Abstract

This study aims to describe the ways in which Mexican adolescents and adults with intellectual disability exercise autonomy. Two focus groups were carried out with family members who are the legal guardians of people with intellectual disability who have received independent living training at the Center for Integral Training and Development (CADI, per its abbreviation in Spanish). Focus group transcripts were analyzed with codes defined a priori, based on an existing theoretical framework on autonomy and quality of life among intellectually disabled persons. Autonomy is exercised by the intellectually disabled in the personal, social, sexual and economic spheres of life. Empowered autonomy implies that the person is taught the necessary skills and then allowed to act upon his or her own interests. Negotiated autonomy includes guidance, explanation and negotiation; it constitutes a learning process. Interpreted autonomy is the most limited type described, and implies protection, interpretation and may involve decision-making by others. These types of autonomy constitute a complex phenomenon and the divisions between them are indistinct.

Keywords

intellectual disability; autonomy; empowerment; qualitative research methods; Mexico