

Challenging Perceptions of Disability: Exploring the Link between Ableism, Social Stigma, Vision Impairment, and Autism Spectrum Disorder

Authors : Aikaterini Tavoulari

Abstract : This research aims to address the types of repetitive behaviours (RBs) observed by adults in children with vision impairment (VI) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the explanations the adults employ to interpret these behaviours, and the impact RBs have on the child, the caregiver, the professional and society. The underlying reason for this is an attempt to discover any potential differences between two different disabilities in a comparative fashion. The study is based on the interpretivism paradigm and follows a qualitative approach. A comparative case study design based on the ecological systems theory (EST) is adopted. Thirty-five caregivers and accredited professionals were recruited (17 for the VI group, out of whom 8 were caregivers and 9 were professionals, and 18 for the ASD group, out of whom 9 were caregivers and 9 were professionals). Following the completion of a pilot study, all participants were interviewed regarding one specific child - their own child/student - via semi-structured interviews. During the interviews, the researcher used a research diary as a methodological tool and video elicitation as a facilitation tool. A cross-case analysis was conducted, and data were analysed according to the method of thematic analysis. A link has been indicated between VI and ASD, which concerns perceptions about the socially constructed manner in which an RB is perceived. ASD is perceived by the participants as a disability with challenging characteristics, such as an RB. The ASD group perceived RB as linked to ableism, social stigmatisation, and taboo, in contrast to VI, where the existence of RB seems to be a consequence of sensory loss. Bi-directionality of EST seems to have been lost completely, and the macrosystem seems to drive the interactions between the ecological systems.

Keywords : ableism, social stigma, disability, repetitive behaviour, vision impairment, autism spectrum disorder, perceptions

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