

**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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DEDICATION

To Richard

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Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Julia Harries and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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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.

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