

- 🌀 **Name of the study:** Self-Determination and Autonomous Decision-Making among Adolescents with Disabilities
- 🌀 **Year:** 2023
- 🌀 **Type of research:** PhD
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- 🌀 **Research Authority:** The Hebrew University

## Abstract

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**Background:** Promotion of autonomous decision-making is crucial for adolescents with disabilities and is the basis for developing their self-determination. Self-determination develops through capacities and opportunities offered to adolescents in the home and school environment, to assist them in making decisions concerning their personal lives. This study is two-fold and examined the perceptions of teenagers with disabilities and parents of these teenagers regarding self-determination and autonomous decision-making.

**Aims:** The main aim of the quantitative part of this study was to examine the relationships between autonomous decision-making and self-determination according to the perceptions of teenagers with disabilities and their parents. The qualitative part of this study aimed to examine the in-depth experiences of adolescents who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and parents of AAC users regarding their autonomy and self-determination.

**Method:** In the quantitative part, sixty-nine adolescents with disabilities and one of their parents completed a self-report questionnaire including Promotion of Autonomous Decision-Making and AIR-Self Determination Scales. The qualitative part was based on a phenomenological approach and included semi-structured in-depth interviews with nine teenagers who use AAC and seven parents of adolescent AAC users.

**Findings:** Regarding the quantitative part: findings showed associations between parents' and adolescents' reports of promotion of autonomous decision-making, and opportunities for self-determination at home. Promotion of autonomous decision-making was associated with capacities for self-determination among adolescents. Gender differences were also apparent, with both adolescent girls and their parents reporting higher ratings of self-determination than adolescent boys.

Regarding the qualitative part, three main themes were found. The first theme related to AAC as enabling self-determination and autonomy. The second addressed the meaning of using AAC from the adolescents' and parents' perspectives, and their perceptions regarding how others perceive AAC users. The third referred to the barriers entailed in the use of AAC.

**Conclusions:** Regarding the quantitative part, parents who promote autonomous decision-making among their adolescent children with disabilities start a virtuous circle by offering greater opportunities for self-determination within the home. In turn, these adolescents rate their self-determination as higher, and communicate this perspective to their parents. Consequently, their parents offer them more opportunities for autonomous decision-making at home, thus enhancing their self-determination.

Regarding the qualitative part, typing using AAC was found to be a lifechanging experience. Relational autonomy and change in peoples' attitudes towards AAC users are crucial to ensure equal opportunities for the development of self-determination, autonomy and self-identity among AAC users. In light of our findings, we suggest extending the ecological model of self-determination to include autonomy and self-identity as well.

## Keywords

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promotion of autonomous decision-making, self-determination, capacities, opportunities, adolescents with a disability, parents of adolescents with a disability, AAC users, self-identity, the ecological model of self-determination, typing.

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