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Theme Park Experiences of Families with a Child who has a Disability Regarding Accessibility and Participation - A mixed methods study

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BACKGROUND

- In California, one in seven children has a special health care need (California Department of Public Health, n.d.)
- Around 15% of the world's population has some form of disability (UNICEF, n.d.)
- Leisure and play provide mental health benefits and physical benefits (AOTA, 2020)
- Research regarding this population's experience in theme parks is non-existent

METHODS

Mixed Methods Research Design:

- Virtual survey with Likert, demographic, and short answer questions focused on the physical environment, participation, and overall experience at the theme parks.
- Optional semi-structured interview focused on participant experiences within the theme parks
- *Inclusion Criteria:* Parents/Guardians of a child (aged 3-18) with a disability who had been to a Southern California theme park within the last 2 years
- *Recruitment:* 37 participants were recruited through social media and snowball sampling; 10 participants chose to participate in the interview

DISCUSSION / FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

This research indicates positive improvements, such as:

- The utilization of technology
- Creating an environment where families can experience connectedness
- Cast/staff members who make all the difference

The research indicates a need for improvement, regarding:

- The physical design
- Access to accessibility resources
- Need for future research

The Creation of Theme Parks for Everyone

Resources Included:

- Detailed information about Access Services offered at each park
- Disability Service Registration Information and links (for each theme park)
- Links to theme park provided guides



PROBLEM

There is a lack of equal access and opportunities for occupational participation for children with disabilities and their families in theme park environments.

PURPOSE

1. Explore the experiences that families of children with disabilities have regarding accessibility and participation at theme parks.
2. Conduct a mixed-methods research study to identify gaps and obstacles to accessibility.

This study involves human subjects; it has been reviewed by the IRB and deemed exempt from IRB approval.

RESULTS

Top Quantitative Findings from Survey:

- Staff/Cast interactions have been generally positive
- Participants are concerned about the physical environment at theme parks
- Past experiences influence whether families will ever return
- Accommodations are vital

70%

Agreed that past experiences with the physical environment will determine whether they return

68%

Worry about the physical environment within the theme parks

52%

Feel that they are not able to take their child to a theme park without pre-planning

Six Themes from Qualitative Data:

- A Desire for an Environment where Families can Experience Togetherness
- Efficiency and Accessibility of Resources Effects Enjoyment and Participation
- Advanced Preparation is Critical for the Overall Experience
- Utilization of Changing Technology
- There are Unavoidable aspects of the Physical Environment
- Staff/Cast Members Make All the Difference



Instagram



References

"Our motivation is to experience life to the fullest!"

"I think the beauty of theme parks is that there's something for everybody."

"It's extensive planning. I bet some families can just show up, but we can't be as spontaneous."

"I kept getting a lot of misinformation. The website wasn't clear, and it was very difficult... I had to dig."

"There's very few places to rest and regroup, and that's very hard for us."

"I don't know if Disneyland has special training for their cast members, but they have it dialed in!"

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