

Challenges for Persons with Disabilities During COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand

Authors : Tavee Cheausuwantavee

Abstract : COVID-19 pandemic significantly has impacted everyone's life. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Thailand have been also effected by COVID-19 situation in many aspects of their lives, while there have been no more appropriate services of the government and providers. Research projects had been only focused on health precaution and protection. Rapid need assessments on populations and vulnerable groups were limited and conducted via social media and an online survey. However, little is known about the real problems and needs of Thai PWDs during the COVID-19 pandemic for an effective plan and integral services for those PWDs. Therefore, this study aims to explore the diverse problems and needs of Thai PWDs in the COVID -19 pandemic. Results from the study can be used by the government and other stakeholders for further effective services. Methods: This study was used a mixed-method design that consisted of both quantitative and qualitative measures. In terms of the quantitative approach, there were 744 PWDs and caregivers of all types of PWDs selected by proportional multistage stratified random sampling according to their disability classification and geographic location. Questionnaires with 59 items regarding participant characteristics, problems, and needs in health, education, employment, and other social inclusion, were distributed to all participants and some caregivers completed questionnaires when PWDs were not able to due to limited communication and/or literacy skills. Completed questionnaires were analyzed by descriptive statistics. For qualitative design, 62 key informants who were PWDs or caregivers were selected by purposive sampling. Ten focus groups, each consisting of 5-6 participants and 7 in-depth interviews from all the groups identified above, were conducted by researchers across five regions. Focus group and in-depth interview guidelines with 6 items regarding problems and needs in health, education, employment, other social inclusion, and their coping during COVID -19 pandemic. Data were analyzed using a modification of thematic content analysis. Results: Both quantitative and qualitative studies showed that PWDs and their caregivers had significant problems and needs all aspects of their life, including income and employment opportunity, daily living and social inclusion, health, and education, respectively. These problems and needs were related to each other, forming a vicious cycle. Participants also learned from negative pandemic to more positive life aspects, including their health protection, financial plan, family cohesion, and virtual technology literacy and innovation. Conclusion and implications: There have been challenges facing all life aspects of PWDs in Thailand during the COVID -19 pandemic, particularly incomes and daily living. All challenges have been the vicious cycle and complicated. There have been also a positive lesson learned of participants from the pandemic. Recommendations for government and stakeholders in the COVID-19 pandemic for PWDs are the following. First, the health protection strategy and policy of PWDs should be promoted together with other quality of life development including income generation, education and social inclusion. Second, virtual technology and alternative innovation should be enhanced for proactive service providers. Third, accessible information during the pandemic for all PWDs must be concerned. Forth, lesson learned from the pandemic should be shared and disseminated for crisis preparation and a positive mindset in the disruptive world.

Keywords : challenge, COVID-19, disability, Thailand

Conference Title : ICSW 2023 : International Conference on Social Work

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : September 11-12, 2023