

Enabling Environments

Measuring the Impact of Environment on Disability and Rehabilitation

This volume is the first effort to compile representative work in the emerging research area on the relationship of disability and physical environment since Barrier-Free Environments, edited by Michael Bednar, was published in 1977. Since that time, disability rights legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act in the United States, the worldwide growth of the independent-living movement, rapid deinstitutionalization, and the maturation of functional assessment methodology have all had their impact on this research area. The impact has been most noticeable in two ways-fostering the integration of environmental variables in rehabilitation research and practice, and changing paradigms for environmental interventions. As the contributions in this volume demonstrate, the relationship of disability and physical environment is no longer of interest primarily to designers and other professionals concerned with managing the resources of the built environment. The physical environment has always been recognized as an important variable affecting rehabilitation outcome. Until recently, however, concepts and tools were not available to measure its impact in clinical practice and outcomes research. In particular, lack of a theoretical foundation that integrated environment with the disablement process hampered development of both research and clinical methodology. Thus, the physical environment received little attention from the mainstream rehabilitation research community. However, this situation is changing rapidly.

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