

Advancing child rights within early childhood services and disability supports: Building expert consensus on practices to affirm the rights of children with neurodevelopmental disabilities

Canada has made formal commitments to protect the rights of children with neurodevelopmental disabilities through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Specifically, Article 23 of the UNCRC states that any mentally or physically disabled child has the right to live in conditions which ensure their dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate their community participation. Yet, children with these disabilities routinely experience violations to their protected rights, including exclusion from community life, segregation from peers, and exposure to violence.

Children, especially young children, depend on the adults in their day-to-day lives to defend their rights. As such, community professionals who support children with neurodevelopmental disabilities (e.g., educators, clinicians/therapists, support workers, childcare providers) are key in determining whether children's rights are achieved or not. Given this pivotal relationship, community professionals who support disabled children need guidance on practices they can use to affirm children's rights, both to avoid causing children harm and to support children's optimal development.

To address this need, a novel study is underway to develop and validate relevant practice guidance. The study will use a Delphi technique to engage an expert panel of researchers, service providers, and self/family advocates to first identify and then build consensus about strategies professionals can use to affirm the rights of young children with neurodevelopmental disabilities. Following the Delphi, an online survey will ask a large national sample of diverse professionals the extent to which they perceive these recommendations to be feasible to implement and relevant to their work. The survey responses will provide insight into the opportunities and barriers to enact rights-affirming strategies. The poster will discuss study methodology, potential practice contributions, and theoretical/research advancements.