

Health issues among adolescents with intellectual disabilities in Kelantan: A qualitative study from caregivers' perspective

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Adolescents with intellectual disabilities have a greater prevalence of health issues that can significantly impact their overall well-being and quality of life. This qualitative study aimed to explore the health issues of adolescents with intellectual disabilities from the perspective of their caregivers. **Materials and Methods:** In depth interviews using the phenomenological approach were conducted among 12 purposely selected caregivers in Kelantan who consisted of parents of adolescents with intellectual disabilities and teachers in community-based rehabilitation centres. An interview guide was developed, and the questions include asking caregivers on health issues related to adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. **Results:** Eight parents and four teachers from community-based rehabilitation centres were interviewed. This study identified five themes on health issues: medical conditions, sexual and reproductive health, developmental disabilities, high risk behaviour and nutrition. Medical conditions included acute and chronic medical conditions, oral health problems as well as injury or trauma. Issues related to sexual and reproductive health were sexual grooming, sexual violence, inappropriate sexual behaviours, sexual implications and poor knowledge on sexual health. Caretakers also highlighted issues on developmental disabilities pertaining to cognitive functioning and adaptive behaviours among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. High risk behaviours such as vulnerability to smoking, substance abuse and being subjected to bullying were significant concerns. Overnutrition, undernutrition, unhealthy eating habits and abnormal eating behaviours were prominent health issues related to nutrition among adolescents with intellectual disabilities. **Conclusion:** The perspectives of caregivers provided additional insights on a variety of health issues affecting adolescents with intellectual disabilities that have not been adequately addressed in previous studies. The study's findings can be used to improve healthcare delivery that catered to the specific health needs of adolescents with intellectual disabilities.