

ISCI 2022: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN AN UNEQUAL WORLD:

RESEARCH, POLICY AND INTERVENTION

Theme: Children's rights indicators; Measurement issues related to child well-being and understanding children's lives

Sub-theme(s): Disabilities; Rights of children and adolescents

Title: Barriers to access and participation among youth with a disability

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Thematic importance: The needs, wants, strengths, and well-being of adolescents with disabilities are often overlooked in research, as are the barriers they face to fully and meaningfully participating in their family, school, and community. Using a population-based survey to measure these indicators has its strengths and limitations.

Introduction and objectives: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) came into force in 2008 and has since been ratified by 182 nations. Two specific areas detailed in the CRPD address the rights of persons with disabilities to access health care and to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport. The objective of the current study was to investigate the prevalence of adolescents with disabilities to access these opportunities as well as explore the barriers they faced in doing so.

Method: The study involved a cluster-stratified random sample of 38,015 public school students aged 12 to 19 in British Columbia, Canada. Students completed the BC Adolescent Health Survey, a paper-and-pencil self-report measure of youth health covering a broad range of health indicators. Analyses were performed to look at the disparities in health access and extracurricular activity participation experienced by young persons with disabilities. This included descriptive statistics using SPSS Complex Samples software to account for the study design's stratification, cluster sampling, and data weighting.

Results: Four percent of adolescents identified having a sensory disability (e.g., hearing or vision impairment), 1% had a physical disability (e.g., used a wheelchair), and 8% had a long-term or chronic health condition (e.g., diabetes). Among youth with these conditions, 36% indicated their health condition prevented them from doing things other youth their age did. Adolescents with a disability were more likely to report missing out on needed medical care and mental health services. For example, 16% of youth with a sensory disability did not access medical care they felt they needed, compared to 5% of youth without a disability ($F(2,3532)=154.37, p < .01$). Youth with a

sensory disability were also less likely to participate regularly in extracurricular activities such as sports or fine arts, and were more likely to indicate barriers to participation such as fear of being bullied (12% vs. 4% of those without a disability; $F(1,1777)=129.86, p < .01$) or lack of transportation (23% vs. 12%; $F(1,1777)=127.47, p < .01$).

Conclusions and implications: Over the course of the current study, the limitations of investigating the needs of adolescents with disabilities using health indicators from a comprehensive population-based health survey were highlighted, in that pertinent aspects of these adolescents' lives may not have been captured and the existing indicators may require revision in the future to better reflect the experiences of adolescents with disabilities. Nevertheless, the results of this study indicate that adolescents with disabilities continue to experience disparities relative to their peers. In order to enjoy their inherent rights, societal and institutional barriers must be addressed and the needs of persons with disabilities must be taken into account in policy and practice planning.