

Applying the ICF to assessment scales in acquired brain injury

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Background and aim: Acquired brain injury is associated with disability in a wide spectrum of domains. Assessment scales have been developed by clinicians and researchers that measure components of disability across these domains. This ongoing project aims to use the ICF as a framework within which to categorise the assessment scales as an aid to reviewing their content and utility in the assessment of the functioning of people with acquired brain injury.

Methods: A systematic review of the literature, supplemented by reference tracking and consultations with experts produced a very large number of potentially relevant assessment scales. These were limited through a secondary literature search to scales reported to be in regular use with people with brain injury, and further categorised to give a manageable number of scales in the ICF categories body functions, activities / participation, and environmental, with two additional categories (multidimensional and children) added to increase acceptability for clinicians.

Results: The largest number of scales assesses, as expected, mental functions with many other scales assessing activities or participation, or are multidimensional. Fewer scales assess contextual factors. When the scales are examined in detail several patterns emerge which are (i) clinically conceived and developed to assess specific body functions, particularly behaviour, or to provide a global measure of functioning; (ii) scales developed prior to ICIDH that assess what are now termed activities / participation; (iii) multidimensional (including health related quality of life) scales; (iv) scales developed using ICIDH or ICF concepts. The content of most scales link readily to the ICF at component and domain level, but difficulty has been experienced when attempting to apply second level categories. Some concepts do not link readily with the ICF.

Conclusion: The ICF provides a useful structure within which to classify assessment scales in acquired brain injury.