

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: half day of general discussion on women and girls with disabilities

Submission from the World Confederation for Physical Therapy

Responding organisation

The **World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT)** is the sole international voice for physical therapy, representing more than 350,000 physical therapists worldwide through its 106 member organisations. The confederation operates as a non-profit organisation and is registered as a charity in the UK.

WCPT believes that every individual is entitled to the highest possible standard of culturally appropriate healthcare delivered in an atmosphere of trust and respect for human dignity, and underpinned by sound clinical reasoning and scientific evidence. It is committed to furthering the physical therapy profession and improving global health through:

- encouraging high standards of physical therapy research, education and practice
- supporting the exchange of information between WCPT regions and member organisations
- collaborating with national and international organisations

This submission has been prepared with the support of the International Organization of Physical Therapists in Paediatrics, a recognised subgroup of WCPT.

The **International Organization of Physical Therapists in Paediatrics (IOPTP)** is a recognised subgroup of WCPT and has the objectives of fostering cooperation between physical therapists practising in paediatrics throughout the world, to encourage improved standards and consistency of practice in paediatrics care by physical therapists, and to promote opportunities for the spread of knowledge of new developments in the field of paediatrics. Additionally, the mission of the IOPTP is to empower physical therapists with an interest in paediatrics to provide effective physical therapy services for children throughout the world.



The understanding of the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by children (and specifically girls) with disabilities that hinder their meaningful participation on an equal basis with other individuals in all aspects of life is important to all physical therapists working with children. The opportunity to address our concerns about these forms of discrimination is important to WCPT and IOPTP.

We would like to highlight examples that support the fact that children with disabilities are affected by discrimination.

1 Violence

In 2011 the NGO Advisory Council stated that children continue to be humiliated, beaten, burned, and sexually abused by adults in their lives.¹ In some countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States, children are two to three times more likely to be recipients of violent crimes than are adults. However, children with disabilities are four to five times more likely to experience violence and sexual abuse than non-disabled children. The effects of this violence may have traumatic effects on the children. In particular, the young child who is exposed to violence may develop anxiety, depression, aggression, and difficulties with attachment. These psychological problems may interfere with the child's participation in all aspects of the child's later life.

Additionally, the most frequent victims of corporal punishment are boys, **children with disabilities**, and children with ethnic minority status. In the US, children with disabilities make up 19 percent of those who receive corporal punishment but these children only represent 14 percent of the school student population.

Institutional care presents a well documented problem of abuse and neglect. In many countries, 60 percent or more of children in institutions have disabilities. As stated previously, the WHO found that children with disabilities are four to five times more likely to experience violence than their typically developing peers, regardless of the severity of their disability. Thus, this environment potentially contributes to the lack of participation of the child in life activities outside the institution as well as to the possibility of violence towards the child. The violence may take the form of sexual as well as physical abuse including the use of chemical and physical restraints on the children.

This violence may lead to the lack of participation by children with disabilities in all aspects of life at home and in the community. Physical therapists, work to maximise participation of all those we work with and thus this discrimination of children is of major concern.

2 Education

UNESCO reports that 90 percent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school.² Physical therapists recognise that environment barriers such as buildings without ramps, unpaved roads which hinder mobility, and limited adapted toilet facilities for individuals with disabilities interfere with the child's full participation in education. Other barriers such as stigma associated with disabilities also interfere with the child being able to participate in school or in the community. We are concerned that even in the OECD countries students with disabilities in higher education remain under-represented. Lower levels of education may impact the lifelong ability of an individual with disabilities to

participate in employment and in the community. Education is the key to the acquisition of life experiences and new skills.

3 Environment

The environmental barriers identified under education also affect all aspects of participation in community and family life for children with disabilities. Often the child is restricted to the family home due to environmental barriers that prevent the child leaving the home. Certainly these barriers affect women and men as well as children with disabilities. For example, the individual may have to be carried from an upper floor of a building in order to leave the home or if the individual is too large or if no other person is available to carry the individual, the person with disabilities is confined to the home.

Barriers in the community such as lack of hard pathways or roads and busses or trains that do not have provision to transport wheelchairs prevent the child with a disability who uses a wheelchair from being independent. These environmental barriers may prevent the child from visiting friends and family or participating in religious activities leading to social and religious isolation. Environments that are not modified to meet the needs of all citizens contribute to an individual's disability and limit an individual's ability to fulfil roles appropriate to her age, sex and social and cultural identity.

Physical therapists can assist in identifying the barriers in the external environment and depending on the degree of modifications, equipment and assistance provided. Physical therapists can also assist with identifying adaptations needed for recreation and leisure activities, for example: pools, playground, hotels, restaurants, city sidewalks, and athletic activities/sports venues.

References

1. NGO Advisory Council. Five years on: A global update on violence against children. October 2011. Accessed at: www.slideshare.net/ThomasMueller/five-years-on-a-global-update-on-violence-against-children-13493486
2. UNESCO. Children out of school. Accessed at: http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/global_co/policy_group/children_out_of_school.pdf

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