



Research Brief

Perceived Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic Among People With Spinal Cord Injury: A Descriptive Study

Introduction

The COVID-19 public health crisis has presented challenges to community participation, quality of life, and health due to the lack of access to necessities and services. These challenges can be more severe for those with chronic conditions such as spinal cord injury (SCI) because of the increased susceptibility to COVID-19 and lack of health care and social support. In addition, individuals with SCI depend on personal care attendants to help them function in daily life and there has been a shortage of these workers due to the pandemic. Although we are more than three years removed from the onset of the pandemic, there is a lack of research on the effects COVID-19 has on those with SCI. The purpose of this study is to describe the self-reported effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of individuals with SCI.

Key Findings

- Of the 382 participants, 45.8% had been tested for COVID-19.
 - Of those, 13.5% tested positive and over 10% reported a family member who tested positive.
- At the time of participation, 60.6% of participants reported that the vaccine was available and of these, 41.7% had received the vaccine.
- Among those who were not vaccinated, over half (55.3%) reported they planned to get vaccinated, while those not planning to get vaccinated reported concerns with side effects (69.4%), transportation (12%), and cost (4.6%).
- Twenty-five percent of participants reported delaying or canceling a medical procedure or treatment due to fear of catching COVID-19, and 15.5% reported difficulty getting routine medical or dental care.
- The majority (58.9%) of participants stated that COVID-19 affected at least one area of their life.
- Over half of the participants (51.4%) reported that COVID-19 restrictions negatively impacted their community participation, while a smaller percentage indicated concerns with mental health (28.8%), finances (26.6%), physical health (22.7%), and employment (20.7%).

Conclusion

Although participants claimed that COVID-19 had adverse effects on their life, the specific effects were not universal. Over a quarter of participants delayed or canceled medical procedures due to the pandemic and multiple individuals had difficulty meeting daily needs. This study was important because it addressed the significant gap in literature concerning the pandemic's effects on individuals with SCI. Further research is needed to identify the long-term effects of COVID-19 and whether those with SCI experience heightened complications from the vaccination.