

Using the quality of life framework to operationalize and assess the CRPD articles and the Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

This article describes how rights, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the quality of life (QOL) framework are closely interrelated. Although legislation can be used as a tool for the practical application of QOL principles, QOL assessment information is required to further develop legislation and monitor the fulfillment of laws, policies, and the SDGs. A validated QOL model, which provides a set of concepts that can be one useful way for understanding and assessing QOL, can also function to assess many of the rights and goals promulgated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and in the SDGs. This article illustrates the overlap between the CRPD, SDGs and QOL using the *#Rights4MeToo Scale*, a new measurement instrument for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The

Abbreviations: CRPD, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; IDD, intellectual and developmental disabilities; QOL, quality of life; SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals.

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instrument's value lies in its potential to: (a) raise awareness about the rights enshrined in the CRPD; (b) design, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at facilitating the exercise of those rights and the achievement of the SDGs; and (c) ultimately improve the QOL of people with IDD.

KEYWORDS

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, developmental disabilities, intellectual disability, quality of life, sustainable development goals

“As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavor to reach the furthest behind first.”

United Nations (2015, p. 35).

These words show the current commitment of society in general—and the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs; United Nations, 2015) in particular—to ensure that all people, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) living in vulnerable situations or in the world's least developed countries, have rights and responsibilities to fulfill their potential in dignity and equality in healthy environments (Büschi et al., 2022; Didi et al., 2018; Murphy & Bantry-White, 2021; Simpson & Chan, 2021). To realize these goals for people with IDD, efforts need to be stepped up in line with the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD; United Nations, 2006) and the SDGs (United Nations, 2015).

Translating the rights of people with IDD into concrete measures, practices, and policies begins with understanding and operationalizing the Articles of the CRPD and the SDGs. The CRPD is society's great international milestone on disability and is unarguably the most widely recognized international treaty that has been produced in relation to this population. The 17 SDGs define the actions that all countries would be required to take to improve health and education, reduce inequality, and speed economic growth so that “no one will be left behind” (United Nations, 2015).

As discussed in this article, there is a close relationship between the SDGs, the CRPD Articles, and the QOL paradigm, since all three undertake to prevent anyone from being relegated to a non-citizenship status, and to enhance human rights and the inclusion of people with IDD into the mainstream of life. They also emphasize valued outcomes such as equality; health and well-being; independent living; sexual and reproductive health and

rights; inclusive education; gender equality and empowerment of women and girls; material wellbeing; employment and decent work; access to information and justice systems; inclusive societies and institutions; supported decision-making; and protection from all forms of exploitation, violence, and abuse.

OPERATIONALIZING THE CRPD AND SDGS USING QOL

Well before the introduction of the CRPD and the SDGs, the construct of QOL had been conceptualized in ways that overlap considerably with many of the values set out in CRPD and SDGs. It had also already been operationalized and applied in a variety of ways and using a variety of models to pursue, defend, and evaluate the aforementioned values and outcomes. A major strength of the operationalization of QOL is its focus on context, the measurement of personal and valued outcomes, and the power to reflect the perspective of people with IDD and what is truly important to them. QOL operational models have a crucial role to play in enhancing stated values in IDD (as set out by the CRPD, the SDGs, and QOL conceptual principles) since they translate abstract social and political values and goals into evidence-based practices (Gómez, 2022).

Using a QOL framework to operationalize and assess the Articles of the CRPD was initially proposed by Verdugo et al. (2012), who argued that the specific rights listed in the CRPD could be aligned with QOL domains recognized in QOL models, thereby operationalizing the CRPD by providing objective and measurable domain-referenced indicators of personal outcomes. This line of work has continued since then, as reflected in Gómez et al. (2020), Lombardi et al. (2019), and Schalock et al. (2018).

In Spain, an initiative that emerged in line with this progression of work resulted in the most advanced operationalized alignment of the CRPD Articles and QOL (Gómez et al., 2022). Here, 21 CRPD-specific rights are aligned with the 17 SDGs, and both are operationalized through 41 QOL indicators, using the eight domains of one

TABLE 1 Overlap among QOL domains, CRPD Articles, and CRPD-related SDGs.

QOL domains	CRPD Articles	QOL indicators	SDGs
Personal development	24 (education)	- Educational setting - Involvement in an educational program - Lifelong learning - Personal skills - Supports for personal growth and development	4. Quality education
Self-determination	14 (liberty and security of person)	- Freedom of movement - Freedom of choice - Personal autonomy - Personal control - Realizing personal goals	17. Partnerships for the goals
	21 (freedom of expression and opinion)	- Access to information - Level of understanding the information - Using information - Opportunities to express opinion	
Interpersonal relationships	23 (respect for home and the family)	- Right to set up their own family - Right to be a parent - Dating people of own choice	3. Good health and wellbeing 5. Gender equality
Social inclusion	8 (awareness-raising)	Acts of awareness to increase social inclusion	9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
	9 (accessibility)	Accessibility in streets, transportation, and community buildings	11. Sustainable cities and communities 13. Climate action
	19 (living independently and being included in the community)	Living in a home with minimum intrusion from others	
	20 (personal mobility)	- Ways to be mobile - Opportunity to travel	
	29 (participation in political and public life)	- Voting - Participation in groups, boards/committees, and public office	
	30 (participation in cultural life)	Participation in cultural events (e.g., concerts, theaters, movies, museums), and in recreational or leisure events (e.g., hobbies, sports)	
Rights	5 (equality and non-discrimination)	Non-discrimination	10. Reduced inequalities
	10 (right to life)	Making choices about end-of-life decisions	16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
	12 (equal recognition as persons before the law)	Legal competence (supported decision-making)	
	13 (access to justice)	Accommodations in the defense of rights, the judicial and penitentiary system	

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

QOL domains	CRPD Articles	QOL indicators	SDGs
	15 (freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment)	Personal injuries caused by others	
	22 (respect for privacy)	- Control over personal areas - Confidentiality of information	
Emotional wellbeing	16 (freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse)	Living in a safe environment (i.e., not being abused by others)	3. Good health and wellbeing
	17 (protecting the integrity of the person)	Experiencing respect and dignity	
Physical wellbeing	26 (habilitation and rehabilitation)	- Medical and emotional interventions if needed - Appropriate therapies	3. Good health and wellbeing 6. Clean water and sanitation 14. Life below water 15. Life on land
Material wellbeing	27 (work and employment)	- Paid employment - Job training programs	1. Non poverty 2. Zero hunger
	28 (adequate standard of living and social protection)	- Annual income covers basic expenses and allows for discretionary spending - Adequate housing - Public assistance	7. Affordable and clean energy 8. Decent work and economic growth 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. 12. Responsible consumption and production

Abbreviations: CRPD, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; QOL, quality of life; SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals.

QOL model described by Schalock and Verdugo (2002). A further five transversal CRPD Articles (Article 6: women with disabilities; Article 7: children with disabilities; Article 11: situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies; Article 18: liberty of movement and nationality; and Article 25: health) are operationalized through sociodemographic data (i.e., gender, age, country of birth, and health conditions) given that they reflect conditions that can have a cross-cutting influence on all the other rights and cannot be manipulated or changed from the microsystem or mesosystem levels. Table 1 shows the considerable overlap between the eight QOL domains selected, the 26 CRPD Articles, and the 17 SDGs, highlighting how both the CRPD Articles and the SDGs are operationalized through objective and measurable QOL indicators. These indicators have been designed to assess both the overlap and the unique aspects inherent in the QOL domains, CRPD Articles, and SDGs.

THE #RIGHTS4METOO SCALE

Implementing the CRPD and achieving the SDGs for people with IDD is a clear and critical priority pursued at the international level. To this end, QOL-based measurement instruments with adequate evidence of reliability and validity are needed. *The #Rights4MeToo Scale*

(“#YoTambién Tengo Derechos”; Gómez et al., 2023) is such an instrument. This validated and standardized instrument operationalizes the CRPD Articles and SDGs through the assessment of QOL-related personal outcomes (Gómez et al., 2021a, 2021b; Morales et al., 2021; Morán et al., 2023; Verdugo et al., 2021) and contextual factors—namely, the 41 QOL indicators listed in Table 1. The purpose of the instrument is to: (a) give a voice to people with IDD regarding their personal values, their lived experience, and everyday situations in their daily lives; (b) act as a tool that professionals and relatives can use to detect any breach, abuse, or denial of rights, thereby helping them enhance the supports and services they provide to this group; and (c) serve as a guide for organizations to identify the strengths and greatest needs of this population in relation to rights and, therefore, in QOL.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE QOL FRAMEWORK

This article contributes to the QOL framework by:

- Highlighting the considerable overlap between the QOL paradigm, the CRPD, and the SDGs—three major international initiatives with a shared philosophy.

- Highlighting the importance of operationalizing values and principles, and exploring how QOL operational models can serve to this purpose.
- Proposing a set of indicators that capture much of what is intended in all three initiatives and using measured outcomes to assess QOL, specific human rights in the CRPD, and many aspects of the SDGs.
- Providing a strong rationale for how we develop policy, provide services, and regard people with disability, ultimately improving the QOL of people with disability.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was authorized and supported by the Consejería de Derechos Sociales y Bienestar of Principado de Asturias, as well as the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidad de Oviedo (17_RRI_2021). All participants provided their informed consent.

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