Literature summary on vulnerable groups' management and communication during COVID-19 epidemic

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COVID-19 epidemic poses increased risks to vulnerable social groups due to obstacles in communication, possible limited resources and complicated life conditions.[1] The literature on management and communication during COVID-19 epidemic is growing that facilitates sharing experience and approaches, but it becomes difficult to navigate over the increasing number of publications. To facilitate the access to key publications, I performed a systematic search in PubMed and Google, and manually explored the obtained documents to select and classify the available literature. Here I present the results of this systematic search on vulnerable groups management and communication, with the total 36 publications and 11 web-resources.

Methods

Vulnerable social groups were defined as children, persons with low health literacy, international migrant workers, international students, persons in assisted living and nursing homes, persons with intellectual or sensorial disabilities, refugees, undocumented migrants, homeless people, prisoners.[1] Only public health management and communication, but not clinical aspects of management were summarized.

I performed systematic search in PubMed with the following query: “(COVID OR COVID-19) AND ((Children OR (low health literacy) OR migrants OR migrant OR students OR disability OR disabilities OR refugees OR homeless OR prisoners OR prisons))”. Then all bibliographic records were evaluated based on title and abstract to decide about usefulness for the current analysis. The potentially useful publications were obtained as full text form the publisher sites, reviewed to definitively estimate the relevance and classified according to the publication type. In addition to the PubMed search, I performed manual screening in the full-text of obtained documents and

selection of useful references, and manual revision of the collections dedicated to COVID-19 at the core journals web-sites (The Lancet, New England Journal of Medicine, Journal of American Medical Association, Science, Nature). The following publication types were defined: "Brief communications" (letter to editor, short comment), "Extended articles" (original article, extended comment), "Position statement of international organization" (accounting to only international intergovernmental organizations [WHO, UNICEF, etc] but not to country-level or non-intergovernmental organizations), "Practice guidelines" (comprehensive guidelines produced by professional societies, national or international organizations).

I performed additional search in Google with the following queries "(COVID OR COVID-19) AND Children", "(COVID OR COVID-19) AND low health literacy", "(COVID OR COVID-19) AND (migrants OR migrant)", "(COVID OR COVID-19) AND students", "(COVID OR COVID-19) AND (disability OR disabilities)", "(COVID OR COVID-19) AND refugees", "(COVID OR COVID-19) AND homeless", "(COVID OR COVID-19) AND prisoners OR prisons". The first 30 results of each Google search were manually reviewed and estimated by accessing the useful web-sites. The relevant resources were classified as "Relevant internet resources".

The latest systematic search was performed at April 14, and the latest publication from manual search was added to the results at April 28, 2020.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the relevant literature sources from the systematic search on public health management and communication with vulnerable groups, with the total 36 publications and 11 web-resources.

Table 1. Literature concerning communication or public policy aspects of COVID-19 epidemic in vulnerable groups (papers on clinical management are not included).

Vulnerable group	Brief communications	Extended articles	Guidance/plan of international organizations	Practice guidelines	Relevant internet resources
Children	[2–6]	[7]	[8][9]	-	[10–14]
Persons with low health literacy	[15]	-	-	-	[12]
International migrant workers	[16,17]	-	-	-	[12]
International students	[18,19]	-	-	-	[12]
Undocumented immigrants	[20]	-	-	-	[12]
Persons with mental or intellectual disabilities	[21–23]	[24,25]	[9]	-	[26–29]
Persons with sensorial disabilities	[22,30]	-	[9]	-	[27,28]
Refugees	[17,22,31,32]	[33]	[34][35][36][9]	-	[37]
Homeless people	[38,39]	[40]	-	-	[40]
Prisoners	[41,42]	[43–45]	[46]	[47]	-

Discussion

The number of publications on vulnerable groups management during COVID-19 epidemic is rapidly growing. The collection of available literature in a single source with classification by the publication type allows to provide a rapid overview of published evidence to the stakeholders. The current review reveals lack of practice guidelines and shortage of extended articles which could provide reliable information in the compact form, and facilitate provision of care to vulnerable groups. Further efforts should be done to produce these guidelines or adopt previous guidelines to the COVID-19 epidemic.

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