

Guardianship from the perspective of people with learning disabilities in Catalonia: An inclusive research study

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The Spanish government signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN, 2006), yet the legal capacity of people with learning disabilities is often questioned and their freedom to make decisions is curtailed. Thus, an inclusive research team at University of Girona, the Research Group on Diversity, selected guardianship as the research topic for 2017-18. This research group, active since 2012, is comprised of 12 people with learning disabilities and three academic researchers and one master's student. This study aimed to (1) document what guardianship means in the lives of people with learning disabilities in Catalonia (Spain), (2) compare and contrast these experiences with the principles of the CRPD, and (3) provide an evidence-base for implementing changes to policy and practice among Spanish service providers that better align with CRPD. This participatory action project involved the research team co-designing this qualitative study. People with learning disabilities, supported by academic researchers completed interviews with 10 participants. Participants were experts with academic/professional background and experts by experience, that is, people with learning disabilities with first-hand experience of having their legal capacity questioned. Their stories were integral to thematic analysis. This presentation contains four key elements. First, the process of co-designing and completing the study will be critically reviewed. Secondly, the support strategies used to create an inclusive research process will be discussed. The findings and implications will be presented. Preliminary data analysis indicates that people with learning disabilities have very little knowledge and awareness about what impact guardianship has in their lives, how guardianship can limit their choices in particular life domains such as money management, housing and even personal relationships and how to demand their rights. Finally, actions organized by this inclusive research team to catalyse political change in guardianship practices will be highlighted.