

# Rural-Urban Disparities in Municipal Services and the Role of Civil Society for Individuals with Spinal Cord Injury in the Danish Welfare System

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## Why

The Danish welfare system is under pressure, specifically in rural areas. This may result in rural-urban disparities in access to healthcare services. This may exacerbate the struggles living with disabilities. Persons with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) have severe disabilities due to paralysis and they need.

- Life-long treatment and prevention of complications (spasm, pain, pressure ulcer, bladder, bowel and sexual issues etc)
- Rehabilitation (physically, mentally, emotionally, socially)
- Participation and re-integration in society.

## What

Explore the lived experiences of access to healthcare, quality of life, and re-integration among persons with SCI living in rural vs. urban areas of Denmark.

## How

- A qualitative phenomenological-hermeneutic approach
- Semi-structured interviews with 16 individuals with SCI
- The interview-guide
  - developed together with Danish SCI advocacy group and SCI specialists.
  - Inspired by the ICF framework.
  - Inductive reflexive thematic analysis based on Braun V, Clarke



## Findings

Regardless place of living, participants experience significant losses, they long for close relationships, and romantic relationships, however they also feel happiness.

### Two Themes

**1** The municipal system's lack of accommodation towards individuals' needs and the personal fight for autonomy, opportunities and respect

Areas of individuals' battles against the municipal system



individual's values regarding place of living and home designing



equipment e.g. for bowel and bladder issues



citizen-directed personal assistance



the need for a personalized wheelchair



interpreting the legal statutes



having your own car

**2** The civil society's crucial role in providing activities that foster connection, respect, and equality.

"Civil society plays a crucial role, especially in rural areas.

It supports community life, fosters networks, and promotes solidarity, respect, and understanding.

In smaller communities, individuals are well-known, respected, and deeply engaged in activities.

However, poor engagement in civil society and a lack of public assistance can lead to isolation and complete exclusion and poor health."

"I read a lot of regulations. The municipality is completely impossible to deal with. I feel alone and overwhelmed by the struggle with the municipality. They should try to put themselves in our shoes..."

Anne 33 living close to large city

"Wheelchair number 2. It was a bit of a hassle to get a new one, but it worked out. Again, when you're out in the countryside, it's damp and all, so it's nice to have an extra one to switch into when you come inside, because you drag dirt in. And I've tried to explain to them that they also have more than one pair of shoes..."

Peter 55 living in the countryside

## Conclusion

Urban-rural differences in Denmark affect life with SCI. Rural municipalities lack the services and capacity to meet complex needs compared to large cities. The municipal healthcare system, especially in poorer rural areas, lacks the knowledge and resources to accommodate individual needs. While rural residents prefer their lifestyle over city living, they still need access to relevant services.

### And then what

New initiatives must address what public and civil society initiatives in collaboration can contribute to health, quality of life, and reintegration in order to support equal access to relevant services for persons with SCI in both urban and rural areas.

#### Further information



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