



UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO DISABILITY AS A CHRISTIAN HEALTHWORKER

EQUIP AND INSPIRE MEETING

1ST OCTOBER 2022

Mithran Coomarasamy

What is Disability?

A disability is any condition that restricts a person's mental, sensory or mobility functions. It may be caused by accident, trauma, genetics, natural aging or disease. A disability may be temporary or permanent, total or partial, lifelong or acquired, visible or invisible.

What is meant by impairment?

- An impairment refers to problems in body function or structure (including mental functions), such as loss of sight, loss of hearing, loss of a limb, impairment of mood or emotion, impairment of speech, and any other lack of function of body organs.
- **What is meant by activity limitation?**
- An activity limitation refers to difficulties in executing everyday activities, such as self-care, mobility, communication, cognitive or emotional tasks, health care, reading or writing tasks, transport, household chores, property maintenance or meal preparation. Self-care, mobility and communication are often referred to as core activities. People who always or sometimes need help with **one or more core activities** are referred to as people with **severe or profound disability**.
- **What is meant by participation restriction?**
- A participation restriction refers to problems a person may experience in involvement in life situations, such as in education or employment. (*A sensitive area – acceptance, exclusion, discrimination, church, healthcare*)

Demographics - Australia

- Over 4.4 million people in Australia have some form of disability. That's 1 in 5 people.
- 17.8% of females and 17.6% of males in Australia have disability.
- The likelihood of living with disability increases with age. 2 in 5 people with disability are 65 years or older.
- Of all people with disability, 1.9 million are aged 65 and over, representing almost half (44.5%) of all people with disability. This reflects both an ageing population and increasing life expectancy of Australians.
- 2.1 million Australians of working age (15-64 years) have disability. (*13.5 million Australians employed*)
- 35.9% of Australia's 8.9 million households include a person with disability.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2019, 4430.0 – Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia 2018, viewed 15 November 2019.

Children with disability in Australia 2015

- In 2015, 7.4% of children aged 0–14 had some level of disability and 4.0% had a severe or profound level of disability.
- Disability was more common among boys (9.4%) than girls (5.4%).
- The most common disability types were intellectual and sensory/speech.

Words of a disabled child!

Paediatricians may be forgiven for not extending their sights beyond childhood. But the disabled child, surrounded by willing friends, family, therapists, and carers may become an adult abandoned by at least the last two of these; and our contributor reminds us that even after decades of being a subject of curiosity it still hurts. How effective are we at ensuring progression to adequate “adult” services?

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY IN AUSTRALIA – GOLD COAST EXPO 2022



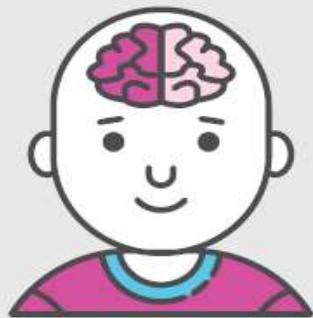
7.3%
OF CHILDREN IN
AUSTRALIA HAVE
A DISABILITY¹



MORE THAN **70%**
OF NDIS
PARTICIPANTS
AGED 7-14 HAVE
AUTISM²



91%
OF PARENTS AND
CARERS BELIEVE
THE NDIS HELPED
WITH THEIR CHILD'S
DEVELOPMENT³



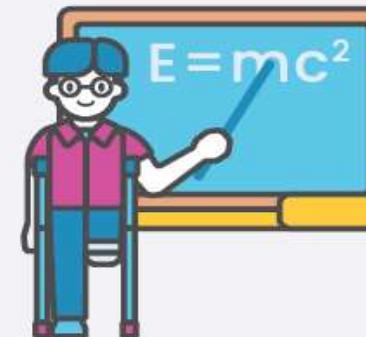
19.4%
OF STUDENTS IN
AUSTRALIA HAVE
A DISABILITY OR
LEARNING DIFFICULTY³



81%
OF CHILDREN WITH
DISABILITY ATTEND
A MAINSTREAM OR
SPECIAL SCHOOL⁴



**NEARLY
4 IN 5**
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY LIVING
IN HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATE
IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES, VISIT
PUBLIC SPACES AND ENGAGE
WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY¹



**NEARLY
60%**
OF PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITY AGED
35-44 IN AUSTRALIA
ARE EMPLOYED⁵

Understanding through different worldviews!

- Worldview – A comprehensive philosophy of life.

Worldviews are sets of beliefs and assumptions that express how cultures interpret and explain their experience. Although essential for humans to make sense of their life, worldviews can nevertheless **give rise to bias, stereotypes, and prejudice among health care providers**.
30 Mar 2010

- **Modernism** From the late 19th century and early 20th centuries. It was based on rational thinking, logic, and the scientific process. Anti-supernatural. Anti –Christian.
- **Postmodernism**, after the Second World War. Postmodernists believed in chance and transience. They questioned the rationality of modernism, its principles and thinking. They believed that there is no connection between the past and the present and that past events are irrelevant in the present. No practical “absolutes”. If truth existed we could find it. Tolerance is the last moral virtue.
- **Biblical (Christian) worldview** - Christian worldview, is built upon the framework of ideas and beliefs through which a Christian individual or group interprets the world and interacts with the world.

DISABILITY WORLDVIEWS

MODERN

Abnormal part of a normal world

POSTMODERN

Normal part of a Normal world

BIBLICAL

Normal part of Abnormal world

From: Hubach, S. O (2020) Same lake different boat: Coming alongside people touched by disability.

Understanding the disabled person

- Disability affects regardless of – race, age, sex and socio –economic class
- What is perceived as disability and labelled varies from culture to culture. (Social and Moral models)
- A feeling of loss.
- Pain and suffering. By disability itself. Societal response to disability. Physical and emotional.
- Often has no control over the disability.
- Disability literature comes from 2 groups: one group experienced disability. Next group, those who have reflected on disability.
- **Disabled person with faith:**He Healed Only One. Healing Is the Exception, Not the Rule—For Now
- For God's Glory—Both in Healing and Non-Healing
- C.S. Lewis said, “God loved us not because we were loveable, but because He is love.”
- **Two types:** Those that dwell on what they have lost. Those that concentrate on what they have left.*

Emotion	Examples of how the parent might display the emotion
Denial	Parent denies his or her child has a disability.
Anxiety	Parent goes through dramatic change that might affect his or her attitudes, values, beliefs, and routines.
Fear	Parent may feel concerned about letting his or her child with a disability do certain things (protective).
Depression	Parent may experience uncontrollable tears, sadness, and feelings of hopelessness.
Guilt	Parent may feel he or she is somehow to blame for the disability or the situation.
Anger	Parent may act out his or her anger or direct it toward another person.

- *(Adapted from Childhood Disability: A Parent's Struggle, by K. Moses, 1987, and You Are Not Alone: For Parents When They Learn Their Child has a Disability, by P. McGill Smith, 2010*

Understanding the disabled person

5 Stages: The Journey of Disability Attitudes

Beliefs and Bible verses that reflect that belief and progressing through in understanding disability as a Christian in work and church and community

STAGE 1: IGNORANCE

Weaknesses and disabilities are a sign that God either does not care or is not able to fix the situation. In fact, they may be a result of sin or a lack of faith. God is not involved in the life of someone with a disability, because He can't use people who are so broken. I do not know people with disabilities, nor do I know anything about disabilities. I have no interest in getting to know them or to know more about their life.

STAGE 2: PITY

I feel sorry for people with disabilities. It's too bad, really. I am blessed by God and I can help others. I am grateful that my children are not disabled. People with weaknesses and disabilities obviously need someone like me to help them and give them meaning, due to their troubles. I really don't see any meaning or purpose to their lives.

STAGE 3: CARE

Like me, people with disabilities were created in God's image. By that virtue alone they have value. I hope that someone will take the time to show them God's love, and I will happily support such an effort. In fact, I think we need to find ways to help those people. Maybe we should start a special church education class, or respite care for the sake of the parents.

STAGE 4: FRIENDSHIP

I have come to know and spend time with a friend who has a disability. This person has value in God's sight, but also in mine, and I know that my life is better for having known this person, and as much as I have helped her, she has also blessed me. In fact, I now like to initiate relationships with people who have disabilities. God brings many different people into my church and community, including people with disabilities, and we all benefit as we grow in friendship with each other.

STAGE 5: CO-LABORERS

If God has called each of us to serve and praise Him with every fiber of our beings, then He has done the same for our brothers and sisters in Christ with disabilities. I think ministry should not just be to people with disabilities, but with or alongside people who have disabilities. Together, we will encourage and equip each other, with and without disabilities, into every good work to respond to God's call on our lives. We can all give and we can all receive.

BUILDING AWARENESS-- PROVIDING ACCESS -- INTEGRATING -- ENGAGING

Theology of Disability

Wheaton Centre for Faith and Disability

www.wheaton.edu/faithanddisability

Ten Pillars

- God's Image bearers: A Glorious Reflection
- God's Image bearers: A Distorted Reflection
- God's Promise to Remedy Creation's Corruption
- God's Remedy is Jesus
- God's Goodness and sovereignty in the Face of Trials
- God's Economy
- God's Law of Love
- God's People Respond
- God's Presence and Purpose in Suffering
- God's Ultimate Restoration of All things in the Age to Come

Theology of Disability

- All made in the image of God. Made by the creator. Life is a gift. Each one is known by name. God walked and talked with man.
- I know how you feel. That is how I felt. Brokenness inherent. Disability draws unique attention. Functional and social disability. Pain and suffering
- If God is in complete control- isn't he responsible? He did not leave us without hope. Jesus was despised, rejected and no beauty.
- Only one was healed. God uses suffering for his purposes. Betty Cuthbert
- The man born blind. Societal ramifications and functional ramifications. Misconception corrected. This disability was purposeful in God's sovereign hand in the context of broken world.
- God's economy. "Who we are" versus "Whose we are"! God sees no barrier in using those with disabilities. Moses! Nick Vujicic!
- My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. A Kairos time – opportunity time.
- One body. 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27 verse 18 put each part just where he wanted (arranged) Jesus the head. Unity in diversity. Help, work and suffer together. Body to function.
- "Christianity is founded on a shamed Christ," Piper said. "We have come to a rejected Christ. Thrown out. Despised. Hated. Slandered. Spit on. Mocked. Stripped. Nailed like a piece of meat to pole. And taunted. This is our forerunner. Amid deep suffering he has promised to eternally save, heal and deliver us."

Is God discriminating people with disability – often quoted verse – Leviticus 21:18-20

First glance looks like it! Understand the context.

Period of Law not Grace. Applies to priestly calling and service. Entry through the veil separating God and man.

No! Why?

The people themselves were not neglected.

Priestly heritage. Capable. Was considered for the position.

Day of Atonement – 1/year A dangerous task if not prepared and elected.

We are all (unregenerated) are sinful unable to draw near to a Holy God.

We have our own sinful defects and deformities in our thinking, attitudes and desires and actions.

Christ the Lamb that was slain for us. 1 Peter 1:18-19 Atonement. Veil torn.

Christ our Great High Priest – Hebrews 4:14-16

Cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:7

God no longer discriminates – we all have a calling of priesthood as believers. Freedom of choice to the abled and disabled.

Our response to the calling – awareness, acknowledgment and Jesus' model of care

- We have a responsibility compelling a response based on what Christ has done for us. Most if not all people will come into contact with a healthcare worker.
- Theology of disability is convincing and convicting and cannot be refuted. Understanding this is important.
- The need to journey toward incorporating them as co-labourers.
- As life is a journey with ups and downs for all – abled and disabled. Approach with patience and compassion.
- As Christian health workers we can make a difference.
- Don't give ready made answers. Encourage the person to open up and listen to their story.
- "You could have been me and I could have been you". Would I have known what matters to you? Unless we listen!
- There is value in each one of us. God's economy. God sees no barriers in using those with disabilities to accomplish his purposes.
- David and Mephibosheth – dignity, respect, community and rightful place. Not forgotten.

God's ultimate Restoration of All things in the Age to Come

Revelation 21: 4-5, 7

- No more sorrow. No more pain. No more death.
- All these things (including disability) are gone forever.
- One on the throne makes **everything new**. (no deafness, blindness, limb deficiency, autism, fibromyalgia, mental illness,)
- It is written down. This cannot be erased.
- All who are victorious (God's children who persevere) will inherit all the blessings.

AMEN COME LORD JESUS