

The 'I'm-Perfect' Fathers Group: A Gathering of Fathers of Children with Disabilities

Raviraj Shetty, Jehanzeb Baldiwala, Tanya Vasunia
Ummeed Child Development Center, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Fathering occupations are identified as a significant aspect of men's lives where fathers describe meaningfulness of occupations ranging from extraordinary journeys to the ordinary everyday activities but fathers often report being dismissed by services. Giving such fathers' opportunities to discuss their concerns with each other could help decrease their sense of isolation, foster a sense of agency and community

Objective: To explore the impact of sharing experiences of fathering by creating a support group for fathers of children with disabilities using narrative frame of reference.

Methodology: Participants were fathers of children with disabilities selected through pre-defined criteria. The group was conducted over six 2-h sessions held once a week. The group was co facilitated by an occupational therapist and a father. The facilitator used the narrative frame of reference to support discussions around themes of fathering in each session. Post-intervention, a focus group was conducted to assess outcomes. The focus group was documented by audio and video recording devices. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data for emerging themes and to understand outcomes.

Results: Primary themes that emerged were (a) learning from each other's experience, (b) redefining disciplining, (c) navigating through fatherhood, (d) the benefits of a nonjudgmental space, and (e) advocacy.

Conclusion: The findings identify fathers' need for a space to share their narratives of fathering a child with disability. The study also demonstrates the need for therapists to engage fathers in the process of family-centered care and indicates that involving fathers could lead to better outcomes for families.