

The Participation of Children and Youth with Physical Disabilities

By King, Gillian

Participation in activities is vital to the development of all children. Past studies indicate that children and youth with chronic disabilities are at risk for lower participation in ordinary daily activities. This presentation will cover a number of topics: the nature of participation, how to measure it, what is known about the participation of children and youth with physical disabilities, and the major predictors of their participation in formal and informal activities.

The presentation will focus on the findings of a longitudinal study of the participation of 427 children and youth with physical functional limitations ages 6 to 12. This study was conducted in the province of Ontario, Canada. The aims were to describe the participation patterns of these children and youth, and the major predictors of their participation. The presentation also will consider how children with physical disabilities are faring in their participation, compared to a group of 354 Ontario children who are typically developing. Participation patterns for boys and girls, and children in different age groups, were examined using the Children's Assessment of Participation and Enjoyment (CAPE). The CAPE is a reliable and valid self-report measure of children's participation in recreation and leisure activities outside of mandated school. The CAPE provides a fine-grained analysis of children's participation by measuring attributes such as intensity, location, and enjoyment.

The study also examined the environmental, family, and child factors that determine children's participation in formal and informal activities. Structural equation modeling was used to test a theoretically based model of these factors. The findings indicate the vital role played by families, and the importance of multifaceted approaches to supporting participation. Understanding the factors that promote the participation of children, and the pathways by which these factors operate, is an obvious prerequisite to our ability to improve the personal and social well-being of children with disabilities.