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Conference Abstract

Growing up-growing older with a physical impairment: The paradox of normalization

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Abstract

The purpose of this presentation is to describe key preliminary findings from a study on growing up & growing older with a lifelong physical impairment. A qualitative methodology was utilized consisting of narrative inquiry informed by the Life Course Perspective. The life course perspective is a dynamic approach that encompasses multiple theories including sociology, human development, and aging highlighting how social, historical, and cultural contexts shape peoples lives. Narratives are storied ways of knowing and communicating that people use to organize events in their lives and make sense out of their experiences. Nine community-dwelling individuals (3 men; 6 women), aged 26-70, with mild to severe Cerebral Palsy were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Multiple (3-4), in-depth interviews were completed with each participant in order to co-construct their life stories. The data analysis was iterative. NVIVO 8 was used to organize the data supporting a systematic caparison of emerging themes and categories, as well as the central plot that weaves the participants' experiences together. "Normalization" emerged as a key recurring theme in the participants' life stories. The focus of rehabilitation on "normalizing" movement, particularly walking, during childhood can lead to social psychological challenges as well as problems later in the life course as people encounter increasing fatigue and decreasing functional abilities but no longer have access to rehabilitation services. The impact of attempts to normalize participants' physical performance throughout the rehabilitation process during childhood and adolescence on experience in adulthood will be highlighted.

Keywords

aging, disability, life course perspective, older adults, cerebral palsy

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

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