

A Scoping Review of the Physical Accessibility of Post-Secondary Schools for Individuals with Mobility Impairments

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Background:

Statistics Canada (2006) reports mobility impairments account for the largest proportion of disabilities experienced by students. Although accessibility standards exist for the physical design of built environments, universities and colleges are frequently cited as inaccessible. It is imperative to determine physical accessibility as research shows that successful involvement in post-secondary education leads to a more productive life and improved vocational options (Christ & Stodden, 2005). The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) can provide a useful framework to categorize the barriers and facilitators to physical accessibility that affect participation in education.

Purpose:

The aim of this research was to examine the evidence on the physical accessibility of post-secondary schools for students with mobility impairments and provide an overview of the barriers and facilitators.

Methods:

A scoping review was conducted to determine the breadth and depth of the evidence available. The primary search terms were “accessibility”, “school” and “mobility impairment.” Only sources written in English after 1990 were included, as the first major accessibility legislation was enacted in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act. The databases searched were OvidMedline, CINAHL, Pubmed, Scopus, ProQuest, CBCA Education, ERIC, Engineering Village, PyscInfo, SocINDEX, and Google. Following a systematic screen of title, abstract and full-text relevancy, 49 articles were included for review. The ICF categories of Products and Technology and Natural Environment and Human-Made Changes to Environments were used to organize data extraction. Frequency of cited barriers and facilitators within these categories were recorded and presented in chart and paragraph form.

Findings:

The literature demonstrated that most barriers fell in the ICF categories of Design, Construction and Building Products and Technology for Gaining Access to Facilities Inside Buildings for Public Use (n=83) and Design, Construction and Building Products and Technology for Entering and Exiting Buildings for Public Use (n=56). These categories also presented the most facilitators (n=67 and n=37, respectively). Other barriers and facilitators were related to Products and Technology for Personal Indoor and Outdoor Mobility and Transportation; Products and Technology for Way Finding, Path Routing and Designation of Locations in Buildings for Public Use; Products and Technology for Gaining Access to Facilities in Buildings for Private Use; Products and Technology of Urban Land Development; Land Forms; Population Density; and Precipitation.

Implications:

Barriers to accessibility pose substantial problems, as barriers were mentioned more frequently than facilitators. To overcome barriers, the necessary changes required expensive architectural adaptations, such as installing elevators. Conversely, facilitators required less costly modifications, such as enlarging designated parking spaces. This research, combined with knowledge of accessibility legislation and human functioning, can help to support participation and raise awareness of occupational injustices related to accessing education. Future research could help determine funding and resource allocation priorities for constructing accessible environments. Future directions for stakeholders should include enforcing accessibility legislation, engaging in knowledge translation, and advocating for disability rights. Limitations of the study were exclusion of visual and hearing impairments, exclusion of non-English literature, possibility of overlooking search terms used in other countries, and not assessing the quality of the literature.