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The Benefits and Barriers of Researching through Virtual Environments for Participants with Lived Experience of Intellectual Disability [ID]

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ABSTRACT: The 'RED Framework - Cocreating Rights Enabled by Design [RED] for IoT in Intellectual Disability' project, is a participatory project addressing how the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' [CRPD] can be integrated into design practices and embedded into the Internet of Things (IoT), focusing specifically on applications in intellectual disability [ID]. Researchers require new knowledge and skillsets to understand the lived experiences of ID, facilitate participation of persons with lived experience of ID in design processes, and effectively integrate the CRPD into IoT solutions. As part of this research, a series of co-creation workshops are being held with participants with lived experience of ID, who will have an option to participate in the study either in-person or online. To help maximise the project's potential in co-creating research outputs with participants with lived experience of ID that align with the CRPD principles, the opportunities and barriers of researching through virtual environments must also be considered. This poster details key challenges hindering, and enablers promoting, research supported through virtual environments, as identified in recent literature.

Research Team and Funding Body:

- **University College Cork**
- (Project PI: Prof. Eleanor Bantry White)
  Queens University Belfast
- **Praxis Care**

Funding Body:

This project is funded by **Taighde Éireann** Research Ireland Centre for Future Networks and Communications 'CONNECT'.
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Project Aim:

This project addresses the question of how the CRPD can be integrated into design practices and embedded into the IoT, focusing specifically on applications in ID.

Methodology and Methods

Participatory Co-Creation Workshops
Research Team: Co-Researchers with lived experience of ID; Social Science and Technology Researchers.
Participants: Technology and Social Science Researchers | Persons with lived experience of ID.



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Expected Project Outcomes:

- Novel Framework
- Learning Module/Toolkit
- Seal of Quality Tool
- Methodological Innovation

Barriers Hindering Participation in Online Research

- **Digital Divide:** Persons with lived experience of ID may have insufficient access to the internet hence experience inequality digitally (Glencross et al., 2021)
- **Limited Research** addressing barriers hindering access to the internet amongst persons with lived experience of ID. Barriers relating to attitudes and issues surrounding security, protection and risk online must be addressed. (Chadwick, Wesson, & Fullwood, 2013)
- Persons with lived experience of ID and developmental disability (IDD) often struggle with access due to a **lack of devices** to access the internet (e.g. smartphone/tablet) or **insufficient knowledge** regarding how to use technology (Miller and van Heumen, 2021)
- **Privacy and confidentiality issues** can arise, that can be challenging for researchers to control (e.g. other people in a room) (Mikulak et al., 2023)
- **Skills training** for virtual participations might not accommodate the communication and support needs of persons with lived experience of IDD (Miller and van Heumen, 2021).
- **Internet Access + Devices** can be costly (Mikulak et al., 2023)



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Facilitators Promoting Participation in Online Research

- Training in digital literacy can help persons with lived experience of IDD use different types and features of digital tools, helping overcome a gap in 'digital literacy' and promote participatory research participation (Mills et al., 2025).
- Researchers must be cognisant of 'task demands' relating to the use of technology, in their selection and implementation of technology (Hwang et al., 2022).



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