Support Needs Assessment for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities: An Investigation of the Nature of the Support Needs Construct and Disability Factors that Impact on Support Needs.

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B.Sc (Hons)

Submitted for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the School of Psychology

University of Adelaide

September, 2008

DEDICATION

To Richard

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Declaration

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Harries, J., Guscia, R., Kirby, N., Nettelbeck, T., & Taplin, J. (2005). Support Needs and Adaptive Behaviours. *American Journal on Mental Retardation, 110,* 393-404.

Harries, J., Guscia, R., Nettelbeck, T., Kirby, N. (in press) Impact of the number and severity of additional disabilities on adaptive behaviour and support profiles for people with intellectual disabilities. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*.

Harries, J., Guscia, R., Nettelbeck, T., Kirby, N. (2008) Impact of the nature of additional disabilities on adaptive behaviour and support profiles for people with intellectual disabilities. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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Abstract

Individualised needs based approaches are increasingly being utilised to fund disability support services. Frequently, standardised assessments such as adaptive behaviour scales and, more recently, measures of support needs are used for determining level of need. The aim of this thesis is to understand the relationship between adaptive behaviours and support needs and to investigate factors that impact functional capacity and need for supports for individuals with an intellectual disability.

Although a conceptually attractive approach to assessment, concern exists regarding the adequacy of the theoretical framework for guiding the development of support needs instruments. Though possessing theoretical similarities, adaptive behaviour and support needs scales are considered to measure different, albeit related constructs, prompting investigation into the nature of the relationship and the structure of the support needs construct. Accordingly, in Study 1 the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS), the Adaptive Behaviour Scale–Residential and Community (ABS-RC:2), and the Inventory for Client and Agency Planning (ICAP) were used to examine this relationship ($N = 80$). Dimensionality of the SIS (Section 1) was examined in reference to the three areas of conceptual, social, and practical skills, considered as comprising the adaptive behaviour construct. Factor analysis offered support for measurement of a common underlying construct. When considered in terms of the three adaptive behaviour skill areas, the support needs construct related predominantly to conceptual skills.

Unlike adaptive behaviour scales, little is reported about the properties of support needs measures or factors that impact on an individual's need for supports. Study 2 examined factors likely to influence adaptive behaviours and need for supports; in particular, the presence of coexisting disabilities. Using a measure of adaptive behaviour (i.e., ICAP) and

two support needs scales (i.e., SIS and the Service Need Assessment Profile, SNAP), the extent to which adaptive and challenging behaviours and support needs (including medical) were impacted by the number and severity of disabilities was examined (N = 83). Results showed adaptive behaviours and support needs (including medical) were meaningfully related to the number and severity of disabilities present, whereas this was not so for challenging behaviours. Profiles for challenging behaviour measures did not support a linear association with number and severity of additional disabilities, raising the possibility that the profiles were influenced more by the nature of the additional disabilities present.

Study 3 investigated the impact of the nature of the additional disabilities present on adaptive and challenging behaviours, support and medical needs using the same instruments utilised in Study 2. Each scale discriminated skills and needs associated with the presence of additional physical and speech disabilities. The support needs subscales of SNAP and SIS were more sensitive to the needs of individuals with coexisting neurological and sensory disabilities. SNAP was the only instrument to identify unique needs associated with the presence of a psychiatric disability but SIS was the only instrument to discriminate needs associated with the presence of a vision disability. Underlying this finding may be the importance of the person-environment interaction intrinsic to contemporary models of disability and support approach to assessment.

Acknowledgements

A thesis such as this would not be possible without the very generous support of many people. Firstly, I would like to thank my principal supervisor, Dr Neil Kirby. I have learned an enormous amount from Neil over the many years that we have worked together. I am indebted to him for the generosity of his time, support, and knowledge. I admire his steadfast optimism and resolute commitment to effecting positive changes for people with disabilities and I am grateful for all of the opportunities I have had to work with, and learn from Neil.

I would also like to thank my co-supervisors, Professor Ted Nettelbeck and Professor John Taplin, for their esteemed and considered advice during the course of this research. I would also like to thank Ted for his meticulous reviews of papers and chapters for this thesis. I would like to express my enormous gratitude to Roma Guscia, not only for her help with the collection of data, but also for her friendship and morale support during the course of the research.

I am very grateful to the caregivers from all of the participating agencies (Balyana, Julia Farr, Minda Incorporated, Orana, and Strathmont Centre) for their generous commitment of their time in completing the assessments that formed the basis of this research. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Professor James (Jim) Thompson and his co-authors for generously allowing access to a pre-publication version of the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS), which has been of pivotal importance in the research findings reported in this thesis.

I would also like to thank my children, Dylan, Katlyn (Katie), Jordan, and Emily, for being so patient with, and supportive of this endeavour. I have appreciated their encouragement and commitment that I should finish what I started. Finally, my heartfelt thanks must go to my husband Richard for his absolute and abiding support, without which an undertaking such as this would not have been possible. It is for this reason that I dedicate this thesis to him.