

LSST lecturer publishes compelling book on social experiences of women with disability



D
r
E
l
e
n
i
K
o
u
t
s
o
g
e
o
r
g
o
u
w
i
t
h
h
e
r

new book on social experiences of women with disability

Favourable exchange with one's social environment has encouraging effects on physical and mental health and wellbeing. Yet, the social experiences of women with disability can be that of exclusion on account of their gender and disability. Addressing social experiences of women with physical, mental or sensory disability, Dr Eleni Koutsogeorgou, LSST's Senior Lecturer in Public Health, speaks with Mr Mohammed Zaidi, LSST's Deputy CEO, about her new compelling book, *Social Relationships and Social Participation of Women with Disability* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing).

During the interview, Mr Mohammed Zaidi commented: 'This is a phenomenal achievement by Dr Koutsogeorgou. Her work on the perspectives of women with disability on social relationships and social participation will add to the body of knowledge in an area needing strategic action. Our friendly and supportive staff have exceptional research and industry experience with connections to reflect our career-focused accredited courses. It is no

surprise that the results of the National Student Survey (2020) found that the overall satisfaction rate of our students was 90%.'

1. [MZ] What was the drive behind this book?

[EK] This book is based on the research I had conducted in 2017-2018 in Milan (Italy) for my PhD in Sociology and Methodology of Social Research at the University of Milan and University of Turin. The idea for this research emerged from my professional and academic research experience on topics related to social inclusion of persons with disabilities, public health, and sociology of health. I am interested in better understanding how our society, which creates barriers for persons with different abilities, could embrace and treat all people as equal, and applaud diversity, against 'normalisation'.

2. [MZ] What makes this book important?

[EK] This book is important as it provides insights into the experiences of women with physical, mental, and sensory disability in terms of their social relationships and social participation, as well as the barriers and facilitators of their physical and social environments in that respect. This book fills in a gap in scientific literature, as it emerged, through the background reading that I conducted for this study, that there is a lack of up-to-date research on this topic looking into types of disability separately and women in particular.

3. [MZ] This research must have involved lots of work. What was the biggest challenge?

[EK] Gaining the trust of participants is one of the most important and challenging parts of research I believe. Therefore, I considered it very important to create before and during interviews a trustworthy and relaxing setting for participants to make sure they were feeling as comfortable as possible, ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality using an informed consent form, and trying to show a non-judgemental, kind, calm and empathetic attitude towards them during our face-to-face contact in interviews.

4. [MZ] Who would you say this book is targeted to?

[EK] I believe this book is of interest not only to academics, researchers and students in the fields of social science, public health and disability, but also to anyone eager to better understand the experiences of women with disability in terms of their social relationships and social participation.

5. [MZ] The book focuses on women - but can it apply to men too?

[EK] According to the current scientific literature on this topic, many of the findings of this research appear to apply not only to women with disabilities, but also persons with disabilities internationally and regardless of gender.

6. [MZ] How long did it take to write the book, or how long did the research take?

[EK] The design of this research took one year to complete and the data collection and analysis of the research were completed within two years. The writing of the book took approximately one year.

7. [MZ] Can you shed some light on your sample sizes and methods used within the book?

[EK] The study is based on qualitative social research methods, and in particular, I have conducted one-to-one interviews with thirty women (aged 22–44) living in the metropolitan area of Milan (Italy), having a role of relative autonomy (meaning not being socially isolated) and facing health issues related to one of the three different types of disability selected: (a) sensory (deafness), (b) physical (with the inability to move lower limbs, e.g. due to tetraplegia), and (c) mental disability (psychotic disorder). The method used for data analysis was template analysis – a type of thematic analysis (King, 2012)

8. [MZ] What were the key findings from this research?

[EK] The contribution of this book is that it explores various key aspects of the social relationships and social participation of women with disabilities, as experienced by them, not merely observed by a researcher. For example, the women who participated in the study described their everyday challenges in terms of their social network characteristics and trustworthiness (constituting components of social capital), social support, employment and leisure activities, political and civic participation, coping mechanisms, loneliness, as well as barriers to social participation and autonomous living, along with their suggestions on how to overcome these barriers.

The book includes perspectives of women with disability on social relationships and social participation, as well as an extensive exploration of the current scientific literature on this topic. The points made in this book can contribute to the discussion on the full integration of persons with disabilities, by removing barriers within society in terms of their social participation and autonomy, together with the strengthening of their social relationships and social support that they receive. Finally, the book stresses the value of moving beyond the purely biomedical model towards the biopsychosocial model of health (Koutsogeorgou, 2020).

Disclaimer: *The research that this book is based on was conducted with a three-year doctoral scholarship funded by Compagnia di San Paolo [Network of the Advancement of Social and Political Studies (NASP)].*

Book link

www.cambridgescholars.com/social-relationships-and-social-participation-of-women-with-disability

About

Eleni Koutsogeorgou received a PhD in Sociology and Methodology of Social Research from the University of Milan and the University of Turin. She obtained an MA in European Health Promotion from the University of Brighton, UK, and graduated in Sociology at the University of the Aegean, Greece. She has worked as a lecturer and researcher across Italy, Greece, and the UK. Her academic interests focus mainly on sociology of health, health promotion, public health, disability, and ageing, and she is the author of 16 peer-reviewed academic journal articles and two book chapters.

Websites

ResearchGate: www.researchgate.net/profile/Eleni_Koutsogeorgou

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/elenikoutsogeorgou

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=ffjZr-UAAAAJ&hl=en>

References

King, N., (2012). Doing Template Analysis. In: G. Symon & C. Cassell, eds. *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 426-450.

Koutsogeorgou, E., (2020). *Social Relationships and Social Participation of Women with Disability*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.