INTRODUCTION

Mental retardation is an area posing serious problem to the mankind everywhere in the world. It is a significant health, social and educational problem. Mental retardation is a developmental disability that can appear from the very birth of a child. It is incomplete or insufficient general development of mental capacities. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) define that mental retardation means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Here “General intellectual functioning” is typically measured by an intelligence test. Persons with mental retardation usually score 70 or below on such tests. “Adaptive behavior” refers to a person’s adjustment to everyday life. Difficulties may occur in learning, communication, social, academic, vocational, and independent living skills.\(^1\)

According to American Association of Mental Retardation (AAMR) mental retardation is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills. This disability originates before age 18.\(^2\)

Generally, children with less than average mental ability are called mentally retarded. Children with mental retardation may take longer time to learn, speak, walk, and to take care of their personal needs such as dressing or eating. They are likely to have trouble learning in school. They will learn, but it will take them longer time. There may be something that they cannot learn. They may have trouble in understanding social rules also.

Mentally retarded children are deviate from the normal children for their negative side in mental dimensions. By definition, a child who is mentally retarded must have a below- average IQ and difficulty with functioning. They have difficulty in changing their way of functioning appropriate to the various situations in every day life.

Mental retardation occurs due to genetic and environmental factors which come in to play at pre-natal, perinatal and postnatal stages of development. Doctors have found many causes of mental retardation. The most common are Genetic conditions as Down

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\(^1\) Fact Sheet Number 8 (FS8), January 2001, National Information Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities.
\(^2\) AAMR 2002, 10\(^{th}\) Edition.
syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, and Phenylketonuria (PKU); problems during pregnancy; problems at birth; health problems; and iodine deficiency.

Whether a child has a developmental delay, early identification and intervention are essential for achieving the best possible outcome. Mental retardation is generally assessed by a combination of testing on formal tests of intelligence and by observation of the child’s adaptive functioning. A preventive approach to mental retardation of children is public education has to be taught, it will have some distinct positive affect.

The levels and IQ scores of mental retardation are Mild mental retardation (IQ. scores ranging from 50-70), Moderate mental retardation (IQ. scores ranging from 35-55), Severe mental retardation (IQ. scores of 20-40), and Profound mental retardation (IQ. scores under 20-25).

A mentally retarded child has certain limitations in mental functioning and in adaptive skills that will cause a child to develop more slowly than a typical child. They can do well in school but is likely to need individualized help. Some mentally retarded children need help with adaptive skills which are needed to live, work, and play in the community. Teachers and parents can help these types of children to work on adaptive skills at both school and home. Right education and training it is possible to overcome many of these challenges and allow a child to make the transition in to adulthood. Therefore, they need proper care, attention and protection from the community.

Today’s child is the citizen of tomorrow of a country. He is a member of our society. Therefore, children are our strength, treasure and our hope. A mentally retarded child is also a member of our society. Mentally retarded children have a whole lifetime to learn and grow as other children. They have also feeling of love and hated, anger and a sense belonging like other children. Mentally retarded children have also fundamental rights for education, security and protection and right to live respectfully as other citizen. So that is why the people think the child as a person first and later his disability. They should be given equal importance and opportunities like other children.

Article 46 of Indian Constitution emphasized the educational and economic interest of the weaker section people including physically and mentally handicapped to give special care and protection from social justice and all norms of exploitation.
The Government of India has enacted three legislations for the person with disabilities - (i) Person with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995; (ii) National Trust for Welfare of Person with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disability Act, 1999 has provisions for legal guardianship of the four categories and creation of enabling environment for as much independent living as possible. (iii) Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 deals with the development of manpower for providing rehabilitation services.

Mental retardation is the most common developmental disorder. Mentally retarded children at homes are lifelong pain for parents. It is a major problem for the parents of children with mental retardation. Some parents of mentally retarded children lose hope, even be frustrated and ashamed. At present situation mental retardation of children is increasing internationally and becoming a major study for us. Although mentally retarded children are increasingly widespread, they are still poorly understood by most of society. So study on children with mental retardation is a vital issue in the context of present society. Till today, very few researches have attempted to study on mental retardation of children.

Keeping in view, the problem arises in our society regarding mental retardation of children the study entitle “A critical study of mentally retarded children with special reference to four institutes of Guwahati city – Assam” is taken up.

In Assam, the numbers of mental retarded children are increasing day to day. On the contrary to this problem people are not conscious. Therefore, Research study in this respect is very limited. So, this research study is an attempt to draw a clear-cut picture of mentally retarded children with the help of four institutes of Guwahati city of Assam, where majority of children are mentally retarded.

Guwahati is the largest city of Assam, Northeast India, situated between the southern bank of Brahmaputra river and the foothills of the Shillong plateau. It is the gateway to the Northeast of India and the major centre of commercial, educational, cultural and sports centre of the Northeastern region of India.