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Conference Abstract

Aging with an adult-onset physical disability: A scoping review

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this literature review is to explore the mutual interaction of aging and disability in individuals aging with adult-onset physical disabilities and to highlight gaps in existing literature.

Background and Significance: Two thousand and eleven marks entry of the world's largest birth cohort into the 65 age category. Over the next half a century, Canada's aging population is expected to double as the remaining Baby Boomers cross the threshold into old age. The sheer number of aging adults has received considerable attention, but one sector of the aging cohort that has fallen under the radar is those aging with a long-term physical disability. This has occurred for a number of reasons including (a) recent increases in longevity for those with disabilities; (b) the emphasis on successful aging and; (c) a focus on intellectual, developmental, or psychological impairments.

Methods: A scoping review was conducted to identify current gaps in the research in this area. In order to be eligible for inclusion in the review, studies had to (a) focus on individuals aging with adult onset-physical disability; (b) provide insight on terminology used in describing someone aging with an adult-onset disability; and/or (c) describe models of disability and aging. Exclusion criteria for this review were studies (a) published before 1975; or (b) about congenital, intellectual, developmental, or psychiatric disabilities. Keywords included physical disability, adult-onset disability, long-term disability, elderly, and aging with disability. Databases used were SCOPUS and CINAHL, although the majority of articles were found through citation tracking, due to the great variation in terminology when speaking about aging with an adult-onset disability. Forty-three articles were selected and used in the scoping review.

Findings: A number of themes emerged from the literature. These include a lack of definitional clarity when speaking about this disability group, challenges to cooperation between aging and disability sectors despite overlapping goals and sometimes similar agendas, and a significant lack of models

that explore the interaction of both aging and disability factors together. Literature to date on aging with adult-onset physical disability has shown predominantly negative themes. A strong presence of what's been called the double jeopardy hypothesis was found in the literature and suggests that the overlay of the aging process on the disability process creates a doubly disadvantaged situation. It postulates that this group will face additional issues associated with their impairments on top of the regular aging process.

Future Directions: Exploring this marginalized group has the potential to shed light on a number of important factors associated with the aging process and future outcomes for this group. By researching further, we hope to become better able to serve this population because of better informed policy and practice agendas. This scoping review has shown the importance of understanding the positive and negative aspects to aging with a disability. It has also highlighted the need for further research into the development of a more balanced model to explain the inter-relationship/mutual influence of disability and aging factors on individuals life experiences and outcomes. The author is currently conducting a grounded theory study on this as a Masters thesis project.

Keywords

aging, disability, research, review

Presentation available from the [FICCDAT Growing Older conference site](#)