Exploring the literature: School violence against children with disabilities in low and middle income countries

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Introduction

❖ Children with disabilities are three to four times more likely to be victims of violence, compared to children without disabilities, in high-income countries (Jones et al., 2012). However, 80% of people with disabilities live in low and middle income countries (LMICs).

❖ Children with disabilities are more likely to be targets for exclusion, bullying and discrimination at school.

❖ Limited attention has been paid to school violence against children with disabilities in LMICs.

Violence is defined as “intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (World Health Organization, 2017).

Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 19, states that children have the right to protection “from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has care of the child” (World report on violence against children, 2006).

Purpose

The purpose of this scoping study was to explore the existing literature on school violence against children with disabilities in LMICs.

Method

The approach for this scoping review was modeled after Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) five-stage framework.

Electronic databases were searched to identify all types of study designs published between 2005 to present, with data on violence perpetrated by adults and peers against children with disabilities (aged 5-18) in school LMICs. To address the grey literature, non-database sources were searched.

Results

Gender

❖ Girls with disabilities were at a greater risk for violence.

❖ Girls experienced higher rates of harassment and reported more physical and sexual forms of violence.

❖ Schools ignored reports of sexual violence filed by girls with disabilities for fear of losing funding.

Disability

❖ Having an intellectual disability heightened the risk of being victimized.

❖ Having multiple disabilities was a risk factor for being bullied and harassed in school.

❖ Beliefs about teenagers with intellectual disabilities encouraged sexual violence against them.

Violence

❖ Sexual and physical abuse were the most common forms of violence reported.

❖ Discrimination was commonly reported and considered to be a precursor to direct acts of violence.

❖ Perpetrators were school staff, peers, and other adults.

Discussion

Results indicate that children with disabilities experience school violence and are likely to be at a greater risk, compared to their non-disabled peers, in LMICs.

Females with disabilities were more likely to be victims of violence, as were children with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and discrimination were commonly reported among children with disabilities.

The current scoping study extends previous research on violence against children with disabilities in high income countries to LMICs, suggesting that having a disability increases vulnerability to sustaining violence.

Future research

While the findings have shown that children with disabilities are exposed to school violence in LMICs, more research is needed to examine the patterns and risk factors for violence.

References

