

Barriers and Facilitators to Inclusive Programming for Children with Mental and/or Developmental Challenges: A Participatory Action Research of Perspectives from Families and Professionals

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Abstract : Rationale: The traditional approach to community programs for children with mental and/or developmental challenges often involves segregation from typically-developing peers. However, studies show that inclusive education improves children's quality of life, self-concept, and long term health outcomes. Investigating factors that influence inclusion can thus have important implications in the design and facilitation of community programs such that all children - across a spectrum of needs and abilities - may benefit. Objectives: This study explores barriers and facilitators to inclusive community programming for children aged 0 to 12 with developmental/mental challenges. Methods: Using a participatory-action research methodology, semi-structured focus groups and interviews will be used to explore perspectives of sighted students, instructors, and staff. Data will be transcribed and coded thematically. Practice Implications or Results: By having a deeper understanding of the barriers and facilitators to inclusive programming in the community, researchers can work with the broader community to facilitate inclusion in children's community programs. Conclusions: Expanding inclusive practices may improve the health and wellbeing of the pediatric populations with disabilities, which consistently reports lower levels of participation. These findings may help to identify gaps in existing practices and ways to approach them.

Keywords : aquatic programs, children, disabilities, inclusion, community programs

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