

8. Disability identifiers

The ICF provides a basis for developing 'disability identifiers' or short sets of questions that can be used in generic service information systems or general population surveys. The goal is to relate the experience of people with a disability to that of the general population, as suggested internationally by the UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and nationally by Commonwealth, state and territory policies in Australia.

This is an area of considerable importance, but still under development, as the following three examples illustrate.

The Washington City Group (UN Statistical Commission)

This international group was established following a UN seminar on measurement of disability in 2001⁵, soon after finalisation of the ICF. At its meeting in February 2002, members agreed on the following as the groups stated objectives:

1. guiding the development of a small set (or small sets) of general disability measures, suitable for use in censuses, sample-based national surveys or other statistical formats, to provide basic necessary information on disability throughout the world
2. recommending one or more extended sets of survey items to measure disability, or principles for their design, to be used as components of population surveys or as supplements to specialty surveys; these extended sets of survey items will be related to the general measures
3. addressing the methodological issues associated with the measurement of disability considered most pressing by the City Group participants

Measures identified in objectives 1 and 2 will be culturally comparable to the extent possible. The ICF model, a useful framework to assist in the development of these measures, will be used in developing the measures.

The final report of this initial meeting, as well as the papers presented, can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/citygroup.htm>.

The work of the group is still progressing.

5 A selected group of papers from the meeting are available from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/otheract/citygroup/products1.htm>

ABS population surveys and related disability 'modules'

The ABS has carried out five major population Surveys of Disability, Ageing and Carers, in 1981, 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003 (see, for instance, ABS 1999). The first and subsequent surveys used the concepts of the ICIDH and, in recent years, the ABS is moving to adjust the survey outputs to the new ICF. These surveys have provided the Australian community and policy makers with valuable information during these years.

In recognition of the need to describe the experience of people with disabilities in a wide range of life areas, the ABS has introduced 'disability modules' into a number of its social surveys, including those relating to time use and household expenditure. The resulting data have contributed, for instance, to the 'outcome' analysis described in Section 3.2.

The ABS modules, while useful for this purpose, are quite lengthy and are constructed chiefly with the aim of replicating the main survey concepts and techniques in the other social surveys. They achieve the purpose for which they were designed but may not lend themselves to be readily incorporated into other collections.

Census questions conforming to the ICF

Countries such as Canada and Australia have worked to develop questions on disability for use in the main population census. Although the ABS has not yet developed a question it has been satisfied to use, it is again attempting to develop a question, for use in the 2006 national census. The question should relate conceptually to the ICF and will be judged by its ability to produce data that relate to the data from the major ABS disability population surveys. Successful development of such a question will greatly enhance disability data in Australia, particularly data for relatively small geographic areas and among smaller population subgroups.

Should such a question become a feature of Australian censuses, it would also be a likely candidate for inclusion in administrative and other collections. This would allow comparisons and cross-checking between census data and data from other collections.

It is hoped that future editions of the User Guide will contain suggestions about useful disability identifiers and model questions.

9. Personal factors

The ICF recognises the importance of personal factors in the framework of Figure 2.1 but does not attempt to enumerate or classify them.

It is recommended that Australian users refer to national standard data elements in the national data dictionaries (AIHW 2000, 2003a) for items such as the following:

Demographic characteristics

- Date of birth
- Sex

Socio cultural characteristics

- Indigenous status
- Country of birth

Education characteristics

- Education level

Labour characteristics

- Employment status
- Labour force status

Income characteristics

- Principal source of income

Accommodation, living characteristics

- Dwelling
- Homelessness
- Living arrangements
- Residential setting

Address

- Geographic location