

What is a 'model of disability'?

In our society, people have different ways of perceiving disability. 'Models' have been developed to put definitions to these

perceptions to help people understand the different viewpoints.

What is the Social Model of Disability?

The Social Model of Disability views people as being disabled by barriers within society, rather than by their impairments. Through the Social Model, 'disability' is understood as an unequal relationship within a social world in which the needs of people with impairments are often given little or no consideration.

People with impairments are disabled by the fact that they are excluded from participation within mainstream society

as a result of physical, environmental and attitudinal barriers. These barriers prevent them from gaining equal access to what is available to people without impairments.

This model was developed by disabled people to describe their experiences and to explain why they thought that seeing disability as a medical problem was inaccurate and inappropriate.

What is the Medical Model of Disability?

Through the Individual or Medical Model of Disability, 'disability' is understood as something which arises from an individual's impairment.

This model views people as being unable to gain equal access to society as a direct result of their impairment. The Medical Model is often known as the 'personal tragedy model' because it regards the

day-to-day difficulties that people with impairments experience as being caused by their impairments, not by barriers within society (Carson, 2009).

The Medical Model puts the 'problem' with the individual and does not recognise the physical, environmental and attitudinal barriers that people with impairments often face.

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Examples of the Social Model and the Individual/Medical Model in everyday contexts:

A wheelchair user wishes to attend a community group which meets in a room that is up a flight of stairs. There is no lift.

- Social Model view: The community group should meet in a location which is accessible, e.g. in a ground floor room
- Medical Model view: Due to the individual's inability to climb stairs, they are not able to participate in the community group.

An individual with a learning difficulty takes up mainstream employment. The induction includes a lot of printed information on the company's policies and the individual finds the information hard to take in.

- Social Model view: The information should be made available in an Easy Read format and time taken to ensure that the individual has understood it
- Medical Model view: Due to the individual's inability to understand the written information, they are unable to be in mainstream employment.

The Affirmative Model of Disability

A model more recently developed by disabled academics is the 'Affirmative Model of Disability'. This model identifies impairment as a characteristic of human difference to be valued.

Impairment can be defined as "physical, sensory, emotional and cognitive difference to be expected & respected on its own terms in a diverse society"(Cameron, 2010)

The Affirmative Model demands recognition of impairment as an ordinary rather than an extraordinary characteristic of human experience, and for inclusion within ordinary life on that basis.