Measuring health: a review of quality of life measurement scales

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MEASURING HEALTH: A REVIEW OF QUALITY OF LIFE MEASUREMENT SCALES
(SECOND EDITION)

Ann Bowling,
Open University Press, Buckingham, 1997
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Reviewed by Rae Vermeulen, LASER

In occupational psychology, we are familiar with reviews of occupational tests both at Level A and Level B. In this book, the author presents concise reviews of broad health-related quality of life measures. For those interested in disease specific scales, these are reviewed in the same author’s Measuring Disease. This book, Measuring Health, is aimed at clinicians and researchers interested in health care but would provide a starting point for anyone interested in measuring subjective feelings of well-being.

Chapter one is a discussion of the core concepts involved in quality of life measures. The author makes it clear that there is no consensus over a definition of quality of life. Early work in the field focused on client ill-health with terms such as morbidity, mortality and service utilization being key. More recently the concept of health has been widened to include social and psychological as well as physical aspects so that terms like functional ability, social health and positive health have become important. The other main development in measuring quality of life has been the shift from physicians’ and carers’ perceptions of quality of life to the individual’s subjective feelings of their own health.

Chapter two gives a brief overview of measurement theory including the familiar topics of reliability, validity and levels of measurement. Unfamiliar to most of us is a short section on utility ratings. This includes such tantalising techniques as the standard gamble, time trade-off and equivalence, all used for calculating costs to individuals of health interventions. The author gives only a brief overview of these but, as is true throughout this book, she provides references for the interested reader.

The remainder of the book is organised into five sections dealing with the measurement of functional ability, health status, psychological well-being, social networks and social support, life satisfaction and morale. In each section, ten to fifteen scales are
reviewed under the headings of content, scoring, validity and reliability. The author provides sufficient information to give an idea of each scale and the limitations of its use.

Overall, the book is well-laid out, with a subject index and a useful appendix of scale distributors together with their addresses. Throughout the text, the author has taken care to acknowledge other reviewers and to document other sources of information which could be useful to readers wanting more information on specialised topics.

Although a review of quality of life measures may not appear to be immediately relevant to DS OPs, the concepts involved in quality of life overlap with our work in measuring subjective feelings of client well-being, for example following work preparation or in assessing employability. It is not surprising then that some of the measures reviewed, such as Goldberg’s General Health Questionnaire and Coopersmith’s Self-Esteem Inventory, are familiar. There is clearly the potential for other scales reviewed in this book, such as the broader measures of health status, psychological well-being and life satisfaction, to be used for evaluation and research purposes in the Disability Service. I could see this review being useful to OPs embarking on a Master’s research project.

However, this is a review of health-related scales, many from the United States, many with a focus on geriatric clients, and many designed to measure outcomes of treatment or levels of self-care, so much of it is not applicable to our work. Some measures may also tempt us to stray too far from our focus on employment and into dubious diagnoses.

I recommend this well-organised and thorough review as a starting point for those in the Disability Service who would like to know more about measuring quality of life, particularly client feelings of well-being.

References

ENABLING TECHNOLOGY; DISABLED PEOPLE, WORK AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

Alan Roulstone,
Open University Press, Buckingham, 1998
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Reviewed by Elaine Chamberlain, LASER

This book forms part of an Open University series entitled “Disability, Human Rights and Society”. It is aimed at students and researchers of disability studies, applied social sciences and the sociology of work and at those working in the field of occupational rehabilitation.

The stated aim of the book is to carry out an investigation of the “social barriers” approach to understanding the experiences of disabled people using new technology in the workplace. The social barriers model holds that the disabling factors which prevent people with impairments from entering employment are not their own physical characteristics, but restrictive features of the environment. Primarily, the author identifies these as being the prohibitive attitudes of employers, colleagues and rehabilitation professionals. The author also condemns equipment and environments that are not designed with the requirements of people with impairments in mind.

The nature of the investigation is an analysis of the personal accounts of people with impairments who have recently come into contact with new technology. The benefits gained and barriers remaining to the individual are drawn out of these accounts and are taken to confirm the assertion that it is factors external to the person with impairments that provide the greatest obstacles to success in the workplace. The social barriers approach is thereby seen to be supported. The book concludes with proposals for legislative changes that take account of this view.

As such, the book presents something of a polemic on the social barriers approach to viewing disability issues. The author appears to have a strong commitment to the social barriers approach and can take a somewhat uncritical approach to the model he is investigating. The book has other, minor flaws, such as a paucity of information on the study that forms the core of the argument (How was the sample selected? How were the inferences drawn from the accounts?). It also feels outdated in parts (for example, the author discusses what could happen when organisations make the change
from manual to computerised systems. He also levels many criticisms at the now-defunct Special Aids to Employment scheme).

Nevertheless, the book does provide a lucid account of the history, rationale and implications of the social barriers model (Chapter 1). This entails a critique of the Access to Work programme which the author sees as being bureaucratic, obstructive and firmly entrenched in the “individual deficit” model of disability. The personal accounts of those struggling to access or use new technology also provide sobering glimpses of what happens once the assessment report has been written and the Access to Work case has been approved (Chapter 7).

I feel that the value of this book to those in the Disability Service resides in the alternative perspectives (sociological, political, individual) it provides on the processes and assumptions of employment rehabilitation via special aids (the arguments presented apply equally well to the supply and use of non-computerised equipment). It would therefore be a worthwhile read for those who would like to broaden their understanding of the issues and problems surrounding the Access to Work programme and occupational rehabilitation in general, particularly the social barriers model. I therefore feel that parts of this book offer a useful, although arguably not essential, introduction to this important school of thought for disability employment advisers, occupational psychologists, disability consultants and others who are involved in the Access to Work programme.
Most investigators who aim to measure health-related quality of life in generic terms have continued to use broader health status scales as proxy measures, with some justifying this with reference to their overlapping domains. But given the increasing interest in conceptual clarification, and in measuring broader quality of life, an additional chapter on these measures has been included in this edition. Measuring Health: A Review of Subjective Health, Well-being and Quality of Life Measurement Scales: A review of subjective health, well-being and quality of life measurement scales by Ann Bowling (Paperback, 2017). Be the first to write a review. About this product. Current slide (CURRENT_SLIDE) of (TOTAL_SLIDES) Top picked items. Brand new. £28.12. This textbook is an invaluable comprehensive guide to all of the major measures of health and quality of life. Product Identifiers. Publisher. VOL 2 NO 1 OCTOBER 1999 BOOK REVIEWS MEASURING HEALTH: A REVIEW OF QUALITY OF LIFE MEASUREMENT SCALES (SECOND EDITION) ANN BOWLING, OPEN UNIVERSITY PRESS, BUCKINGHAM, 1997 ISBN: 0-335-19754 X (pbk) £16.99 0-335-19755 8 (hbk) £50.00 Reviewed by Rae Vermeulen, LASER In occupational psychology, we are familiar with reviews of occupational tests both at Level A and Level B. In this book, the author presents concise reviews of broad health-related quality of life measures. Chapter two gives a brief overview of measurement theory including the familiar topics of reliability, validity and levels of measurement. Unfamiliar to most of us is a short section on utility ratings.