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Ensuring the Reproductive Rights of Women with Intellectual Disability

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Abstract

Background: Women with intellectual disability experience disparities in sexual and reproductive health care services.

Methods: To explore perceptions of caring for persons with disability, including individuals with intellectual disability, we conducted open-ended individual interviews with 20 practising physicians and three video-based focus group interviews with an additional 22 practising physicians, which reached data saturation. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. We used conventional content analysis methods to analyse transcripts.

Result: Physicians indicated that intellectual disability can pose challenges to providing sexual and reproductive health care. Observations coalesced around four themes: (1) communication; (2) routine preventive care; (3) contraception and sterilisation; and (4) conception and parenthood. Observations raised concerns about equity of access to reproductive care for women with intellectual disability.

Conclusions: In our sample of physicians, we found attitudes that might compromise reproductive care for women with intellectual disability, suggesting that gaps remain in ensuring reproductive rights of women with intellectual disability.

Keywords: intellectual disability, disability, reproductive health, reproductive justice, health disparities

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