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Demographic and social statistics: Washington Group on Disability Measurement

Report of the Washington Group on Disability Measurement

This background note contains updated information with respect to
E/CN.3/2003/8.

Washington City Group on Disability Statistics

Preliminary Report from 2nd Meeting - January 9-10, 2003

Location- The 2nd meeting was hosted by Statistics Canada, Health Statistics Division, in Ottawa at the Chateau Laurier Hotel.

Participation – Representatives from national statistical offices of Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Sierra Leone, Spain, St Lucia, Uganda, United Kingdom, the United States and Zambia participated. In addition, representatives from the following organizations also participated: Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, United Nations, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, OECD and the French Department of Health. In total there were 40 participants.

The objectives of the Washington City Group on Disability Statistics are:

1. To guide the development of a small set of general disability measures suitable for use in censuses, sample surveys and other statistical activities.
2. To recommend one or more extended sets of survey items to measure disability, the principles of their design, and how these extended sets of questions will be related to the general measure.

The measures will be culturally comparable, to the extent possible, and the ICF provides a useful framework for their development.

3. To address priority methodological issues associated with the measurement of disability.

The focus of the second meeting was to: (1) continue the work on the development of a disability measurement matrix; (2) discuss the results of methodological testing; and (3) initiate discussion of methodological priorities.

Measurement matrix

The Disability Measurement Matrix has three components:

- The *purpose* of the measurement at either the individual or population level, for example equalization of opportunity, financial support, needs assessment, or prevention;
- The ICF *domain* covered by the measurement, such as the environmental element, participation elements, activity limitations, body structure; and

- The *characteristics* of specific survey questions such as the duration of the circumstance, or the number of categories in the response choices.

In addition, a related effort is evaluating currently used survey questions against the matrix – first to obtain a sense of where countries' survey foci are in the disability domain, and second to identify possible gaps. The measurement matrix is a “work in progress”, and is being pursued by members from Italy, the United States and the United Nations.

Methodological Testing

Participating countries presented the current situation in the methodological testing and development or collection activities of disability questions. The diversity of approaches underlined the challenge in the development of a set of common questions that will be comparable and acceptable across diverse countries. The discussion was agreed to be exploratory at this stage, and no effort was made, for example, to recommend specific survey questions.

A clear distinction could be observed between survey or census questions that were intended to identify a broad population that would be targeted for additional disability questions (e.g. in a post-censal survey) and items aimed at identifying the specific disabled population and the severity of their conditions.

Numerous methodological issues were identified in the course of the discussion. These included the coverage of population such as the institutionalized or the homeless, the comparability of data based on varied collection approaches, for example telephone versus self-completed questionnaires, the impact of language or translation, and the use of proxy reporting. These are among the issues that will be addressed at future meetings.

Next Steps

The next meeting of the Washington City Group has been tentatively scheduled for September 2003 in Brussels. The objectives for this meeting are:

1. selection of one or two key purposes (from the Matrix) for measurement;
2. selection of 1-4 domains where measures would be developed in line with the ICF; a lead has been identified for each of these items
3. addressing issues of collection methods related to these measurements, such as combining different sources of information (e.g. administrative and survey)

4. developing short and long versions of questions to identify impairment or activity limitation. (Participation was considered more difficult to address at this time.)
5. recommending approaches to ensure coverage of the total population
6. using current “off the shelf” data – what (if anything) is considered comparable across countries.