

Alternate Approaches to Quality Measurement: An Exploratory Study in Differentiation of “Quality” Characteristics in Services and Supports

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Abstract : Today, virtually all programs offered to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities tout themselves as person-centered, community-based and inclusive, yet there is a vast range in type and quality of services that use these similar descriptors. The issue is exacerbated by the fields’ measurement practices around quality, inclusion, independent living, choice and person-centered outcomes. For instance, community inclusion for people with disabilities is often measured by the number of times person steps into his or her community. These measurement approaches set standards for quality too low so that agencies supporting group home residents to go bowling every week can report the same outcomes as an agency that supports one person to join a book club that includes people based on their literary interests rather than disability labels. Ultimately, lack of delineation in measurement contributes to the confusion between face value “quality” and true quality services and supports for many people with disabilities and their families. This exploratory study adopts alternative approaches to quality measurement including co-production methods and systems theoretical framework in order to identify the factors that 1) lead to high-quality supports and, 2) differentiate high-quality services. Project researchers have partnered with community practitioners who are all committed to providing quality services and supports but vary in the degree to which they are actually able to provide them. The study includes two parts; first, an online survey distributed to more than 500 agencies that have demonstrated commitment to providing high-quality services; and second, four in-depth case studies with agencies in three United States and Israel providing a variety of supports to children and adults with disabilities. Results from both the survey and in-depth case studies were thematically analyzed and coded. Results show that there are specific factors that differentiate service quality; however meaningful quality measurement practices also require that researchers explore the contextual factors that contribute to quality. These not only include direct services and interactions, but also characteristics of service users, their environments as well as organizations providing services, such as management and funding structures, culture and leadership. Findings from this study challenge researchers, policy makers and practitioners to examine existing quality service standards and measurements and to adopt alternate methodologies and solutions to differentiate and scale up evidence-based quality practices so that all people with disabilities have access to services that support them to live, work, and enjoy where and with whom they choose.

Keywords : co-production, inclusion, independent living, quality measurement, quality supports

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