**SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF ADULTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES DURING COVID-19: A NATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT, TWO YEAR FOLLOW-UP**

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**Objectives**

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) faced unique challenges with mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier in the pandemic, most studies evaluating the mental health of people with IDD were based on a one-time point measure, choosing long-term studies over short-term ones. Studies that evaluated interventions geared towards improving the mental health of this population often stopped data collection days after the intervention ended. Consequently, there is limited research on mental health changes throughout the pandemic, from 2020 onwards.

This project aims to evaluate the long-term impacts of a virtual 6-week COVID-19 education course that was delivered to adults with IDD (self-advocates) in 2020/21. The course was co-taught by clinicians and individuals with IDD and involved topics intended to support mental health such as Grief and Loss and Healthcare Communication. Participants completed three online questionnaires: before the course, immediately after, and 8 weeks after the course. Questionnaires assessed participants’ experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, self-efficacy, and mental well-being. Participants in the course reported higher self-efficacy and felt more confident protecting themselves from COVID-19 after the course. However, they also reported difficulties with the pandemic in three areas: finances, navigating changes amid restrictions, and vaccine access. The current study is evaluating long-term changes in mental health reported by self-advocates. Specifically, we want to know what self-advocates remember from the course and any benefits they have noted long-term. We also want to know how they have managed since 2020/21 and what the priority concerns are for them now, three years into the pandemic.

**Method**

27 self-advocates will be contacted to schedule a 1-1 structured interview virtually through Webex. The interview will consist of a questionnaire which includes the same measures as the previous follow-up questionnaire, with additional open-ended questions asking them about their COVID-19 experience right now. All participants will complete the following quantitative measures: Experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic and perception of COVID-19 related risks, Self-efficacy, and Wellbeing using an adapted version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. All participants will receive an honorarium for their time. Thus, the questionnaire uses a mixed-methods design, with both qualitative and quantitive measures.

**Results**

Open-ended responses will be analysed using descriptive content analysis. Together, combing qualitative and quantitative findings will allow us to better understand the long-term mental health benefits of the course and how self-advocates’ mental health has changed since taking the course, two years later. Data collection is ongoing and not yet completed.

**Discussion**

This study is unique in that we seek to explore how participants’ mental health has changed or been maintained since taking the course. It will also tell us if participants still practice aspects of the course today, providing valuable information about which course topics were most useful. The open-ended questions about their current experience with COVID-19 will especially help inform future interventions within community-based research geared at supporting mental health for this population.