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ABSTRACTIONS

The abstracts below are taken from journals, the contents page of which are included in this month's Information Service. These abstracts are provided as a response from Information Service members who have asked us to provide more information about the articles contained in our contents' page.

Participation in intellectual disability research: a review of 20 years of studies

Background Researchers have noted difficulties in attracting adequate numbers of participants with intellectual disabilities (ID) to their studies.
Methods This study was a review of participation by adults with ID in research conducted in South Eastern Ontario over a 20-year period (1987-2006). Original research studies were identified by local investigators and then reviewed for inclusion and exclusion criteria. The report of each study was then reviewed by three reviewers and key information was extracted. The extent of study participation was calculated using three methods and compared along with key design characteristics.
Results Nine studies met all inclusion/exclusion criteria and provided sufficient data to calculate participation. Among the studies there was a variety of purposes, research designs and recruitment strategies. Using the participant/approached calculation, participation varied between 41.8% and 100%. Higher participation was observed in studies where investigators had direct access to participants, the data collection was non-invasive and consent was required from substitute decision-makers only. There was no clear trend of increasing or decreasing participation over time.
Conclusions Researchers seeking the participation of adults with ID in their studies must incorporate factors influencing participation into study designs to ensure robust results and effective use of research resources.

Understanding early communication signals in autism: a study of the perception of infants' cry

Background Previous studies have highlighted that episodes of crying of children with autistic disorder (AD) were perceived as inexplicable from their parents who could not identify causative factors. These results supported the view of AD as related to a problem of expressing and sharing emotions. Moreover, no evidence has been presented on which characteristics of a cry episode influence the adult perception. Aim of our research is to investigate how acoustical features of crying episodes modulate their perception of infants with ASD compared with infants with typical development (TD) and infants with developmental delay (DD).
Methods Two studies were employed. In study 1, we artificially modified structural parameters (fundamental frequency, duration of the pauses, waveform modulation) of a cry episode, and then 50 adults (parents and non-parents) were asked to judge the level of distress elicited. In study 2, acoustic analysis was applied to episodes of crying selected from retrospective home videos of 42 children with AD, TD and DD at 18 months.
Results The results showed that (1) differences in the fundamental frequency and in other structural parameters of the cry lead parents and non-parents to perceive an episode of crying as more aversive and (2) at 18 months of age, AD episodes of crying have higher fundamental frequency (f0).
Conclusion  Our findings offer support for the hypothesis that acoustic characteristics of episodes of crying of children with autism, especially higher fundamental frequencies, may account for mental states of uneasiness in the listener.

Training Staff to Measure the Engagement of Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Childcare Centres
International Journal of Disability, Development and Education Volume 57 Number 1 March 2010

Practitioner use of the revised Individual Child Engagement Record - Revised (ICER-R) for observing children with disabilities in inclusive childcare is examined. Training in the use of the ICER-R, which includes both a momentary time sampling observation system and rating scales, was provided across two training phases with five to seven participants. Four of the five participants who completed both phases of the training achieved greater than 80% inter-observer agreement on the observation measure within the allocated time, and were able to maintain this level of agreement over subsequent observation sessions. There was consistency in ratings across observers and positive, statistically significant correlations were found for data gathered using momentary time sampling and data from rating scales. The practical value of the ICER-R was supported by feedback provided through evaluation questionnaires completed by participants. Training childcare practitioners to systematically observe children with disabilities in inclusive childcare has the potential to benefit both children and staff.

Social Participation of Students with Special Needs in Regular Primary Education in the Netherlands
International Journal of Disability, Development and Education Volume 57 Number 1 March 2010

This study addresses the social participation of young students (Grades One to Three) with special needs in regular Dutch primary schools. More specifically, the focus lies on four key themes related to social participation: friendships/relationships, contacts/interactions, students' social self-perception, and acceptance by classmates. The outcomes of the study revealed that the majority of students with special needs have a satisfactory degree of social participation. However, compared with students without special needs, a relatively large portion of the students with special needs experience difficulties in their social participation. In general, students with special needs have a significantly lower number of friends and are members of a cohesive subgroup less often than their typical peers. In addition, students with special needs have fewer interactions with classmates, have more interactions with the teacher, and are less accepted than students without special needs. The social self-perception of both groups of students does not differ. A comparison between students with different categories of disability regarding the four themes of social participation revealed no significant differences.

A masculine perspective of gendered topics in the research literature on males and females with intellectual disability

Background: A focus on male social pathologies may have evolved within parts of the intellectual disability research literature. This article explores this notion and makes some connections between mainstream gender theory about hegemonic masculinity and the current gendered discourse in intellectual disability research.
Method: We conducted a thematic analysis of all journal article titles from four prominent intellectual disability journals where “man,” “woman,” “women,” “male,” “girl,” and “boy” were mentioned in the title.
Results: Thematic differences were identified between articles that focused on males or females, with less research attention on male health compared with female health. A strong focus was evident on problematised male sexual behaviour.
Conclusions: There is a distinct difference evident between articles that problematise males and articles for females encouraging health promotion that suggests a disparate focus on male social pathologies. A deeper contextual analysis of unique sex differences in research is proposed.

Social Integration in Employment Settings: Application of Intergroup Contact Theory
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Volume 48 Number 1: 31-51 February 2010

This study used a survey of 106 employment specialists to test the ability of intergroup contact theory to explain social integration outcomes of employees with disabilities. Contact theory suggests that coworkers are more accepting of employees with disabilities if they have sufficient opportunities to interact with them, equal status and interdependent working relationships, and supervisors who support equality and acceptance. The contact model and an expanded model that includes workplace culture significantly predicted not only coworker attitudes toward employees with disabilities but also the employees’ level of social participation and feelings of social support. In addition, outcome dependency moderated the relation between the vocational competence of employees with disabilities and coworker attitudes toward them. Study findings have practical implications for facilitating social relationships in the supported workplace.
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
Volume 48 Number 1
February 2010

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Australias disability laws need critical review

NICHOLAS PATRICK
March 12, 2010

People with disabilities in Australia live on a lower socio-economic rung than most. People with a disability have poorer educational qualifications, have a higher rate of unemployment, earn lower wages on average, have a reduced life expectancy of up to 20 years, are three-times more likely to be a victim of violent crime and, are far more likely to be the victim of a sexual assault than the rest of the population.

It reads like life in a third world ghetto, yet it is here, and our laws do little to address these critical issues.

For some four million Australians and their families, a threadbare patchwork of state and federal laws, often ignored international conventions and, an all round lack of understanding make life more challenging than it already is. What's needed is a complete review of the existing legal framework to ensure that people with disability live lives of dignity and can realise their potential to fully participate in Australian society.

Much newsprint and digital space has been devoted to such issues as wheelchair access on domestic and international flights, mental health in the Northern Territory, and, on Four Corners recently, the dire state of government support for parents of children with disabilities.

Other cases, gaining less media attention, such as access to education and electoral rights for voters, are progressing through the courts.

Yet, for all the very real pain and injustice these stories draw on, they are only mountain peaks of public awareness. The state of legal rights for people with disability are, in fact, far worse than even these very
serious cases might suggest.

Currently, the disability sector is compiling a shadow report to the United Nations on Australia's compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by the Australian Government in 2008. The report will act as a response to the federal government's own report on our adherence to the convention, which is due later this year.

The shadow report reveals that many of the requirements of the CRPD are ignored in Australia and that people with disabilities experience high rates of social isolation as a result. This sorry situation is based largely on the fact that there are too many gaps in the legal landscape of protections for people with disabilities, combined with a lack of proactive measures designed to ensure that rights are fully realised.

Australia has no Human Rights Act, and no comprehensive human rights protections. Various State and Commonwealth Discrimination Acts, while offering legal protections in some areas, are disjointed with enough gaps to make them largely ineffective. Because the requirements of the legislation are unclear, employers and providers of vital services such as health, education and transport find it difficult to determine what is required in order to fully comply.

Advocacy groups are not adequately resourced to assist individuals to effectively assert and realise their rights.

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) can be an unsatisfactory channel for the enforcement legal rights. It is only commissioned with a conciliatory role and may not commence enforcement proceedings where important rights are being violated.

The role of the courts is problematic, since in most cases complaints must be commenced by an individual, rather than an organisation, outcomes can be hard to predict, and costs are prohibitive. Most cases
of violations of disability rights are not brought to the courts and thus the jurisprudence is relatively limited. People living with disability in Australia are being let down by a shaky, ill-designed legal framework. They experience high levels of social, physical, financial and legal isolation. It is an unacceptable situation in 21st century Australia.

The CRPD mandates a review of national legislation to ensure that it complies with the requirements of the Convention. An audit of the current legal protections provided for people with disabilities across all jurisdictions is the only appropriate means of beginning a reform process to alleviate the extraordinarily awful state of affairs. The Government must not only strengthen protections, but must also implement programmes to ensure that rights are fully realised.

Nicolas Patrick is Pro Bono Partner at DLA Phillips Fox and lead author of the formal response to the federal government's report on Australia's compliance with the CRPD

Source: theage.com.au
Diagnosis: autism

Finding out that your child is autistic is difficult enough, but when the child is a girl it comes as a real shock, JEREMY LAURENCE writes

With hindsight, Nicky Clark says early signs of autism were present in both her children. The elder one, though very bright, had a love of routine and was not interested in fantasy games like other children. The younger one liked to line things up in rows and would watch the same video clip over and over again for hours. When she got the diagnosis it came as a huge shock, as it would be for any aren’t. But there was an additional reason why it was unexpected – both her children are girls.

Autism is an overwhelmingly male diagnosis – it has been described as the “extreme male brain”. Boys with the diagnosis outnumber girls by between 10 and 15 to one. The typical high functioning male, if he is lucky, finds a secure post in a university where he can use his exceptional powers for academic study, shunning most social contact as the “eccentric professor”, and relaxing at home with his train set in the attic.

But in the developing story of autism – interest in which has increased hugely in the last decade – girls have been neglected. That omission will be remedied this week with the first conference on autistic spectrum disorders in women and girls. One aim will be to examine whether the condition has been underdiagnosed in females – and what links there may be with eating disorders.

According to Janet Treasure, professor of psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College, London, around a fifth of girls diagnosed with anorexia have autistic spectrum features and 20 to 30 per cent may have exhibited rigidity and perfectionism in childhood. Anorexia has been called the female Asperger’s (the mild version of autism). Treasure says: “When I was training at the Maudsley 30 years ago, anorexic girls were treated as little more than malfunctioning machines.

“The view was that it was an illness that mainly affected middle-class intelligent white girls and was little more than an awkward phase of adolescence. Today there has been a huge change in the understanding of the disease. People with eating disorders find it difficult to change self-set rules and learnt behaviour once fixed in the brain. They also see the world in close-up as if looking through a zoom lens, and get lost in the detail.

“There is a strong similarity to autistic spectrums.”

She will tell the conference that there are two aspects to the link. First, people with autistic spectrum disorder are more at risk of getting anorexia. “If girls are obsessed with systems and rules then the rules governing eating become very attractive. They grab them very much.”

Second, being undernourished and underweight as a result of an eating disorder exaggerates any autistic traits. The effect of starvation on brain function impairs set-shifting – the ability to think flexibility and to multi-task instead of focusing on one thing – and the ability to read other people’s minds. “They become more socially isolated, withdraw more and more into their own world and become cut off and lonely,” she says.

The task for therapy is to bring them out of their obsession with eating, or avoiding it. But they have to make “big choices that require a lot of courage”. The autistic features are reversible in the majority of sufferers once they regain full weight but it requires “a leap so they stop listening to their eating disorder voices”.

Girls whose autistic traits predated their anorexia face a harder task, even supposing they conquer the eating disorder. “For those with high functioning Asperger’s they can work out what they have to do – to remember to smile, to ask, “How are you?” They need to work at it because autistic traits make them uncharming and can cause heartache throughout life. If they remember the social rules it makes them a bit more charming.” Treasurer says.

Nicky Clark’s daughters do not have eating disorders but, like all those with autistic traits, they struggle with the complex rules that oil the wheels of social intercourse. The eldest, Lizzy, 15, is bright, able and verbally confident. She was progressing well at school until the age of 10, when she was ostracised by her peer group and bullied.

Nicky says, “I had always known she had to have a routine. She never really played with dolls or liked imaginative games like other girls. She asked very complicated questions, constantly seeking and clarifying her perception of the world. I had to be very careful with expressions like “He will bite your head off” because she would understand it literally and be frightened.”

“She was my first child and I assumed all children were like this. But it became more apparent when she was 10 that there were differences. She moved to secondary school but the bullying became much worse and she started self-harming – biting the backs of her hands till they were raw because of her frustration. Things really spiralled down.”

It took 18 months for her to be diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome – “we really had to fight for a diagnosis”, Nicky says – and by that time she had developed head-nodding and a mild version of Tourette’s syndrome.

Eventually Nicky and her husband Phil, who come from Shrewsbury, moved Lizzy to an independent school, with small classes, where she has since thrived. In 2008 she appeared in the award-winning BBC film Dustbin Baby, playing Poppy, a character with Asperger’s.

Nicky says, “She has a small group of friends; they realise her take on things is different and they back off. That is all it takes. She has the maturity to say, ‘This is the way I like to do things. I am who I am and you do things differently from me.’”

Emily, aged 12, was diagnosed as a toddler – long before Lizzy – with autism and learning disabilities, Nicky says. “She wasn’t speaking and my mum, who was a health visitor, said I should take her to the GP who referred her to the child development centre. She was diagnosed the day before her third birthday. I didn’t see it coming and all I could think of was Rain Man, the movie with Dustin Hoffman. Nothing the doctors were saying to me was going in. I left the consulting room and collapsed.

“Emily was terrifically affectionate and interested in things but had no language – that was the only symptom. She went to mainstream school and gradually her language started to come through. But around the age of five her friends started to drift away.” They moved her to a special school where things improved. “She is still affectionate but she has grown and matured. Puberty has set in – she is becoming a teenager and there is a natural withdrawal. As long as she has her Teletubbies and Thomas the Tank Engine DVDs she is happy. But there is the huge challenge of her learning disabilities, which can lead to temper tantrums and what I call serious meltdown.”

Visitors to the Clark household are often surprised when they learn the girls are on the autistic spectrum. “People say, ‘Isn’t that a boy thing?’ or want to know if she can draw
Westminster Abbey. Someone once said they couldn’t have autism because it only affected boys.”

Ignorance about the condition in the female sex extends to professionals, adding to the distress it causes. Research suggests that, even when girls are screened, autistic traits are not picked up. In one study of 60 patients at a psychiatric hospital in England, none were diagnosed as autistic but 11 were later shown to have autistic traits. They were diagnosed with other conditions such as personality disorder and schizophrenia.

Charities say a growing number of adult women are coming to them, having recognised themselves in autistic characters on television or in print.

Often they are relieved to discover why they are ‘different’. The explanation for their delayed diagnosis, in addition to medical ignorance, is that girls tend to be better at masking the condition. They are better with language, more advanced than boys, less disruptive and better able to compensate for their problems.

Judith Gould, psychologist and director of the Lorna Wing Centre of the National Autistic Society, says, “We are definitely seeing an increase in women and girls being diagnosed. Girls are diagnosed later than boys at age 12 upwards. It is when they hit puberty that it becomes more obvious. Often they are on the periphery of social groups. They have learnt their social skills by intellect, not naturally or instinctively. Teenage girls are very socially demanding on each other and can be marginalised, teased and bullied. Often girls do not show difficult or aggressive behaviour but are shy or passive and depressed.”

It is to combat the ignorance and neglect of the condition among girls and women that this week’s conference is being held. Mark Lever, chief executive of the National Autistic Society, says, “So many women tell us that trying to get a diagnosis feels like an insurmountable hurdle and they have to fight tremendous battles to get the help, support and services they desperately need. Autism is a lifelong condition. Without the right support it can have a profound effect on individuals and families.”

Sunday Canberra Times
7th March 2010
All new buildings will be required to have adequate disabled access under new broad standards aimed at evening things up for the disabled community.

The scheme has been lauded as an unprecedented move opening the door to those with a disability, giving them greater access to employment, services and the community as a whole.

For the first time in Australia, the Standards for Access to Premises - as announced by the federal government on Monday - sets minimum access requirements for buildings.

It covers stairs, ramps, toilets and corridors and will apply to all new office buildings, shops, hotels, B&Bs and even the common areas of apartment blocks.

The new rules apply from May 1, 2011.

Attorney-General Robert McClelland said the standards were about addressing the "practical realities of what can reasonably be required and enforced".

Existing buildings will also be compelled to make accessibility changes under the proposal, although only if there's significant upgrade work being undertaken.

Exclusions, meanwhile, also apply for those who cannot fulfil the requirements because it would cause "unjustifiable hardship" - a move that has won the support of Australia's peak construction body.

Master Builders Australia said the concession was significant as the
industry struggles to recover from the global financial downturn.

It has otherwise welcomed the standards, as have carers groups, who say it signals a marked change from the days when sending a disabled person to use the goods lift equalled adequate access.

Carers Alliance secretary Mary-Lou Carter said change in behaviours would only come through changes made through law.

"Disability is really the next frontier when it comes to valuing people and being able to access things on the same level as everyone else," she told AAP.

She says it will make a real difference for those with a mobility, hearing or vision impairments and make life more inclusive for them.

"It's just about that aspect of life where you use something universally - like a ramp at a school, it's not just for the person in a wheelchair but for their friends too."

The government will review the standards after five years.

Mr McClelland said the commonwealth would work with the states and territories to ensure compliance.

He's also taken a lead role in pushing the reform.

"I am proud to say that the new Attorney-General's department building, which was completed in 2009, was built in accordance with the draft standards," he said.

"This demonstrates that accessible architecture is not only possible - it is the way of the future."

While the standards were fantastic, Ms Carter said she hoped it was the start of something bigger.
"It's baby steps, baby steps all the time," she said.

"People with disabilities are very patient, but in the 21st century, we can't get away from the fact that that patience can end.

"We can speed up."

She'd like to see the standards for public transport tightened so that it is no longer just accessible to "five per cent of the population to use it".

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Disabled girl, 11, to be sterilised
10 Mar, 2010
The Canberra Times

The Family Court of Australia has approved the sterilisation of a disabled 11-year-old girl.
Family Court judge Paul Cronin found that performing a hysterectomy on the child, identified only as Angela, was "in the child's best interests". Angela has Rett syndrome, making her profoundly disabled and unable to talk or use sign language. She has to be fed and cared for and has no bladder control. She has a special walking frame she has to be strapped into and has a person to help her. Since she was born, Angela has had epileptic seizures but they are now under control through medication. While the epilepsy is controlled, seizures can occur when she has a heavy menstrual period, which have been happening since she was nine.
AAP
Housing scheme for disabled adults in doubt as minister backs down

ERIK JENSEN
March 1, 2010
The Canberra Times

EIGHTEEN months ago two women sat in a Gladesville kitchen and pleaded with Paul Lynch to approve a housing scheme for their disabled adult children. What happened next is in dispute.

They say the Minister for Disability Services reached forward with his finger and drew his signature in the air. After six years of lobbying, his gesture was the closest their cluster housing scheme had come to approval. The minister denies it ever took place.

"We left that meeting feeling that it would actually happen," the group's president, Jenny Rollo, says. "It was the same feeling we had with Kristina Keneally because she was so supportive." But the RASAID scheme, a residential care facility for the disabled children of a group of older parents from north-west Sydney, is no closer to approval under Mr Lynch than it was when the Premier held the portfolio.

"I do not," the minister says, "draw my signature in the air."

Talking to Ms Rollo, ministers walk in and out of conversation. Almost 60 meetings with politicians and bureaucrats in the past six years. The project's plans sit on her table, but need government funding for construction and ongoing care. "We're made to feel that the best solution is for our kids to die before us," she says.

"One of the hardest things about being the parent of an adult with a
disability is not being able to plan for the future. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor - there's no way to plan. The state government expect our other children to take over."

Since the group of 19 families formed, two parents were forced to relinquish their 32-year-old son because his needs had become too great. "We're still going through the whole process," his mother says, "of coping with what we've done."

While there is some hostility to the scheme, with British research suggesting accommodation of this type can be restrictive, each family believes it is important to keep their adult children together. Many have known each other for 30 years but current systems of care would give no guarantee on where they end up once they leave their parents' homes.

Mr Lynch told the *Herald* the plan would be considered once land was available. "… I did not give in-principle support to the RASAID proposal, as the land has not been secured and there would be numerous other steps which would have to be undertaken."
ALMOST half the young people in NSW juvenile detention centres have an intellectual or borderline intellectual disability, a new study shows, and half have parents who have been in jail.

"The kids in custody are some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised people in NSW," Peter Muir, the chief executive of the Department of Juvenile Justice, said yesterday.

The Young People in Custody Health Survey shows 28 per cent of the girls in detention centres have been admitted to a mental hospital and 43 per cent have harmed themselves at some time in their lives. More than 65 per cent of the young people have regularly used drugs in the year before coming into custody and almost all have used alcohol regularly.

The numbers in juvenile detention increased by 52 per cent between 2004-5 and 2008-9, from a daily average of 280 to 427.

The Minister for Juvenile Justice, Graham West, commissioned the first review of the system in 17 years.

Mr Muir told a juvenile justice conference this week that the public wanted something done about juvenile crime but understanding who the offenders were could lead to a better outcome.

"There are other ways to meet community concerns that don't involve custody," he told the Herald.
Rigorous testing found 13.5 per cent had an IQ of less than 70, which signifies an intellectual disability. A further 32 per cent had an IQ between 70 and 79, considered borderline. Only 9 per cent of the general population scores under 79.

Mr Muir said intellectual disability might have contributed to the increased numbers of juveniles detained for bail breaches.
Stop giving stick to those on disability, wield baton on bosses

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It's time to quit pussyfooting around with the disabled. The nation cannot tolerate this burgeoning roll of disability pensioners. More than 750,000 people are drawing a disability support pension, an amazing 31 per cent increase in a decade. Is it possible the nation has so many sick, mentally ill and worn-out folk who are incapable of holding down a job? The solution to the problem is easy: more stick.

Tony Abbott has plans to introduce a little S&M into welfare policy, finishing the job his former boss started. He plans to further toughen the eligibility rules for the disability pension, which were screwed tighter only four years ago. He wants disability pensioners to attend compulsory annual medical reassessments, and twice-yearly "chats" about getting work. But I fear that in cracking down on disability pensioners, Abbott is picking the wrong whipping boy.

Take the cane instead to the bosses who look askance when a one-legged, 50-year-old former brickie labourer has the temerity to apply for work, or a former factory hand with repetitive strain injury wants a mid-life career change.

Take the stick to employers with offices inaccessible to job seekers in wheelchairs. Lash the boss who will not hire a person who has suffered psychiatric problems, or countenance flexible hours for an applicant with chronic fatigue syndrome or a heart complaint.

Put the boot into the public service bosses who allowed the proportion of their workers with disabilities to slide over a decade from around 6
per cent to 3.6 per cent.

All this pussyfooting around with employers over the years, asking, begging them to give people with disabilities a chance, even giving bosses government hand-outs to widen a doorway or provide a special chair, has failed to staunch the rising number on a pension.

All the carrots won't persuade bosses, already ill-disposed to the older applicant, to choose a 45-year-old with controlled schizophrenia or sub-par intelligence over a younger rival with all the bits and pieces intact.

It's time to get tough. No more awareness campaigns and employer education. Let's bring in the quota. Let's try a little affirmative action. Compel workplaces of a certain size to set aside jobs for people who are leaving the disability rolls. Monitor progress and impose fines for non-compliance. The rising rolls are not solely the fault of individuals but the structures in which they find themselves.

Compulsion should be a two-way street. Any government that compels people with serious health problems to get a job should also compel employers to hire them.

Everyone from liberals to conservatives agrees something must be done. The numbers of disability pensioners have long since surpassed the numbers on the Newstart Allowance. Once a person is on the pension, the average time spent there is 12 years with most either moving on to the age pension or dying.

The Howard government wielded the stick. It made it much harder for new applicants to get the pension; if they were well enough to work 15 hours a week, they were pushed on to Newstart, now worth $107 a week less, and made to look for work (previously the criteria was 30 hours a week).

People already on the disability rolls were left to languish there. But if
they dared approach a Job Network agency to look for work, heaven help them. Under Howard they were subjected to a medical reassessment and, if they met the 15-hour criteria, were taken off the pension, and put onto Newstart. A better work-disincentive is hard to imagine.

Labor changed that stupid rule, and it's already bearing fruit. But Howard's stick-wielding approach failed to stem the rising numbers, especially in the economic downturn; so now the Rudd government has its own plans. These, too, focus on individuals - more hoops for new claimants to jump through, new impairment tables, and more sweet-talking of employers.

Disability pensioners aren't shirkers. Interviews conducted by Dr Alan Morris, of the University of NSW, showed disability pensioners under 49 were keen to get jobs. They needed the money; without work they felt like outsiders and their self-esteem was rock bottom. They believed if the workplace allowed them flexibility and understanding, they could manage a job. One young woman with mobility problems had tried for years to get a job before going on the pension. "As soon as they saw you walk in with a cane, you haven't got a chance," she says.

But those over 49 were unenthusiastic, and who could blame them? Typical of them, Fred, 53, had worked 30 years as a welder before losing a leg in an industrial accident. He'd paid off his house, and was content to be with his friends and grandchildren. He'd done his bit.

What's the point in hassling these older, frequently low-skilled pensioners when they feel they've paid their dues in long working lives that left them with ill-health and disability? Why not help those on the pension who want to work but face huge barriers?

If the Opposition and the government are serious about reducing the numbers on disability pensions, it's employers that should be hassle
into doing their bit. If anyone needs the stick, it's those who hold the key to jobs.

Source: The Sydney Morning Herald