
Immigration and disability: Minority families with disabled children

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Abstract

Issue

Families from non-western countries are for various reasons seldom included in research on families with disabled children, and there are few separate studies about families with "double" minority background. This paper discusses how families with disabled children understand disability and how they cope with their situation. Do disabled people from ethnic minority groups face the same type of challenges as the majority population in their daily lives, or do they meet special barriers due to factors like culture, religion, language, prejudice or racism? Do they have other or additional problems because of their status as ethnic minorities? What are their experiences from interaction with the service system?

Methods

- Qualitative interviews with 50 families, living in eight different municipalities in Norway. The majority of the parents are first generation migrants from different countries: Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq, Iran and Lebanon.
- Observations of their children in kindergartens and schools.
- Qualitative interviews with teacher and other professionals.

Results

The study indicates that the situation of migrant families with disabled children is simultaneously similar to and different from families in the majority population. Special challenges are for instance: problems with language and communication, lack of information about disability and the service system, being met with prejudice or discrimination and having practical problems defined as culture. There are great needs for improving the service system in order for professionals to be able to meet the needs of these families. Improvements have to be made with regard to: written information in the preferred language of the families, systematic use of interpreters, better coordination of services and greater awareness among professionals about how these families both are similar to and differ from other families.

Keywords: Immigration, Minority families, Children, Service system, Language, Culture

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