

Self-Chosen Interview Formats: Enhancing Data Richness Through Participant Autonomy in Adolescent Participation Research

Background

Adolescent participation in physical activity is a core focus in pediatric rehabilitation, yet qualitative studies often predetermine interview formats, potentially misaligning with adolescents' communication preferences and limiting insight into participation(1). Enabling adolescents with disabilities to choose how they participate in research may strengthen autonomy and influence the depth of information shared about participation barriers(2). This study explored how self-chosen interview formats shaped data richness and disclosure when investigating physical activity participation.

Objectives

To examine how allowing adolescents with disabilities to self-select individual or group interview formats influences: (A) information richness about physical activity participation, and (B) disclosure of sensitive participation-related topics relevant for pediatric rehabilitation.

Methods

Thirteen Swedish adolescents with disabilities (aged 14–17 years; physical, neurodevelopmental, or intellectual disabilities) were recruited through schools and rehabilitation services. Participants chose between individual interviews (n = 6) or group interviews (n = 7; two groups). Semi-structured interviews focused on perceived barriers and facilitators to physical activity and preferences for participation-supporting interventions(3,4). Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using inductive qualitative content analysis. Meaning units, codes, and categories were generated across the dataset, then theme distributions were compared between formats.

Results

Self-chosen formats generated distinct but complementary participation data. Individual interviews facilitated detailed descriptions of autonomous decision-making, personal priorities, and mental energy demands in social environments, including reflections on when participation felt "too effortful" despite interest. Group interviews supported collective identity formation ("all three of us go to the gym"), normalization of economic and social constraints, and co-construction of solutions to shared barriers. Economic barriers emerged exclusively in group interviews, suggesting peer presence reduced perceived sensitivity. High engagement and information power attainment across formats indicated that offering choice contributed to both depth and breadth of insights.

Conclusion

Self-chosen interview formats may enhance data richness by aligning methodology with individual communication preferences and autonomy principles. Format choice appeared particularly important for revealing sensitive participation barriers, such as financial constraints, that might remain underreported in researcher-determined formats. For pediatric physical therapists and rehabilitation researchers, incorporating format choice into qualitative assessments and intervention development may strengthen both data quality and ethical rigor when working with adolescents with disabilities(5).

References

Self-Chosen Interview Formats: Enhancing Data Richness Through Participant Autonomy in Adolescent Participation Research

1. Ma Y, Liu M, Liu Y, Liu D, Hou M. Exploring Physical Activity in Children and Adolescents with Disabilities: A Bibliometric Review of Current Status, Guidelines, Perceived Barriers, and Facilitators and Future Directions. *Healthcare (Basel)*. 2024 May 1;12(9):934.
2. Teachman G, Gibson BE. Children and youth with disabilities: innovative methods for single qualitative interviews. *Qual Health Res*. 2013 Feb;23(2):264–74.
3. Anaby D. Towards a new generation of participation-based interventions for adolescents with disabilities: the impact of the environment and the need for individual-based designs. *Dev Med Child Neurol*. 2018 Aug;60(8):735–6.
4. Kramer JM, Helfrich C, Levin M, Hwang IT, Samuel PS, Carrellas A, et al. Initial evaluation of the effects of an environmental-focused problem-solving intervention for transition-age young people with developmental disabilities: Project TEAM. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*. 2018;60(8):801–9.
5. Granlund M, Imms C. Participation as a means-implications for intervention reasoning. *Frontiers in Rehabilitation Sciences*. 2024 June 27;5:1399818.