

## The Positive Impact of Wheelchair Service Provision on the Health and Overall Satisfaction of Wheelchair Users with the Devices

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**Abstract :** Introduction: In recent years, diverse types of wheelchairs, both local production and imported, have been made available on the Georgian market for wheelchair users. Some types of wheelchairs are sold together with a service package, while the others, including the State Program, Supported locally-produced ones, don't provide adjustment and maintenance service packages to users. Within the USAID Physical Rehabilitation Project in Georgia, a study was conducted to assess the impact of the wheelchair service provision in line with the WHO guidelines on the health and overall satisfaction of wheelchair users in Georgia. Methodology: A cross-sectional survey was conducted in May 2021. A structured questionnaire was used for telephone interviews that, along with socio-demographic characteristics, included questions for assessment of accessibility, availability, timeliness, cost and quality of wheelchair services received. Out of 1060 individuals listed in the census of wheelchair users, 752 were available for interview, with an actual response rate of 73.4%. 552 wheelchair users (31%) or their caregivers (69%) agreed to participate in the survey. In addition to using descriptive statistics, the study used multivariate matching of wheelchair users who received wheelchair services and who did not (control group). In addition, to evaluate satisfaction with service provision, respondents were asked to assess services. Findings: The majority (67%) of wheelchair users included in the survey were male. The average age of participants was 43. The three most frequently named reasons for using a wheelchair were cerebral palsy (29%), followed by stroke (18%), and amputation (12%). Users have had their current chair for four years on average. Overall, 60% of respondents reported that they were assessed before providing a wheelchair, but only half of them reported that their preferences and needs were considered. Only 13% of respondents had services in line with WHO guidelines and only 22% of wheelchair users had training when they received their current chair. 16% of participants said they had follow-up services, and 41% received adjustment services after receiving the chair. A slight majority (56%) of participants were satisfied with the quality of service provision and the service provision overall. Similarly, 55% were satisfied with the accessibility of service provision. A slightly larger majority (61%) were satisfied with the timeliness of service provision. The matching analysis suggests that users that received services in line with WHO guidelines were more satisfied with their chairs (the difference 17 point/0-100 scale) and they were four percentage points less likely to have health problems attributed to the chair. The regression analysis provides a similar finding of a 21 point increase in satisfaction attributable to services. Conclusion: The provision of wheelchair services in line with WHO guidelines and with follow-up services is likely to have a positive impact on the daily lives of wheelchair users in Georgia. Wheelchair services should be institutionalized as a standard component of wheelchair provision in Georgia.

**Keywords :** physical rehabilitation, wheelchair users, persons with disabilities, wheelchair production

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