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Disabled students: educational & psycho-social experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis

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Outline

- **Background**
- **Aims**
- **Methods**
- **Results**
- **Conclusion**
- **Recommendations**

Background

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- In COVID-19 period, disabled children and adolescents :
 - ✓ were at disproportionate risk of harm,
 - ✓ experienced disproportionate loss of access to education, care, medical devices.

Background

2/3

- ❑ School closures = pressure of students with disabilities.
- ❑ The consequences of this pandemic are especially concerning.
- ❑ Disabled students have experienced inequities in the educational system.
- ❑ Those inequities have been further compounded by the risk associated with COVID-19

Background

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- Research identified challenges such as :
 - Misplaced priorities.
 - Lack of accessibility to technologies.
 - Mistaken assumption on family support.
 - Lack of proper preparedness of the educational staff.

Aims

- This study aims to explore **the lived experiences of primary and secondary school-aged disabled students as they are transitioning from quarantine and distance education back to their schools during the pandemic crisis.**

Research questions

1. How did Greek disabled students experience the quarantine period during the pandemic crisis?
2. How did they experience distance learning and returning to school in relation to strict measures during the pandemic crisis?

Methods

1/2

Qualitative research study

- Semi-structured interview protocol (*data collection*)
- Thematic analysis (*data analysis*)

Methods

2/2

The **three axes** that students were asked to reflect upon were the following:

- (1) everyday life during COVID-19 quarantine period,**
- (2) distance learning experiences, and**
- (3) educational and social experiences when returning to schools after the quarantine phase.**

Participants: **Disabled students aged 10-18 years old.**

No of disabled students	45
Male	30
Female	15
Regular schools	21
Special schools	24

Type of students' impairment (N)	
Autistic spectrum disorder	18
Intellectual disability	10
Sensory impairment	7
Motor impairment	1
Multiple forms of impairment	8

Results

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Five central themes emerged from the data analysis, namely:

1. educational experiences,
2. educational & psycho-social challenges,
3. positive experiences,
4. educational & psycho-social support and
5. returning to school-emerging from lockdown.

[1] Educational Experiences

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- Positive feelings, but also boredom, eagerness.
 - Face-to-face instruction was more beneficial to them than remote learning due to various factors.
 - The use of asynchronous platforms was very limited.
 - Most of the teachers in both regular and special schools used the platforms only for uploading homework.
 - Communication between students and teachers was solely restricted to the synchronous learning.

[2] Educational & Psycho-social Challenges 3/6

- Several disabled students experienced difficulties in attending remote classes.
- Another difficulty experienced by several students was the use and navigation through the online.
- Another challenge experienced by disabled students during the quarantine phase was the pause of their therapeutic sessions.
- Several disabled students felt that they were excluded by their peer group.

[3] Positive experiences

4/6

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- Most students shared difficulties in participating in remote learning.
 - There were several of them who experienced positive feelings during this new educational experience.
 - Most of the student participants shared feeling proud of themselves following and adapting to the new rules and restrictions in their lives.

[4] Educational & Psycho-social support 5/6

- Absence of psychological support.
- Inability of their special education teachers to adopt their role and offer them support during remote learning.
- Most of students felt alone and turned to their parents to receive the support needed to meet the demands of remote learning.
- Need for support to handle various circumstances.
- Not-attending most of the sessions in the after-school hours, like speech and language, occupational and physio-therapies.

[5] Returning to schools

6/6

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- A challenge experienced by most of the students with sensory impairments **was keeping distance between them** when returning to schools after the quarantine.
 - It was difficult for them **to be able to communicate with their classmates**, while following this safety measure.
 - When disabled students returned to school after the quarantine, almost all of them agreed that **using face mask was the most demanding task** they had to perform because of their difficulty to breath.

Conclusion

- The face-to-face instruction is more beneficial for disabled students.
- Difficulties in attending remote classes.
- Dissatisfaction in regard to remote learning.
- Most of the interviewed students found being proud of themselves.
- Absence of psychological support.
- No-attendance of most of the sessions in the after-school hours.

Recommendations

- Rebuilding the relationship between parents and schools, teachers, psychologists and other professionals.
- Provide clear written instructions and directions to both disabled students and their parents.
- Government need to improve the quality of support of disabled students and their families in times of crisis.
- Schools and parents should collaborate to overcome all home- and school-related challenges.

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