Reviewer’s report

Title: Implementing a Disability Determination and Welfare System Based on the Framework of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health: The Experience in Taiwan

Version: 2 Date: 26 August 2013

Reviewer: Jerome Bickenbach

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RE: Implementing a Disability Determination and Welfare System Based on the Framework of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health: the Experience in Taiwan

Overall:

The stated objective of the paper is primarily descriptive (documenting the process of introducing reforms and the experienced gained), but at the end of the paper the objective appears to have change to “This study demonstrates a practical model for integrating the medical model with a social model based on the ICF.” The concern is where the ‘demonstration’ appears. All we have on Pp 15-16 is a ‘before and after’ indicating that more people were identified as disabled under the new system. Some argument needs to be provided that that is an improvement. Or, if the claim is only that the new approach is ‘practical’ (and not better), then some argument needs to be provided why this system is more practical than the previous one. What is the value added of the new ICF approach?

The problem, therefore, is that it is not clear what the paper is trying to do, other than describe the process the Taiwanese government engaged in to create a ICF-related disability evaluation approach. What is missing is any sense of assessment of that effort: has it made a difference to the lives of people with disabilities? How would we know whether it has or not? Why is introducing ICF important, what is its actual or expected effects? Or, again, more generally, why use the ICF?

On pp 17-18, there is a hint of an argument that might be developed: because of limited resources, welfare services are being cut back, but since the ICF approach turns our attention to the environment, where changes can be made to accommodate disability, then…. but here is my problem. Then what? What if the cost of environmental accommodation was vastly higher than the cost of welfare? Then the ICF approach would not be something governments would be interested in. The authors actually admit this on P 19 where they say that the ICF approach would have costly consequences. So what is value added of the ICF. The authors hint vaguely about this, but they must be very clear what the added value is, or the paper lack a meaningful or interesting objective.
Overall, but secondarily, the structure of the paper is somewhat confusing. The methods section is not about the methods of this paper, but merely a historical description of what happened, and the results section is also a historical description of a process and its consequences, not the report of study results as such. This is tied into the problem of the objective of the paper, since methods and results and discussion depend on what the point of the paper is.

Major compulsory revisions:

1) Clarify the objective of the paper and align the methods, results and discussion with this objective in mind, so that the paper actually responds to the objective as stated.

(I do not believe a paper that has as its objective the historical description of a process is publishable, without also presenting evidence and argument that shows, or at least suggests, that (in this case) the ICF approach made a positive difference, or that there is an added value in using the ICF for disability determination. If this assessment is not addressed, then the paper is too weak, I believe.)

Minor essential revisions:

1) P 5
The 15% figure should be referenced by the WHO World Report on Disability

2) “This overly medicalized view fails to address the social factors, discrimination, prejudice, and inaccessibility that prevent the full participation of disabled people, and contributes to the overall disability experience.”

It is important, following the ICF, to also mention that environmental factors also constitute facilitators (e.g. assistive technology) that enhance or improve the disability experience.

P 6

3) "The CRPD ensures that all mainstream health services are inclusive of people with disabilities, especially for older adults, women, and people with a low economic status."

The CRPD expresses the rights of persons with disabilities, but it has no power to ‘ensure’ that these rights are actually fulfilled, that is the responsibility of each country.

P 7

4) I fear that the services of ‘Wallace Academic Editing’ tended to slip from time to time, e.g.

"We collected their scramble data from the national registration system."
which I presume meant the ‘anonymized data’

Pp 7-11 Methods

5) This section is not really a methods section as such (which should describe the methods used in the paper’s study, and which produced the results that are reported in the paper), but a historical description of the process actually used by the Taiwanese authorities. In this sense the ‘methods’ of this paper are historical description.

Pp 11-16 Results

6) Similarly, this section is not a report of the results of this paper, but of the activities of the taskforce.

Pp 13-14

7) Developing a ICF core set: There is a very substantial body of literature on ICF core set methodology and development, developed over the past decade, and none of these is referenced or compared with what was done in Taiwan (cf. e.g. Bickenbach et al. ICF Core Sets Manual for Clinical Practice, Hogrefe, 2012)

P 16

8) "Although the ICF framework has been implemented in numerous countries, documentation currently exists on using the ICF system to classify people with disabilities on a nationwide basis [3, 15, 16, 17]."

I suspect something is missing in this sentence, possibly “documentation currently only exists...”

9) "Taiwan is a pioneer country linking functional evaluations and needs assessments based on the ICF and CRPD."

Unfortunately, I can see no justification for saying that the needs assessment is “based on the CRPD”, nor am I entirely sure what that would mean.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests