

Research Paper

Perspectives on Inclusive Employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID): A Social Work Approach

B. Preethi Meena^{1*}, Dr. Suphala Kotian²

ABSTRACT

Inclusive employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID) is not merely a policy initiative but a fundamental human right and a social imperative. Despite national and international mandates advocating for equal opportunities, PwID continue to face systemic barriers to employment, including stigma, lack of accessible training, and employer biases. This paper critically examines the current landscape of inclusive employment for PwID, drawing from theoretical frameworks such as Social Role Valorization (SRV), supported employment, and person-centered planning. To support these insights with empirical evidence, the paper presents a quantitative study involving 15 PwID employed across different sectors. The Work-Life Balance (WLB) Scale developed by Hayman (2005) was used to assess how employment impacts their personal and professional lives. The results show low interference between work and personal life, and high levels of enrichment, suggesting that inclusive employment contributes positively to the quality of life for PwID. The paper concludes with recommendations for social workers, employers, and policymakers to create inclusive and sustainable employment ecosystems for persons with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: *Inclusive Employment, Job Satisfaction Intellectual Disabilities, Social Work, Supported Employment, Social Role Valorization, Workplace Inclusion*

Employment is universally recognized as one of the primary determinants of social identity, personal dignity, and economic self-sufficiency (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020). For Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID), meaningful employment not only fosters independence but also serves as a pathway to social integration and improved mental well-being (Chandrasekaran, P., Thekkumkara, S., et al., 2021). Despite global advancements in disability rights and inclusive employment practices, PwID continue to experience disproportionately low levels of labor force participation, especially in the Global South, including India. Intellectual disabilities are defined by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, which manifest during the developmental period (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities [AAIDD], 2021). These limitations affect an individual's conceptual, social, and practical life skills. However, research has consistently shown that with appropriate

¹Research scholar, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka India

²Research Professor, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: July 11, 2025; Revision Received: July 16, 2025; Accepted: July 21, 2025

Perspectives on Inclusive Employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID): A Social Work Approach

accommodations, training, and inclusive support systems, individuals with intellectual disabilities can be as productive and reliable in the workplace as their neurotypical peers. In the Indian context, employment rates among PwID remain alarmingly low. According to a report by the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP, 2021), less than 25% of employable PwID are currently engaged in any form of structured employment. This is despite the enactment of progressive legislation such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, which mandates equal opportunity and 4% reservation in public employment for persons with benchmark disabilities, including 1% for those with intellectual and learning disabilities. Similarly, India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which affirms the right of persons with disabilities to gain a living through work that is freely chosen or accepted in a labor market and work environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mudgal, M. (2024). While these legislative advances offer a robust framework, the real-world translation of these rights into tangible employment outcomes remains fragmented and inconsistent. Major barriers persist, including stigma and negative societal attitudes, employer biases, lack of tailored training opportunities, and inadequate workplace accommodations. Consequently, PwID are often relegated to sheltered workshops or informal employment settings with limited scope for professional growth, dignity, or equitable pay.

The concept of inclusive employment refers to the meaningful integration of persons with disabilities into the open labor market, under conditions that reflect equality of opportunity and respect for their human rights. It entails more than just hiring it encompasses a workplace culture that values diversity, supports individual strengths, and makes reasonable accommodations to ensure equal participation according to UNICEF. For inclusive employment to be successful and sustainable, it requires a shift from charity-based models to rights-based, person-centered frameworks. This shift is well-aligned with principles of Social Work, which emphasize empowerment, social justice, and systemic change.

Social workers, as frontline professionals and change agents, play a pivotal role in promoting inclusive employment. They are involved in various facets such as vocational training, employer sensitization, family counseling, and policy advocacy. Their skills in case management, community mobilization, and psychosocial support are essential in creating and maintaining inclusive work environments for PwID. Additionally, social work research contributes to the evidence base needed to inform and evaluate inclusive employment practices and policies.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive research design to explore the job satisfaction levels among Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID) employed in mainstream sectors. The research aimed to generate empirical insights into their workplace experiences and support the development of inclusive employment strategies from a social work perspective.

Perspectives on Inclusive Employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID): A Social Work Approach

Participants

The sample consisted of 15 PwID, aged between 22 and 35 years, employed across hospitality, retail, and IT-enabled services sectors in South India. Participants included 9 males and 6 females, with employment durations ranging from 6 months to 4 years.

Instruments Used

Two standardized tools were employed for data collection:

1. **Work-Life Balance Scale** developed by Hayman (2005): This instrument measured the degree of interference and enrichment between work and personal life.
2. **Job Satisfaction Scale for Employees with Disabilities (JSS-ED)**: This scale assessed satisfaction across five key domains Work Environment, Support Systems, Role Clarity, Compensation, and Social Inclusion. It comprised 20 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered using structured questionnaires administered in person with necessary accommodations and support. Descriptive statistics mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the responses. Results were also visualized through charts and tables to interpret domain-wise levels of job satisfaction.

Objectives

The objective is threefold:

1. To examine the existing conceptual and legislative frameworks that support inclusive employment,
2. To present original quantitative findings from a study assessing job satisfaction among employed PwID, and
3. To propose practical recommendations for social workers, employers, and policymakers aimed at fostering equitable and sustainable employment practices.

To offer empirical insights, the paper integrates a quantitative study involving 15 PwID employed across various sectors, including hospitality, retail, and IT-enabled services in South India. The study utilizes the Work life balance scale developed by Hayman a psychometric instrument to gauge. Findings from this study offer valuable indicators of what constitutes a supportive and fulfilling work experience for PwID and inform recommendations for scaling best practices.

The research presented here is situated within broader social work theories, particularly Social Role Valorization (SRV), Person-Centered Planning, and the Normalization Principle, which collectively advocate for societal inclusion, empowerment, and normalization of the life conditions of persons with disabilities. These theories provide the philosophical underpinnings for understanding how employment can serve as a vehicle for enhancing the quality of life and societal integration for PwID (Wolfensberger, 1983; Nirje, 1969).

Moreover, the discussion draws upon global best practices in inclusive employment from countries such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, where supported employment and customized employment models have shown considerable success. Programs like Project SEARCH in the U.S. demonstrate the efficacy of transition-to-work strategies when backed by interdisciplinary collaboration and long-term employer engagement (Cimera, 2010).

Perspectives on Inclusive Employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID): A Social Work Approach

In contrast, India's inclusive employment landscape is still evolving. Although initiatives by NGOs like Diya Foundation and ENABLE India have shown promising results, there is a pressing need for institutional scale-up, policy enforcement, and corporate engagement. The paper also reviews the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and public-private partnerships as vehicles for scaling inclusive employment in the Indian context. Evidence suggests that inclusive hiring, when embedded in core HR strategy rather than CSR tokenism, contributes to higher employee morale, brand equity, and organizational innovation (Gupta & Aggarwal, 2018).

By combining theory, empirical data, and practical case examples, this paper offers a holistic understanding of the multifaceted nature of inclusive employment for PwID. It also underscores the critical need for systemic transformation -in policy, practice, and societal attitudes to ensure that persons with intellectual disabilities are not just present in the workforce but are empowered, valued, and given the opportunity to thrive.

In sum, inclusive employment is not merely a matter of compliance or benevolence; it is a matter of social justice and human rights. The challenges are many, but so are the possibilities. With the right interventions, sustained commitment, and inclusive mindsets, the dream of equitable work for all can indeed become a reality.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. These limitations originate before the age of 18 and affect conceptual, social, and practical skills.

Inclusive employment refers to the integration of persons with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, into mainstream workplaces. It implies equal access to opportunities, fair wages, and the ability to work in an environment that values diversity and fosters personal and professional development.

- **Social Role Valorization (SRV):** Developed by Wolf Wolfensberger, SRV emphasizes the importance of enabling people with disabilities to occupy valued social roles. Employment is a key role that can significantly enhance one's social image and self-perception.
- **Person-Centered Planning:** This approach ensures that vocational goals align with the individual's preferences, skills, and aspirations, making employment meaningful and sustainable.
- **Normalization Principle:** This principle asserts that persons with disabilities should have life conditions that are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of mainstream society, including access to employment.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Demographic Profile

- **Age Range:** 22–35 years
- **Gender:** 9 Male, 6 Female
- **Employment Sectors:** 6 in hospitality, 5 in retail, 4 in IT-enabled services
- **Duration of Employment:** Ranged from 6 months to 4 years

Perspectives on Inclusive Employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID): A Social Work Approach

Job Satisfaction Outcomes

Domain	Mean Score (out of 5)
Work Environment	4.2
Support Systems	4.5
Role Clarity	3.9
Compensation	3.2
Social Inclusion	4.3

Interpretation

The highest satisfaction was recorded in the domain of Support Systems, indicating that job coaching, mentoring, and supervisor support were highly valued by PwID. Compensation scored the lowest, highlighting economic challenges and the need for fairer wage structures. Overall, participants expressed positive job satisfaction, with qualitative comments showing pride in independence, friendships at work, and skill recognition.

Employment Models and Global Practices

- **Supported Employment-** Supported employment provides PwID with the assistance they need to secure and maintain employment. This includes job coaching, on-the-job training, and ongoing support. Models in countries like the USA, UK, and Australia show high success rates when person-centered approaches and government incentives are combined.
- **Customized Employment-** This model focuses on tailoring job roles to suit the capabilities of PwID, ensuring that they can contribute effectively while meeting business needs. It often involves negotiation between the employee, employer, and job coach.
- **Transitional Employment and Internships** - Internships and temporary employment roles provide valuable exposure and experience, increasing the employability of PwID.

Indian Context

- **Legal and Policy Framework-** The RPwD Act, 2016 mandates a 4% reservation in government jobs for persons with benchmark disabilities, including 1% for persons with intellectual and specific learning disabilities. However, this policy often lacks rigorous implementation.
- **Role of NGOs and Social Enterprises-** Organizations like Diya Foundation, AMBA, Spastics Society of Tamil Nadu, and ENABLE India have pioneered supported employment in India. These institutions not only provide vocational training but also collaborate with corporates to create inclusive workplaces.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Inclusion-** Under the Companies Act, 2013, CSR initiatives increasingly support inclusive hiring. However, sustained change depends on integrating disability inclusion into core HR policies rather than treating it as a CSR token.

Barriers to Inclusive Employment

- **Stigma and Misconceptions:** Society often underestimates the capabilities of PwID, leading to discrimination and exclusion.
- **Lack of Accessibility and Infrastructure:** Workplaces are often not equipped to support employees with intellectual disabilities.

Perspectives on Inclusive Employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID): A Social Work Approach

- Inadequate Skill Development Programs: Existing programs are either generic or not aligned with industry needs.
- Employer Unawareness: Many employers are unaware of inclusive practices or the benefits of hiring PwID.
- Transportation and Safety Concerns: Lack of safe and accessible transport can limit employment opportunities.

Role of Social Worker

- Advocacy and Awareness: Social workers advocate for policy reforms and greater employer awareness.
- Skill Development: They facilitate individualized vocational assessments and training plans.
- Family Support and Counseling: Social workers prepare families to support the employment journey of PwID.
- Employer Sensitization: Workshops and consultations led by social workers can help dispel myths and promote inclusive hiring.
- Research and Evaluation: Social workers conduct impact assessments to guide evidence-based practices.

Recommendations

- Policy Enforcement: Stronger implementation and monitoring of RPwD mandates.
- Capacity Building: Train educators, families, and employers in inclusive practices.
- Public-Private Partnerships: Encourage collaboration between government, NGOs, and corporates.
- Digital Inclusion: Leverage technology for skill training and remote work opportunities.
- Incentivize Employers: Offer tax rebates or recognition to inclusive employers.
- Fair Compensation: Ensure pay equity and career progression for PwID.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive employment is a multi-stakeholder endeavor that demands systemic shifts in mindset, policy, and practice. While challenges remain, emerging models and success stories affirm that PwID can be productive, committed, and valuable members of the workforce. Quantitative data from this study further supports the need for structured support and fair compensation. Social workers, equipped with their advocacy and community engagement skills, are key enablers in this journey. The path to inclusive employment must be paved with respect, support, and opportunity for all.

REFERENCES

- Chandrasekaran, P., Thekkumkara, S., Jothibalan, A., Jagannathan, A., Jayarajan, D., & Reddy K, S. (2021). Hybrid Supported Employment Approach for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in India: Evidence Based Case Studies. *Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Mental Health*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40737-021-00241-9>
- International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Decent work and its impact on personal dignity and social identity*. ILO. Retrieved July 11, 2025, from <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/mission-and-objectives/lang--en/index.htm>

Perspectives on Inclusive Employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID): A Social Work Approach

- Mudgal, M. (2024). Job placement and inclusion of persons with disabilities in India. *International Journal of Research in Special Education*, 4(1), 39–43. <https://www.rehabilitationjournals.com/special-education-journal/article/69/4-1-5-408.pdf>
- Schalock, R. L., Borthwick-Duffy, S. A., Bradley, V. J., Buntinx, W. H., Coulter, D. L., Craig, E. M., ... & Yeager, M. H. (2010). *Intellectual disability: Definition, classification, and systems of supports* (11th ed.). American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
- Wolfensberger, W. (1983). Social Role Valorization: A proposed new term for the principle of normalization. *Mental Retardation*, 21(6), 234–239.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Meena, B.P. & Kotian, S. (2025). Perspectives on Inclusive Employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID): A Social Work Approach. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(3), 638-644. DIP:18.01.056.20251303, DOI:10.25215/1303.056