

Social Implications of People with Disabilities in India – Critical Review on Challenges and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Disability as an identity and entity exists at the intersection of multiple vulnerabilities — social, economic and gender, with each facet requiring careful consideration when conceptualising action for equity. Globally, there are **1.3 billion people live with some form of disability** of them, about 80 percent live in developing countries further about 70 percent of them live in rural areas. Current systems are designed for persons without disabilities and end up being exclusionary to people with disabilities, resulting in them experiencing higher instances of poverty, lack of access to education and opportunities, informality and other forms of social and economic discrimination. Enhancing Employment Opportunities, Improving Accessibility and Infrastructure, Raising Awareness and Sensitivity, Strengthening Legal and Policy Support are some of the solutions. This paper is focused to provide a critical review on social implications and some solutions to overcome these implications.

Keywords: *Social Implications, Persons with Disabilities, Disability Rehabilitation*

According to the world bank, 4% to 8% (i.e., roughly 40 – 90 million) population in India have some kind of disability. The NSSO estimates that 2.2 percent of the population are disabled. The NFHS-5 Survey (2019–21) found the prevalence of disabilities around 4.52 percent among Indian population. According to Rights of persons with Disabilities Act 2016 “Person with disability” means a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with others finds barriers, hinders his potential and the effective participation in society. Disability is not a single term but an umbrella term as it is characterised by impairments, limitations in activities and restrictions in participations. Disabilities according to RPWD act are of 21 types like Intellectual Disability, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, locomotor disabilities etc. Challenge of disability is largely manifested in social position where social interactions between the people takes place rather than in an individual’s medical condition.

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Social Implications

Limited Awareness

The first hurdle is the lack of awareness about the government schemes and benefits available for people with disabilities. This issue is more prevalent in rural areas where information dissemination is challenging.

Lack of Accessibility and Infrastructure

Many public places, such as schools, hospitals, transport systems, and government offices, are not designed to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. This limits their mobility, education, health care, and participation in social and civic activities. According to UNICEF, children with disabilities are often excluded from such spaces and therefore miss out on the critical initiatives that aim to improve their health and well-being.

Limited Access to Education and Employment

Persons with disabilities in rural areas often face restricted access to education and employment opportunities. The lack of inclusive educational institutions and vocational training centres can hinder their ability to acquire necessary skills and participate in the workforce. Exclusion from Developmental Schemes: Some developmental schemes may inadvertently exclude persons with disabilities, leading to their exclusion from critical initiatives, e.g., a vaccination campaign that does not take into account the accessibility and communication needs of persons with disabilities, such as ramps, sign language interpreters, or braille materials.

Perception and Stigma

Persons with disabilities are sometimes viewed as objects of charity rather than as autonomous beings capable of making meaningful contributions to society. This perception can lead to social stigma, discrimination, and exclusion from decision-making processes, further exacerbating their challenges.

Agricultural Dependence and Climate Change Risks

Rural areas in India often have a high dependence on agriculture, and persons with disabilities in these areas are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Reduced access to clean water and food, hurricanes, heatwaves, and floods pose heightened risks to their livelihoods, health, and overall well-being.

Lack of Legal and Policy Support

India has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007, and enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD) in 2016, which provides a legal framework for the protection and empowerment of people with disabilities. However, there are gaps and challenges in the implementation and enforcement of these laws and policies, and many people with disabilities are still unaware of their entitlements and remedies.

Solutions

The Spark Project: The ILO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in collaboration with the Women's Development Corporation in Maharashtra, are implementing the Sparking Disability Inclusive Rural Transformation (SPARK) project, through this project, persons with disabilities were put in the lead, being identified from the villages, and trained as Disability Inclusion Facilitators.

The DIFs engage with the community, persons with disabilities, caregivers of persons with disabilities, women from self-help groups and other stakeholders to raise awareness about disability inclusion and barriers to inclusion.

The DIFs identify women with disabilities and mainstream them in existing self-help groups for social and economic development, where these women have been able to access funds to start an enterprise.

The SPARK project has been able to bring an attitudinal shift towards persons with disabilities, right from the societal to administrative levels.

What Measures Should be Taken to Improve Conditions of Persons with Disabilities?

Enhancing Employment Opportunities

There is a need to create more job opportunities for persons with disabilities, and to provide them with adequate training, skill development, and support. The government and the private sector should implement the provisions of the RPWD Act 2016, which mandate 4 percent reservation for persons with disabilities in government jobs, and incentives for employers who employ persons with disabilities.

CSR initiatives can also play a role in promoting inclusive and accessible workplaces for persons with disabilities.

Improving Accessibility and Infrastructure

There is a need to make public places, such as schools, hospitals, transport systems, and government offices, more accessible and user-friendly for persons with disabilities.

- This can be done by adopting universal design principles, providing ramps, lifts, signages, tactile paths, assistive devices, and other facilities that cater to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.
- The government should also ensure the implementation and monitoring of the Accessible India Campaign, which aims to make public buildings and transport systems accessible for persons with disabilities.

Raising Awareness and Sensitivity

There is a need to raise awareness and sensitise people about the rights and abilities of persons with disabilities, and to combat the myths and misconceptions that surround them.

- This can be done by conducting campaigns, workshops, seminars, and cultural events that showcase the talents and achievements of persons with disabilities, and by involving them in decision-making and leadership roles.
- The media and the education system can also play a role in creating a positive and respectful image of persons with disabilities, and in promoting a culture of inclusion and diversity.

Strengthening Legal and Policy Support

There is a need to strengthen the legal and policy framework for the protection and empowerment of persons with disabilities, and to ensure its effective implementation and enforcement.

- The government should allocate adequate resources and funds for the welfare schemes and programs for persons with disabilities, and monitor their outcomes and impact.

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- The government should also ensure the participation and consultation of persons with disabilities and their organisations in the formulation and review of laws and policies that affect them.
- The government should also raise awareness and the capacity of the judiciary, the police, and the administration to deal with the issues and grievances of persons with disabilities.

Capacity-Building at Grassroots Level: To bridge the gap between government policies and the people they are meant for, there is a need for capacity-building at the grassroots level. Community leaders play a crucial role in advocating for the rights and benefits of persons with disabilities, and their training is essential to ensure the effective implementation of these initiatives.

CONCLUSION

There is a need to practice various guidelines and expert recommendations for emergency and public health planning with specified steps to include people with disability, particularly at the local level. Even in noncrisis situation, people with disabilities encounter problems including inaccessible services, lack of appropriate transport to and from healthcare facilities, out-of-pocket expenditure, stigma, and discrimination at every point. Thus, research is required to explore the effectiveness of interventions to improve access to healthcare for disabled people. Also, there is a need to decentralize and provide timely, affordable, and consistent access to good quality disability-related services, including rehabilitation, such as through community-based interventions.

Evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to address persistent biases in health systems and to ensure all services are inclusive of and responsive to the needs of people with different types of requirements is critical for planning. Furthermore, information systems used to track health and other outcomes during crises are required to include data on individuals with disability to enable real-time disaggregation to understand the impact on this population and monitor whether these people are being adequately reached and included in response activities.

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Social Implications of People with Disabilities in India – Critical Review on Challenges and Solutions

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Conflict of Interest

I Declared there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to this research study.

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