

The biopsychosocial model in the analysis of visual disabilities

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This paper examines the effects of psychosocial factors on the association between functional limitation and visual disabilities. The theory of disablement proposed in the revised International Classification (ICIDH-2) is discussed in this light. Disablement is presented as an identifiable variation of human functioning. This perspective attempts to dislodge the assumption that the body level dysfunction is the fundamental, or conceptually prior, dimension of disablement.

Levels of disability not only depend on levels of functional limitation, but also on levels of psychological attributes, coping strategies and social factors. The biopsychosocial model represents a synthesis of medical and social models, rather than a mere adoption of the social approach. Each dimension of disablement (impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions) is conceptualized as an interaction between intrinsic features of the individual and that person's social and physical environment.

Ophthalmologists increasingly recognize the importance of assessing a broad array of outcomes, such as physical function, social function, and overall health, in addition to standard clinical endpoints. By incorporating self-reports of Visual Functioning and health-related Quality of Life into clinical studies, it may possible to demonstrate the negative impact of visual impairment on everyday activities that are not reflected in clinical measures. Visual Functioning indices and Quality of Life instruments provide a measure of patients' own perception of their disability, and have recently gained popularity for estimating visual functioning.

They consist of a collection of questions aimed at assessing an individual's ability to perform vision dependent tasks. A cumulative review and analysis of 11 recent empirical investigations was conducted to provide a synthesis of research on assessment instruments with individuals who have visual disabilities. Several studies have demonstrated that they were strongly correlated with traditional measures of impaired visual function and should be included in the array of health status measures. These findings are discussed for the purpose of informing the field regarding future directions for research and practice in disability assessment.

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