

IMPAIRED OR DISABLED?



An impairment relates to a person's actual abnormality or condition. The WHO defines impairment as 'any loss or abnormality of a psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function'.¹

Disability refers to people who have long term physical, sensory, cognitive, and or mental impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.²

The literature identifies two main models of disability: the medical model and the social model. Disability heavyweight academic, Finkelstein argues that all models have to fit their times and need to change with those times.³ The following paragraphs attempt to simplify a complex body of research.

The medical model of disability focuses on the individual's limitations and ways to reduce such impairments or ways of using technology to adapt the individual to society.

The social model of disability identifies systemic barriers, derogatory attitudes, and exclusion, which makes full inclusion difficult or impossible for individuals with impairment. A disability is a functional limitation that emerges from an impairment, but according to the social model, one which can be negated by adjustments to the built environment, social attitudes and social support.

In the often-used example of climbing stairs, the medical model aims to facilitate the person to navigate the stairs, whereas the social model would look to neutralise the need to climb the stairs by inserting a ramp or lift.

Inherently golf genuinely values people, and yet due to a narrow lived experience of how, where and by whom the game has been played, it can sometimes inadvertently cause unnecessary tension by asking players to conform to a set of unrealistic norms.

Golf clubs are made up of 'insiders' and so a club member, diagnosed with a life-changing condition or an acquired disability, they will likely receive support to continue their participation in the game, whereas an 'outsider' may not be so fortunate. On the one hand, the game is positioned as being a game for all, even though public perception is quite the contrary. On the other hand, the built environment and social structures culturally embedded in the game, are barriers to some that limit participation in a sport that has the opportunity to be one of, if not, the most inclusive sport of all.

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1 (2011) World Health Organisation - World Report on Disability

2 (2018) Professor Brett Smith et al., for Public Health England - Physical Activity for General Health Benefits in Disabled Adults

3 (2007) Finkelstein, V. - "The 'Social Model of Disability' and the Disability Movement."