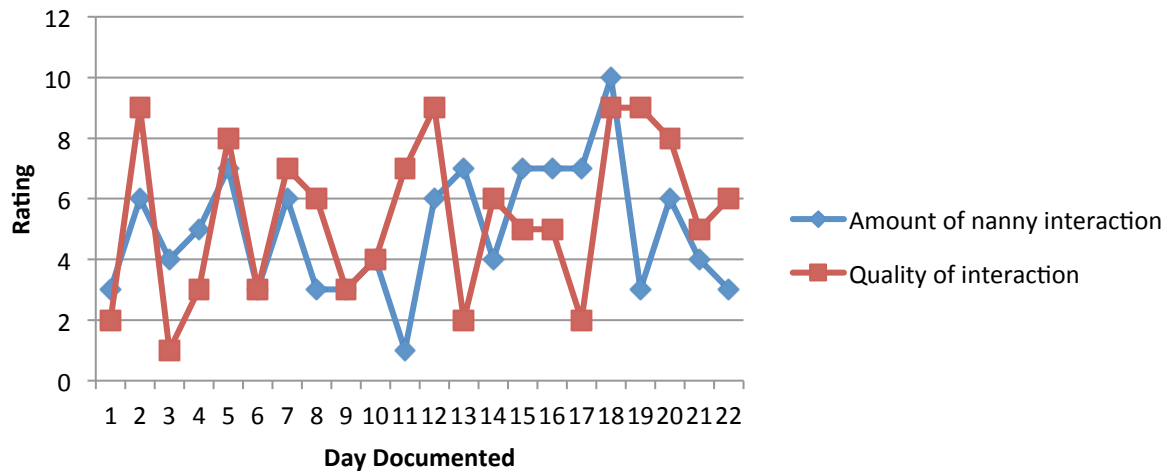
This graph shows the correlation between the quality of the interactions the nannies had with the children compared to the behaviors of the children. The data is rated on a scale from zero to ten, with zero representing negative behavior and a ten indicating “perfect” behavior. The data was rated as a zero through a four for the behavior of the children when the children were misbehaving: not listening, hitting one another or the volunteers, screaming, or experiencing other negative traits. In order for the children to score a six through a ten, they needed to be well behaved such that they obeyed the nannies, were kind towards one another, and took initiative to care for one another. The nannies scored a zero through four on the quality of interaction when they enacted abuse towards the children, yelled at them, or other negative behaviors. The nannies were awarded a six through a ten for their quality of interaction when they would play with the children, act kindly towards them, or exhibit other positive behaviors.

This data suggests that, overall, there is a correlation between positive interaction from the nannies when the children are better behaved, and a more negative level of

interaction from the nannies when the children are poorly behaved. There were only four times when the children were worse behaved, and the nannies had a more positive level of interaction. Yet, during these four instances, the children only scored one point lower on the zero to ten scale. This is significant because, although the children were poorly behaved on these days compared to the nannies, they did not score significantly lower showing that the gap in behavior was minimal.

There were thirteen times when the children behaved well, but the nannies acted towards them in a more negative manner, such as yelling at them, hitting them, making fun of them, or other similar behaviors. The scale of positive to negative interaction between the children and nannies ranges from a one to a seven point difference. Similar to when the children scored one point below the nannies, the one point difference does not show much significance, but when there is a seven point increase of the children's behavior, this suggests that, despite the children being significantly better behaved, the nannies actions towards the children were of much lower quality. This indicates that even when the children act in a positive manner, this does not ensure that the nannies will treat them with a higher level of quality. Although it is nearly impossible to tell which groups' behavior directly affects the other, it is likely that the increasingly positive behavior between both groups has the potential to increase the positive behavior of the opposing group, while the opposite is also true.

Amount of Nanny Interaction verses the Quality of the Nannies' Interaction



This graph shows the correlation between the amount of nanny interaction with the children compared to the quality of the interaction the nannies had with the children. The data is rated on a scale from zero to ten, with zero being the lowest amount of interaction, or the most negative behavior, and a ten being the highest amount of interaction, or perfect behavior. Concerning the amount of nanny interaction with the children, a score of zero to four was given when the nannies spent anywhere from zero to twenty minutes total out of the two hour time frame interacting with the children. To earn a rating of a six through a ten, the nannies were required to spend anywhere from thirty minutes to the full two hours interacting with the children. These ratings were given solely based on how much interaction occurred and was not effected by whether the interactions were positive or negative. The nannies scored a zero through four on the quality of interaction when they enacted abuse towards the children, yelled at them, or exhibited other negative behaviors. The nannies were awarded a six through a ten for

their quality of interaction when they would play with the children, act kindly towards them, or demonstrate other positive behaviors.

During the first half of the study, there appears to be a slight correlation between the quantity and quality of interaction on behalf of the nannies towards the children. An overall trend indicates that when the nannies treat the children in a more positive manner, there is a higher amount of interaction. This would occur when a nanny was active with the children under her care and would play games with them; the nannies would often play with the children for longer periods of time when they appeared to be having fun and became involved in the children's play time. This differs from when there was more negative interaction from the nannies to the children; trends show that the negative behavior occurs for less time. This correlation nearly vanishes during the second half of the observation time. Here there are both positive and negative behaviors of interaction for a vastly different quantity of time.

OBSERVATIONS FROM ADULT HOME

In a massive building, protected by a bright green gate, towers a home where the children from the orphanage are transferred after they turn eighteen. Inside the four story building, which loops around in a large 'L' shape, are hallways with patients held under lock and key. Out of approximately 250 patients in the Adult Home, about 40 have freedom to move throughout the home and are not confined to their room. The rest of the patients stay in their rooms whether by rule or by choice. During the three months I was there, permission was granted to me by staff members of the home to visit some of the women's rooms. The caretakers explained that those who are locked away are violent, but after visiting the rooms a handful of times, the patients I encountered proved to be pleasant and kind individuals who love visitors and are, above all, gentle. While roaming the halls, I saw about 50 of the patients who could be observed, all of whom appeared nonaggressive. Perhaps these patients are kept inside of their hall for other reasons, such as not being able to independently move around or having an injury, but there is not a clear reason as to why they are required to stay in their rooms, besides it being easier to manage and keep track of the patients.

Although the institution is referred to as a "Mental Institution" in English, the direct translation from the Russian name is "Nursing home for Invalids and Psychochronicles." However, a more appropriate name for the facility would be "Residential Behavioral Health Facility," or "Residential Psychiatric Facility" due to the population they are working with. A vast majority of the residents are the same population as the children's home, which means this facility is not a "Mental Institution," but an Adult Home for those with physical and mental disabilities. This includes adults

who have an intellectual disability, a social disorder, a physical deformity, lack of neural control, or a communication disorder, among other conditions.

After spending one morning a week with a group of women from the institution for a three-month duration, there was nothing observed but affection and appreciation exhibited towards the patients with whom the caretakers work. The building was also being completely renovated, improving the look and accessibility of the home. Although the group of ladies who were observed was a very small sample size and is not representative of how the majority of the patients are treated, it was exceedingly encouraging to see joyful, vibrant, and attentive caretakers who appear to be friends and have a genuine interest in their patients, often reaching beyond the basic level of care.

The comradery witnessed appeared genuine, consistent, and was often reciprocated by the patients. As mentioned earlier, this is based off of the care of the patients who receive the most freedom. There were many men outside at scheduled times, and although they usually stood around idly, not interacting with each other or with workers, there was a physical therapist instructing the men in group exercises on several occasions.

It was refreshing to see the facility taking notice of the mental and physical health of the men; outside of the few who are allowed to do wood working, most are confined to their rooms. In addition, every patient is locked inside their respective hall. This means that, although they may leave their room and wander along the hallway, they must be summoned and signed out of their hall to leave their section of the building.

Despite the very limited freedoms the patients' experience, the conditions of their rooms and halls are decent. They are over-all clean and well-presented. Each room is

typically filled with 4 beds and very little else. There is a designated section of the home where those with more freedom stay, and there are less people in those rooms. For example, there is a couple who are married and have their own room in that wing. However, this privileged group is small in number and excludes the many other patients living in tight spaces. There is typically a common area, with tables and a television, where residents can gather and enjoy social time with one another, but to leave their hall to go anywhere else proves to be nearly impossible unless someone comes for them. Even then it does not always happen.

However, some of the patients in the Adult Home have the freedom to roam throughout the building as they please and are often placed in a specific ward, which is not cordoned off. Those with the freedom to roam the many halls of the large building are often consumed with doing crafts or woodworking. Approximately 20 to 25 of these individuals prove to be talented and capable individuals who even sell their art work to visitors and show their craftsmanship in local competitions. The women are usually preoccupied with sewing, bead-working, and crocheting. The men, on the other hand, are found with tools in their hand, either engraving pictures into flat squares of wood or creating figurines out of the wood scraps they work with; on several occasions there are also men in a computer room playing and working on the computers. A few individuals hold jobs helping with office organization.

Even with the limitations the patients are often confined to, the patients here are treated more kindly than the children at the orphanage. There is no hitting, screaming, or other physical abuse that was observed. The only potential abuse that can be identified is abuse through neglect. Without being encouraged to make the most of themselves, to

strive to gain more independence, or to have their own experiences, many individuals lie in beds all day with minimal human contact.

A means of escape from the patients' confinement arises through group activities. The upper management from the Adult Home allows other approved groups to take the patients on field trips and do organized crafts and cooking. In September, a group of volunteers paired up with the staff of the Adult Home to take a group of about fifteen patients to a traditional Kazakh circus that was in town. The volunteers were able to provide snacks and chocolates to the patients before the show started. It was incredible to see the joy and excitement the patients had in leaving their narrowly confined world to have experiences which are often off limits to them.

About a month later, volunteers also took a group of patients to a park, after the facility's director arranged for a concert to be put on at the home in honor of Senior Citizen Day. It was impressive how the director went out of their way to entertain the patients and treat their needs, outside of primary and essential care. They had many talented singers and dancers perform at the concert, and some of the patients were allowed to perform their own acts, such as singing or playing the dombra, a traditional Kazakh instrument. There was an impressive level of kindness the performers showed for the disabled. Several of them invited the patients to dance while they performed and shared the limelight with the senior citizens. This kind gesture showed a deep level of outreach, and for a moment, the patients and performers seemed removed from the realities of their typical segregation.

After the concert, a smaller group journeyed to President's Park, an elaborate walking area painted with flowers and statues. Ten patients were allowed to partake in

the field trip, although the institution was willing to let the volunteers bring additional patients if there could have been more volunteers. The time at the park was filled with laughter and joy, and each of the women lit up with delight at the immense amount of new freedom they were experiencing. On the way through the park, one of the women revealed that she had not left the home for 15 years. This highlights how rare it is for these individuals to have the typical freedoms most individuals are accustomed to, such as leaving their house of their own will. Although these traits are not essential to existence, they add a much desired dimension and value to mankind's existence and experience.

Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of the Adult Home was the buying and selling of homemade crafts. In an altered form of micro financing, volunteers and workers who visit the Adult Home are permitted to buy gifts, such as slippers or ornaments, directly from the patients who made them. This money often goes to buying more supplies so they can continue to make more crafts to sell, but any money left over goes to the women who can save or spend their profit on whatever they want. This level of independence and power was unmatched by any other level of responsibility that was observed. It enabled the women to make choices to buy and sell what they wanted, for how much they wanted. It also gave them the ability to invest in things they wanted, giving them the power of choice, which is something rarely enacted at the Adult Home or orphanage.

During the three month duration of my stay, one of the women had been saving up to buy her own television, and she had finally reached the point where she could afford her own mini DVD and television combo. After saving for over a year and finally

being able to purchase a personal item, she exhibited joy and pride from her purchase which was unmatched. The patients at this home do not have many items that they are allowed to claim as theirs.

Despite having limited freedoms and items of ownership, overall the level of care at the adult home was rather phenomenal, especially when it is compared to the treatment at the orphanage. Patients are given more of an opportunity to thrive and be independent. Although there are still many steps required to reach full equality, this facility is taking the right steps towards allowing the patients to live a fulfilling life.

OBSERVATIONS FROM ALMATY

The average standpoint from locals is fully supportive of their government and the work it does to protect those with disabilities. Often, Kazakhstanis are shocked and bewildered when they find out the type of treatment that is usually exhibited in the facilities designed to take care of those with physical and mental disabilities. This is usually because those with disabilities are so far removed from society that most citizens are unaware of their current circumstances. The average citizen is completely oblivious to the fact that facilities such as the orphanage or adult home exist, let alone the level of treatment that occurs at the homes.

Throughout my time in Almaty, I would occasionally see people who have disabilities throughout the city. It remains challenging to recount and accurately analyze the attitudes towards those with disabilities in Almaty based solely on observations because seeing someone with disabilities in public is infrequent. Although it was a rare occurrence, it was a privilege to see mothers and fathers with children who had special needs and had decided against giving away their child. To see someone with disabilities is not common, but I was pleased to see some people were willing to, not only keep their child with disabilities, but to also take them outside of the house. Better was seeing a full grown adult functioning independently in society. As they passed by on the street, no one gawked or stared; the lack of attention it drew was impressive.

It is rare to see a parent who has kept their child with disabilities because there is often deep shame associated with having a child with disabilities, and there is a great lack in knowledge and awareness of how to raise a child with special needs. Most parents give away their children because they are at a crossroads and often do not know what to do.

There are not support groups or books to read to inform new parents on steps to take to ensure the success of their child, like there are in the United States. However, there are government funded day care centers in Almaty which take care of children with special needs free of charge, as well as schools that are available.

The reason these options are not utilized comes down to the mindset that those with disabilities are not fully human, with all of the feelings, value, and potential of a typical child. Most parents do not fight to provide for their child with disabilities because it is often seen as pointless. To surrender a career, a family, and a chance for life without public shame for a child leaves many parents scared. They do not know of other parents who have kept their child with disabilities because it hardly ever happens, and even when it does occur, the child is often kept secret. These new parents are left to make a decision to keep their child and give up time, energy, money, pride, and prosperity or to drop it off at an orphanage and continue on with their life. With resources being limited and no true incentive to keep their child, it is often an easier solution to be relinquished from their burden of a child by placing them in an orphanage, rather than keep them.

INTERVIEW WITH FAMILY MEMBERS OF SOMEONE WITH DISABILITIES

In a shop across from a university in Almaty, I met with a wonderful woman, I will name Rose, who had a son with special needs. Rose is now a professor at a prestigious university in Almaty, Kazakhstan. She appears to be an ideal Kazakh citizen, with a talented daughter and an impressive career. Yet few know of her son, who I will name Jim. Jim had Down's syndrome and died on his 18th birthday several years ago.

Rose gave birth to Jim roughly 25 years ago, and she was ecstatic to have her first born son. She was shocked when ten days later the hospital told her her son had Down's syndrome. Although the hospital did not tell her directly to give her child away, many others told her it was better to desert her new born son while she still could. Her friends warned her that once he was taken home, she could not give him back, which worried them. They told Rose that the child would be too difficult to take care of, and reminded her that many parents who have a child with special needs feel ashamed. Ultimately she decided to keep Jim, saying 'If I knew he was dead, I could leave, and I would be sad, but I would be okay. But how can I leave my son, knowing he was still alive and not take care of him.'

Once Rose made her decision to keep Jim, her challenges only increased. Jim progressed much slower than the other boys in school and her other friends' children without disabilities. She said it was hard for her to know what he needed. Rose struggled to find a place for her son. As a single mother with a young daughter, she tried to put her son in a school for children "like him." She encountered many challenges with the schools and day care centers she enrolled Jim in. They were often dirty, they were too expensive, or they did not treat the children well.

When a kind-hearted woman Rose knew wanted to open a better home for children who had disabilities, she approached the mayor of Almaty for financial help; he said they did not need specialists for the children, only nannies to watch after them. The woman went on to open the school without help from the government, but problems arose later when Jim began coming home with bruises caused by an aggressive classmate. He had already been in the school for seven years when Rose discovered the poor care Jim was receiving; Rose still regrets putting Jim in the school.

For a short period of time, Rose had to leave her son with her mother in a different city in Kazakhstan, due to personal living conditions in Almaty, and she was already struggling to care for her other child. After Jim moved back with Rose, she put him in a new school with her daughter. Rose always wanted both of her children to be in the same group in school so her younger daughter could help her son, but usually the faculty from the school would force the children to be apart.

When I asked Rose why the citizens of Kazakhstan struggle to adapt to the viewpoint that those with disabilities are capable and deserving of rights, she explained that there is still a heavy Soviet impression here that pushes for perfection and uniformity. This philosophy makes it challenging to validate a mindset which accepts those who are not considered perfect. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the Soviet's changed the mindset the Kazakhstanis had towards people with disabilities when they originally took over the country.

Another Kazakhstani I had the pleasure of meeting is a twenty three year old young lady I will call Lily. Lily's sister, who I will call Jillian, is seventeen and uses a wheel chair, and requires constant care. Jillian also needs assistance with feeding,

toileting, dressing, and almost everything most people take for granted on a daily basis. Jillian can communicate through facial expressions and slight arm movements; for example, she will often sport a huge smile on her face and start bouncing up and down in her chair when she feels excited about something.

After talking with Lily, she told me the treatment in Almaty is “not very good” for those with disabilities. The ramps in Almaty are incredibly steep, and it is too challenging to take her sister into stores with her. So although Jillian loves to shop and visit places in the city, she always has to wait outside until Lily can join her again, because it is too challenging to carry her inside. On one of the evening strolls with Lily and Jillian, which I had the privilege to participate in, I was pleasantly surprised when a young man offered to leave his car and help us bring Jillian inside the store we were visiting. This generosity was stunning to both Lily and myself, considering this behavior is a rare gem to find in Almaty.

After raising her sister, Lily had moved to Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, for a year and a half, but she had to leave behind her dreams in Astana to come home and help Jillian. Lily has a mother who can help take care of her sister, but after Lily left, Jillian thought Lily was her mother and she missed her so much that her family begged Lily to come back home. Lily now has a job in Almaty and is thriving. She still takes Jillian on walks when she is not too tired after work and when the weather is good.

SIGNIFICANCE

The treatment of children and adults with physical and mental disabilities in Almaty, Kazakhstan becomes significant once it is considered how many people this cultural exclusion effects. 1.31% of the 5,029,936 children in Kazakhstan under the age of 18 have a disability (UNICEF, Kazakhstan). Although this represents a low percentage, it turns out to be a large number of children. As of 2012, there were 65,800 children under the age of 18 who were reported to have a disability (UNICEF, Kazakhstan). That means that there are roughly 65,800 children who are typically undervalued, uneducated, and discriminated against in Kazakhstan. This estimate excludes the many unreported cases which occur in Kazakhstan's numerous villages.

Out of the number of children with disabilities under the age of 18, there are 4312 children who are housed in residential care (UNICEF, Kazakhstan). Often these are orphanages, much like the one in Almaty, but they can also be centers for children with disabilities or full time schools, much like the one Rose had her son put into. However, only 60 of the 4312 children were under the age of three. This means that only 1.39% of the children placed in residential care are under the age of three, which makes up 16.67% of the age groups represented. This suggests that a vast majority of parents decide to place their child in residential care at some point after they turn three. This has the potential to cause increased stress and psychological trauma to be removed from the child's family and home environment. Several times during my stay, the orphanage would have new children join us as old as ten who are uprooted from their families and placed into orphanages.

Although there are laws and regulations in place to protect these children and the general population, they are seldom honored. While children in the orphanage may

receive the occasional music class, many capable children, some of whom have no mental disability, are deprived of the opportunity to earn a basic education. This theme carries on into the adult population, where many of the disabled population are left under stimulated and without purpose.

The regulations in place are designed to ensure those with disabilities can live a fulfilling life, with opportunities to reach their full potential. Those with disabilities are promised the ability to earn a higher education, and eventually a job, that best suit their capabilities, as well as social equality within their community. This seems to be beneficial, not only for those with physical and mental limitations, but also for the community, government, and nation as a whole. Although the initial financial investment of training and implementing programs and schools are costly, it will likely pay off when those who have disabilities can gain occupations, as their bodies and minds allow, and become more independent.

In addition, the jobs these individuals with disabilities take on will help stimulate the economy and will teach them to be more independent and self-sufficient. This will reduce the cost for the Kazakh community and government, as they no longer have to economically support all of those with disabilities through adult homes, large faculty and nursing staff, and all sources of food, equipment, and medication. Once those with disabilities have learned how to properly make and spend money, they can better take care of themselves by living on their own and sustaining their own livelihood. Although this idealistic system of complete self-sufficiency is not realistic for everyone with disabilities, it is worthwhile to allow each individual to reach their optimal level of success in the least restrictive environment possible.

By providing better treatment and training for those with disabilities, as the Kazakh law suggests, those with physical and mental disabilities are likely to have a higher quality of life. They will achieve higher self-satisfaction and gain confidence to happily and confidently excel. By being challenged to better themselves, these individuals will be limitless in their achievement potential. Enabling this people group will allow those with disabilities will experience a freedom and desire to take control of their own life and future, ultimately bettering themselves and their community.

ASTANA COMPARISON

During my stay in Kazakhstan, I traveled to Astana, the current capital of Kazakhstan, for a three-day period. During my stay, I worked with a center for children with disabilities, which focuses on working primarily with children who have Autism Spectrum Disorder. I observed an incredibly high standard of treatment provided for the children. The children arrived in the morning and stayed through the late afternoon, participating in a wide range of activities, including learning math and reading, enjoying a music group, and playing in the gym filled with hammocks, cloth tunnels, and balls for the children to play with. They had the opportunity to take naps when needed, were well-fed, and could participate in therapy. They had both physical and occupational therapists working there, including employees from New Zealand and the United States. The occupational therapist there is one of the four occupational therapists operating in all of Kazakhstan. There are currently five licensed occupational therapists, but one of them is not practicing.

While in Astana, I also spent time visiting five families of children who have special needs and was pleased to see mothers who showed affection and love for their children with disabilities. Each mother I worked with showed deep affection and compassion for her child; the children with disabilities in these homes were not treated differently than the other siblings they had from what I observed during my time with them. Unfortunately, I was unable to observe how the general public reacted to those who have disabilities; due to the frigid temperatures, most children were kept inside.

Although Astana seemed incredibly progressive towards their treatment of those with disabilities, it is essential to consider that I was observing private family life and a non-government run day care center. From my observations, most Kazakhstanis are not

affectionate towards their children in public, and I have had limited experiences observing mothers with their child with disabilities in private circumstances in Almaty. It is not known whether mothers and family members in Almaty show the same affection towards family members with disabilities when they are not in public. The other factor to consider is that the facility I was working with was a private center, which was not run by the government and had their own budget and freedom to hire whomever they chose. Regardless, the behavior in Astana remains insightful towards what Kazakhstan's future could hold for the treatment of those with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The Kazakhstanis as a people group are kind and compassionate. They genuinely desire to improve the standing and well-being of their nation. With time and increased awareness, I firmly believe that Kazakhstan has the potential to radically improve the treatment and increase the level of social equality towards those who have disabilities. Currently, there is an immense level of undeveloped potential in the realm of people with disabilities in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The society as a whole has a grand possibility to increase their level of care for those with disabilities; the population is simply overall unaware, and currently unconcerned, with the treatment towards those with disabilities. Almaty has the physical resources and the financial capabilities to create an optimal environment for those with disabilities. The actions required to reach the city's full potential consist of properly training the personnel working with those with disabilities, providing a source of education for those with disabilities, and enforcing the laws and regulations already in place to provide for those who have disabilities. In order for these ideals to become a reality, there needs to be societal change in Almaty to find value in those who have disabilities.

Undeveloped potential also exists within those who have disabilities. Throughout the world, and particularly in Western society, people who have physical and mental disabilities are thriving and contributing to society. With the proper resources and social support, those with disabilities may have the capabilities to improve their quality of life, increase their independence, and contribute to society.

However, for such improvements to occur, there needs to be a call to action to bring change in society. There will not be cultural adjustments unless Kazakhstanis begin

to acknowledge a need for change and enact the steps necessary to alter the customs in their society. With time and a heavier emphasis placed on the disabled population, I envision a great level of change in Almaty, as the laws and regulations currently in place to protect those with disabilities begin to be enforced and those with disabilities begin to be seen as equals and as humans, rather than as a burden and shame to society.

WORKS CITED

Central Intelligence Agency. (2014). *The World Fact Book: Central Asia: Kazakhstan*

Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>.

The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.kazakhstan.at/index.php?id=96>.

David Christian. (Spring, 2000). *Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World*

History. Journal of World History , Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 1-26.

The History of Kazakhstan. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.kazakhstan.at?index.](http://www.kazakhstan.at?index.php?id=history)

[php?id=history](http://www.kazakhstan.at?index.php?id=history).

Huesmann, L.R., J. Moise-Titus, C. Podolski, and L.D. Eron. "Early Exposure to TV

Violence Predicts Aggression in Adulthood." [Http://www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org). 1 Jan. 2003.

Web. 5 Dec. 2014. <<http://www.apa.org/pi/prevent-violence/resources/tv-violence.aspx>>.

Keetie Roelen and Franziska Gassmann, (July 2012). *Child Wellbeing in Kazakhstan*,

UNICEF.

Lonely Planet. (2014). *Almaty:History*. Retrieved from [http://www.lonelyplanet.com/](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/kazakhstan/almaty/history)

[kazakhstan/almaty/history](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/kazakhstan/almaty/history).

UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS, *Changes in the legislative and policy framework*

stipulating the rights of children with disabilities in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/KA_Country_profile_eng_29_July__proofed.pdf.

UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS, *Kazakhstan*. Retrieved from

http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/KA_Country_profile_eng_29_July_FINAL_proofed.pdf

Kathryn Stoner. (2012). *Old Games, New Rules? Great Powers in the New Central Asia*.
New York: Oxford University Press.

Weekenberg Solutions (2012). *Welcome to Almaty in Kazakhstan, A guide to accommodation, attractions, maps and tourism*, Retrieved from:
<http://www.almaty-kazakhstan.net/>.

VisitKazakhstan.kz (2012). *Kazakhstan Traditions*. Retrieved from: <http://visitkazakhstan.kz/en/about/78/>.