



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Evolution of system for disability assessment based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health: A Taiwanese study



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## KEYWORDS

disability;  
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*Background/Purpose:* The criteria for disability were mainly based on the medical model, and the candidates for disability benefits were identified by physicians mainly depending on their degree of bodily impairment, but without sufficient evaluation of their activity, participation, and environment in Taiwan. According to the *People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act*, the assessment of a person's eligibility for disability benefits was required to be based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) framework since July 11, 2012. This study investigated a proposed system to assess patients' eligibility for disability in Taiwan, based on the ICF.

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**Methods:** We have initiated a national decision-making process involving members of Taiwan's ICF Team. We facilitated 16 group discussions on the ICF coding system, in which 199 professionals participated. In each group, one member led the group discussion until a consensus was reached.

**Results:** We have developed a process to determine the eligibility of people with disabilities. This study set up the standards, tools, and practice manuals for each category. We have also developed a core set for disability assessment.

**Conclusion:** We implemented a new system to assess patients' eligibility for disability. The proposed assessment protocol and tools require further validation.

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## Introduction

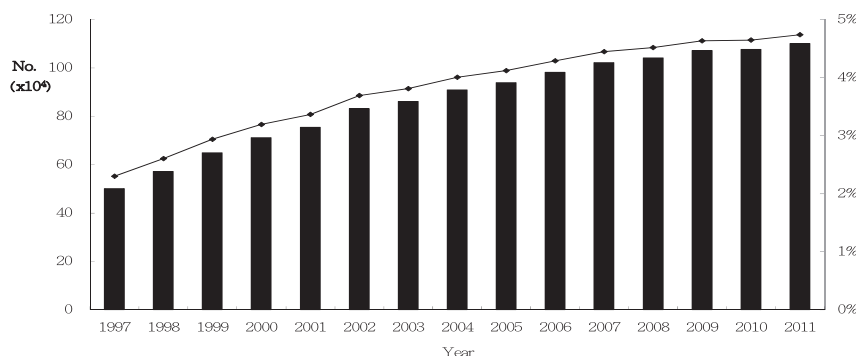
Disability may be defined as a negative interaction between the functional impairments and environment of an individual. People with disabilities often experience difficulty in daily life and are limited in their activities and social participation. The Ministry of the Interior in Taiwan reported that the number of people with disabilities nationwide in 2003 was 861,030 (3.8% of the total population); this figure had increased to 1,100,436 by 2011 (4.6% of the total population).<sup>1</sup> The percentage of disabled people shows a yearly increasing trend (Fig. 1).

People with disabilities often require special support in various areas to assist them in adjusting to normal daily life, such as education, housing, work, and social benefits.<sup>2</sup> Since 1980, the Taiwanese government has applied certain legislative procedures to create and revise categories of disability. A person who fulfills the criteria to determine eligibility for disability benefits may be granted cash and in-kind services from the government. However, the criteria for disability were mainly based on the medical model, which considered disability as a physical and mental impairment. Thus, candidates for disability benefits were identified by physicians mainly depending on their degree of bodily impairment, but without sufficient evaluation of their activity, participation, and environment. In 2007, the Taiwanese Legislative Yuan passed a constitutional amendment known as the *People with Disabilities Rights Protection Act*.<sup>3</sup> Under this act, the assessment of a person's eligibility for benefits was required to be based on the International Classification of

Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) framework since 2012.

The ICF framework was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) to describe health and disability at the level of both the individual and society. It examines a person's functioning at the level of body, person, and society, and provides definitions for operational assessment.<sup>4</sup> The ICF system provides a universal framework for assessing the functional limitations of any person. The ICF classifications are based on the understanding that for any person, various factors interact, and all of these factors must be considered in making a proper assessment; hence, several domains of assessment are included, such as body function and structure, activity and participation, and environmental and personal factors (Fig. 2). The ICF system has been universally accepted by the United Nations since 2001. It provides an excellent scientific approach to collect reliable statistics on disabled populations.<sup>5,6</sup> In Japan, Italy, and Australia, the ICF framework has been used to guide clinical measurement and evaluation of patients requiring rehabilitation, home care, old-age care, and disability support.<sup>7-9</sup> The ICF framework was also used in the Multi-Country Survey Study conducted between 2000 and 2001, and the World Health Survey Program of 2002 and 2003, to measure the health status of general populations in 71 countries.<sup>7</sup>

To prepare for reform in the system of disability assessment, the Taiwanese government authorized professionals to form a Taiwanese ICF Team. This task force includes physicians, dentists, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, social workers, psychologists,



**Figure 1** The trend and estimated prevalence rates for disability in Taiwan between 1997 and 2011. Black bars indicate the number of people with disability each year, and the line shows the percentage of people with disability among the general population each year.

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