

# Finding visually impaired people

some basic principles and practical steps

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## **Purpose of presentation**

### **Understand:**

- means of defining visual impairment
- the appropriate and inappropriate use of these definitions
- Achieving greater clarity and quality in visual impairment research

### **By examining:**

- concepts of disability and WHO disability classifications
- understanding individualised and social definitions of visual impairment
- correspondence and consistency of definitions
- relevance of definitions to research

# The concept of disability

## Social model of disability

- society that is disabling rather than the physiological and psychological characteristics of individuals.

## Medical model of disability

- disability as entirely inherent to the individual.

But:

- a medical model has never been formulated; defined or championed.
- denies the phenomena that inherent physiological and psychological characteristics – as well as social factors - can and do play a part *in and of themselves* in the life experiences of people with a disability.

## Alternative

- disability should be seen as both a social construct *and* as an experience arising from the specific physiological or psychological characteristics of individuals.
- disability arises from the interaction of social and individual factors and responses to it should be designed accordingly

# **World Health Organisation (WHO)**

## **International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)**

The ICF's underlying principles are that it:

*'... acknowledges that every human being can experience a decrement in health and thereby experience some degree of disability. Disability is not something that only happens to a minority of humanity. The ICF thus 'mainstreams' the experience of disability and recognises it as a universal human experience...[The] ICF takes into account the social aspects of disability and does not see disability only as a 'medical' or 'biological' dysfunction. By including contextual factors, in which environmental factors are listed ICF, allows to record the impact of the environment on the person's functioning'.*

Classifies functioning, disability and health in terms of:

- body functions, such as the function of seeing;
- the physiological and related structures of the body;
- activities and participation by people, such as communication, interpersonal relationships and community life;
- environmental factors and barriers such as the environment, social attitudes and the provision of services.

# What is visual impairment?

## Individualised definitions

- Types/causes of visual impairment
- Clinical definitions
- Administrative definitions

## Social and individualised definitions

- Self-definitions
- Vision related quality of life

## **Types/causes of visual impairment**

- 'Untreatable' conditions : currently no treatment to reverse the process of sight loss:
  - Include glaucoma and Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD).
- 'Treatable' conditions : sight loss that can often be corrected :
  - By surgery (cataracts)
  - through the prescription of spectacles (refractive error).

## Clinical definitions: measuring visual acuity (VA)

- WHO defines visual impairment on the basis of distance visual acuity (VA)
- Reporting standard for all internationally comparative epidemiological studies of visual impairment.
- Snellen tests : the size of letters on a chart that can be read over a distance of 6 meters.
- Will identify whether sight loss is treatable or untreatable

Severe visual impairment	VA <3/60.	little or no light perception  usable sight but great difficulty seeing clearly objects and people
Moderate visual impairment	VA 6/18 and >3/60.	
Mild visual impairment	VA <6/12 and 6/18.	not be able to recognise a car registration number plate at a distance of 20 meters (DVLA)

## Administrative definitions

- Department of Health registration terminology

partial sight = sight impaired

blind = severely sight impaired

- No precise statutory definitions but a gateway to social care services

severely sight impaired: *so blind as to be as to be unable to perform any work for which eye sight is essential* (National Assistance Act 1948)

sight impaired: *substantially and permanently handicapped by defective vision caused by congenital defect or illness or injury* (Department of Health guidelines)

- Only those with untreatable conditions are eligible

### Approximate correspondence of WHO and DH criteria

WHO			DH
Severe visual impairment	VA <3/60.	little or no light perception	Severely sight impaired (if untreatable)
Moderate visual impairment	6/18 and >3/60.	usable sight but great difficulty seeing clearly objects and people	Sight impaired (if untreatable)
Mild visual impairment	<6/12 and 6/18.	not be able to recognise a car registration number plate at a distance of 20 meters (DVLA)	Not eligible for registration (even if untreatable)

## Self –definitions/Quality of Life

### Self-definitions

- extent of difficulty in seeing
  - being able to see a friend across the road
  - ability to read newspaper print

### QoL

- impact of vision problems across a range of domains of everyday life
  - including physical and social functioning and psychological well-being
  - vision-related quality of life measures.
  - National Eye Institute Visual Function Questionnaire (NEI-VFQ) rates:
    - attitudes to vision loss
    - difficulties experienced carrying out a wide range of daily activities such as domestic tasks, watching TV and taking part in social activities.

Do not differentiate between treatable and untreatable conditions

## Are the definitions conceptually consistent with each other?

Type of definition	Physiological aspects	Social aspects	Functional aspects	Treatable	Un-treatable	Social model	Medical model
Self-defined/ QoL		X	X			X	x
Clinical	X			X	X		X
Administrative	X				X		X

## So what?

Read:

*A brief guide to carrying out research about adult social care services for visually impaired people*

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School for Social Care Research: Methods Review 3

## So what?

	Self-defined and quality of life	Clinical	Administrative
<b>Appropriate uses</b>	<p>They can be used for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•measuring functional ability and identifying the social impact of visual impairment;</li> <li>•evaluating the need for and impact of services</li> </ul>	<p>They can be used for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•identifying samples of those with treatable and untreatable visual impairment;</li> <li>•estimating the number of people with treatable and untreatable visual impairment;</li> <li>•identifying and quantifying the causes of treatable and untreatable visual impairment</li> </ul>	<p>They can be used for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•estimating the number of people with untreatable visual impairment; identifying and quantifying the causes of untreatable visual impairment;</li> <li>•sampling frames to obtain representative quantitative and qualitative studies of those with untreatable visual impairment</li> </ul>
<b>Inappropriate uses</b>	<p>They should not be used for estimating the number of visually impaired people</p>	<p>They should not be used as a proxy for measuring functional ability and social barriers</p>	<p>They should not be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•as a proxy for measuring functional ability and social barriers</li> <li>•estimating and identifying those with treatable conditions and those with VA&lt;6/12</li> </ul>