



Canadian Media Coverage of the Impact of Covid-19 on the Lives of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Critical Presences and Absences

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Introduction

- Persons with intellectual and developmental (IDD) have been disproportionately affected by the COVID19 pandemic (REF).
- Systematic exploration of the Canadian media news coverage of the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of people with IDD remains sparse.
- The ways in which mass media are developed and disseminated play a significant role in the way that social reality is constructed (Solves et al., 2018).
- Analysis of the media coverage of persons with IDD during the COVID-19 pandemic can provide important insights about how persons with IDD are being supported, valued, and viewed during this unique time in history.

Conclusion

- Media coverage can produce cultural artifacts that reflect commonly held beliefs and “valued social issues.”
- The COVID19 pandemic highlights the already existing issues and concerns regarding the quality of care for people with IDD in Canada.
- A more nuanced coverage is required to advance the understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities experienced by people with Intellectual and developmental disabilities rather than created them.
- Our findings are also a call to action for journalists to include the voices and thus lived experiences of people with IDD in the Canadian media coverage of issues impacting them and their everyday lives.

The purpose of this study is to examine the Canadian media coverage of people labelled with IDD during COVID-19.

Methodology

- 50 English-language Canadian newspapers (March 2020-October 2020)
- Purposeful sampling was used to select articles using Nexis Uni and specific search parameters.
 - Inclusion and exclusion requirements were applied
- Search was supplemented by
 - Google News
 - Authors' own social media search.
- Frame analysis (Funk et al., 2020; Kerzner, et al., 2020)
“Framing is the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy” (Nelson et al., 1997, p.221)

Examples

- Access to Information:
Now that in-person appointments are a rare occurrence, communication is even more strained. Megan Pollock, Special Olympics BC communications manager, said they are fearful that people with ID aren't receiving critical information around the prevention and symptoms of COVID19. (Skrypnek, 2020, para 4)
- Appropriate Accommodations:
“I can't leave the house. I'm always at home...The only thing we're allowed to do is go in the backyard, take a walk, and that's it. I feel trapped.(Seucharan, 2020, para. 11) ”
- Standard of Support:
The Alberta government required staff who work at multiple continuing-care homes to be limited to a single site....workers did not receive extra hours to make up for the loss of income from their other employers...“Now the ones who stayed are paying the price, along with the residents they support.” (Hackett, 2020, para. 3-5)

Results

- Voices of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are largely absent from the media narratives about the impact of COVID-19
 - Narratives presented by family members and community agency “experts”
- COVID-19 seems to be exaggerating already existing concerns for persons with IDD
 - Access to information, appropriate accommodations, high quality standard of supports/care, limited communication, lacking resource (e.g., technology).
The pandemic has highlighted the big gaps in supports for people with intellectual disabilities...Inclusion BC wants the next government to work on accessible housing, tailored mental health services and family care supports for people with intellectual disabilities. (Skrypnek, 2020, para 1).

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