

Stakeholders' Perceptions of Travel Barriers for People with SCI

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Objectives: There is increasing research effort addressing constraints and barriers for people with disabilities in the travel and tourism literature. However, the travel literature, as well as the rehabilitation literature, does not provide sufficient empirical data on the travel barriers for people with disabilities, especially people living with spinal cord injury (PwSCI). Since majority of the individuals living with SCI use wheelchairs, either part-time or full-time, the barriers they encounter when travel could be significantly different from people with other disabilities such as visual or hearing impairments. The purpose of the study is to identify the types of barriers that are pertaining to PwSCI. The objective of this presentation is to explain the viewpoints of different stakeholders regarding these barriers.

Design: The study adopted a qualitative approach to understand the stakeholders' views on the barriers people with SCI encounter when traveling. Semi-structured telephone personal interviews were conducted among four different stakeholder groups.

Participants/Method: Qualitative interview data were collected from among 39 individuals living with SCI, 24 caregivers and family members, 9 recreation therapists and 11 travel agents who specialized in travel services for people with special needs. Data analysis was conducted using the constant comparative method to identify themes from the interviews.

Results: Almost all PwSCI agreed that accessibility in travel-related services/facilities has improved since the passing of ADA. However, most recognized a system-wide ignorance toward people with disabilities, especially to people in wheelchairs. While some respondents were outraged by this ignorance, others were more accepting. Family members/caregivers' perspective is more focused on being the advocate for PwSCI. They were more concerned with PwSCI not being hurt physically and emotionally. Therapists, while working with PwSCI, pay more attention to the mindset of PwSCI, and focus more on problem-solving skills when encountering barriers. Travel agents providing special services because they understand the challenges PwSCI face. However, many were frustrated with the struggle between their passion for helping and difficulty in making a living.

Conclusion: Although all stakeholder groups agreed on the travel barriers for PwSCI, their views on how to address the issues are different. Understanding the different perspectives should help health professionals, travel businesses, and policy makers to better understand the magnitude of the issues in order to address the barriers.

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