

Title: Examining the relations among empowerment and civic engagement among parents of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities

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Introduction: Historically, parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have played a critical role in spearheading disability legislation (Turnbull, Shogren, & Turnbull, 2011). However, during the last reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, the federal special education law), parents of individuals with IDD provided only 3.82% ($n = 288$) of the public comments (York, 2005). Further, in previous studies, parents have reported not advocating for legislative changes (Trainor, 2010; Wright & Taylor, 2014). Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents may feel especially disempowered to advocate (Magaña, Lopez, Aguinaga, & Morton, 2013). Also, due to systemic barriers, CLD parents of children with IDD report not engaging in civic engagement. Yet, we know little about which parent and child characteristics relate to increased empowerment and civic engagement. To this end, in this study, our research questions were: (1) Which parent and child characteristics correlate with empowerment?; and (2) Which parent and child characteristics correlate with civic engagement?

Method: Data were collected via a questionnaire from 335 parents of children with IDD. Of the participants, 44.48% ($n = 149$) were from MA, 29.55% ($n = 99$) were from IL, 15.82% ($n = 53$) were from TN, and 9.55% ($n = 32$) were from NH. The majority (82.42%; $n = 272$) of participants was mothers. Also, the sample was racially diverse with 44.65% ($n = 146$) of the participants reflecting CLD backgrounds. On average, participants were 28 years of age ($SD = 9.99$); their children with IDD were 12 years of age, on average ($SD = 6.46$). Within the survey, participants completed the following measures: Civic Engagement Scale (with three subscales: electoral activities, civic activities, political activities, Lopez et al., 2008) and Family Empowerment Scale (with three subscales: family empowerment, service system empowerment, community/political empowerment, Koren, Dechillo, & Friesen, 1992). Independent variables included: child age, CLD background, participant gender, and special education knowledge (Burke et al., 2016). All subscales demonstrated reliability with alphas greater than .6. Data were normally distributed; missing data were imputed according to Harrell (2005). Analyses included inferential statistics (e.g., Pearson correlations, t-tests). Effect sizes were measured using Cohen's d .

Result: There was a positive significant correlation between community/political empowerment and: special education knowledge ($r = .25, p < .01$), child age ($r = .18, p = .003$), and political civic engagement ($r = .40, p < 0.01$). There was a positive significant correlation between family empowerment and: special education knowledge ($r = .12, p = .043$), child age ($r = .12, p = .043$), political civic engagement ($r = .40, p < .01$), and electoral activities ($r = .35, p < .01$). There was a positive significant correlation between services empowerment and: special education knowledge ($r = .20, p = .001$), political civic engagement ($r = .23, p < .01$), civic engagement ($r = .21, p = .001$), and electoral activities ($r = .21, p = .001$). Regarding civic engagement, there was a positive significant correlation between civic engagement and: special education knowledge ($r = .18, p = .003$). There was also a positive significant correlation between electoral activities and: special education knowledge ($r = .13, p = .027$). There were significant differences between CLD families and White families with respect to: civic engagement ($t = 2.070, p = .04$), electoral activities ($t = 2.121, p = .035$), and political engagement ($t = 3.004, p = .003$). Specifically, CLD families reported significantly fewer activities than White families. Additionally, mothers reported significantly greater engagement and empowerment than fathers of children with IDD: family empowerment ($t = -3.437, p = .002$), services empowerment ($t = -2.517, p = .019$), political engagement ($t = -2.132, p = .043$), electoral activities ($t = -3.265, p = .003$), civic engagement ($t = -2.105, p = .046$).

Discussion: The findings from this study indicate there may be child and parent characteristics contributing to empowerment and civic engagement. Further, there were differences between CLD families and White families and between mothers and fathers in regard to empowerment and civic engagement. Future research and practice should consider interventions targeting CLD families and with a specific focus on fathers.

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