Disability inclusiveness of government responses to COVID-19 in Brazil and Chile

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Issue/problem:
People with disabilities are disproportionately exposed to the risks of COVID-19, due to underlying health conditions, as well as on account of mechanisms introduced as a response to COVID-19. This study examines the disability inclusiveness of government measures to COVID-19 in Brazil and Chile. With more than one billion people with disabilities worldwide, it is important to examine the inclusiveness of official government responses, in order to protect and mitigate the impacts of the pandemic for this population.

Description of the problem:
Government responses have a direct impact on the capacity of people with disabilities to protect themselves against health-related, economic, and social consequences of the pandemic. In order to examine official measures, we conducted documentary research, using framework analysis, and studied official documents published from February 1st, 2020 until June 30th, 2021. The aim was to explore the inclusiveness of government responses in areas such as access to healthcare, and social welfare.

Results:
We analysed 41 documents in total. The findings highlight that while both countries took steps to ensure access to healthcare, and relevant information, as well as financial support, they also implemented policies - or did not undertake any at all - that often resulted in an amplification of existing inequalities. Neither country included people with disabilities and their organisations in decision-making processes.

Lessons:
This study illustrates how official government responses taken by Brazil and Chile - while positive, in several aspects - do not fully address the needs of people with disabilities. In order to ensure response to COVID-19 is disability-inclusive, it is necessary to translate recommendations into practice, consider people with disabilities both in mainstream policy and in disability-specific measures, and focus on the long-term reconstruction phase.

Key messages:
- People with disabilities are particularly exposed to the risks of and responses to COVID-19.
- Inclusive measures have been adopted but the needs of this population have not been fully addressed.