Online peer mentorship programs for children and youth with neurodevelopmental disabilities and their caregivers: A scoping review

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Introduction

• Peer mentorship provides individuals living with a particular life experience the chance to learn from those who have undergone similar experiences1.
• For children with disabilities, a common barrier to participation is a lack of information on existing programs and strategies to participate.
• From an adolescent viewpoint, frequent barriers to participation are: a limited number of peers with disabilities and limited social support2,3.
• Online peer mentorship programs may bridge the gap between access to information and social support for caregivers and youth with disabilities.

Online communities

• An online community is "any virtual social space where people come together to get and give information or support, to learn, or to find company"4.
• Online peer mentorship programs may increase access to peer mentorship and be cost-effective.
• Advantages of online peer mentorship groups include:
  • 24/7 accessibility;
  • Easy access of information and social support,
  • the opportunity to speak to individuals who can personally relate to certain experiences regardless of geographical boundaries5.

Objectives

• We aimed to explore the scope of the literature on:
  1) the components of online peer mentorship programs for children and for caregivers of children with neurodevelopmental disabilities;
  2) to determine existing platforms and formats for online peer mentorship;
  3) to examine mechanisms of moderation and types of content exchanged; and,
  4) to synthesize the perceived outcomes and benefits of the online peer mentorship programs.

Methods

• Six different databases from various disciplines (PubMed, Medline, CINAHL, ERIC, PsycINFO, and SocINDEX) were searched for studies from January 1st, 1995 to April 30th, 2015.
• The search strategy aimed at addressing the research question:
  “For children and youth with neurodevelopmental disabilities and their caregivers, what are the benefits and characteristics of online peer-mentorship programs?”

Study Design

Inclusion Criteria

- Quantitative and qualitative peer-reviewed published studies.
- Peer mentorship that is not online, mentorship that is not targeted to the individual (e.g., blogs, general forum posts, personal story-telling).
- Peer to peer. Child or youth with a disability, parent of child with disability or person (caregiver of child or parent with disability).
- Any neurodevelopmental childhood disability (developmental disabilities that have a neurologic origin).
- Children and youth (ages 0-18 years) with neurodevelopmental disabilities, parents of children and youth with neurodevelopmental disabilities.
- Any country.
- English or French.
- Any article up to April 30th, 2015.

Exclusion Criteria

- Non peer-reviewed and grey literature.
- Peer mentorship is not that online, mentorship that is not targeted to the individual (e.g., blogs, general forum posts, personal story-telling).
- Mentorship that is not peer based, i.e. mentorship from someone from a clinical background (e.g., social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, doctor, nurse healthcare professional).
- Not including mental health disorders such as eating disorders, depression in children or youth, psychosis in children or youth, children or youth with alcohol or substance use disorders, or suicide or infant death.
- Children and youth without disability; Children and youth with a mental health condition; Parents of children without a disability, parents of children with mental health conditions.
- Languages outside of English or French.

Search & Selection Process

Records identified through database search: n=1,824
Records after screening: n=55
Total after removing duplicates: n=42
Total for full text screening: n=59

Additional records selected through searching references of selected articles: n=23
Related articles: n=4
Total included in review: n= 14

Recorded: n= 45
22 not online peer support
9 unable to access
6 not developmental disabilities
3 duplicates or newer version published
2 not research studies
2 target population adults with disabilities
1 unpublished dissertation

Search & Selection Process

Results

Potential benefits

Key Messages

• Several benefits of peer mentorship groups include finding meaning to lived experiences, and creating a social support network.
• Online peer-mentorship can be an alternative way to provide support and information for parents and caregivers of children with disabilities.
• Discussions moderated by a health care provider are a common model and perceived to be most effective by participants.
• Caregivers can benefit from exchanges with other caregivers that do not share the same conditions, but prefer peers who care for children with the same diagnosis and age group.
• It is important to account for accessibility for parents who do not have easy access to the internet.

References