



Challenges to Persons with Disabilities in Pakistan: A Review of Literature

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Abstract: This study is based on the review of available literature to explore the problems faced by persons with disabilities in Pakistan. However, only those persons were focused who were physically handicapped. In order to probe into the problems faced by this weaker section of society, different books, research papers, newspapers and online sources were extensively reviewed. The study summarizes that this marginalized section of society is faced with multiple problems, chief among them are education, health and employment. Owing to their disability and attitudinal problems from society, very few of them complete their education, and most of them drop out in the early levels of education. In addition, there is a lack of health facilities, due to which they are vulnerable to chronic diseases like COVID-19. The lack of education and lack of opportunities have created employment problems for them. The study recommends that persons with disabilities should be given educational opportunities as have been given to able-bodied persons. Furthermore, they should also be given jobs quota not only in government jobs rather in the private sector as well.

Introduction

The term "disability" is a very comprehensive term and every country has defined it differently. Therefore, there is a lack of a universally accepted definition (Hussain, Munir, & Ibrar, 2020). According to (Ahmed, Khan, and Nasem, 2011), a person can be called a disabled who, due to disease, injury, or who inherited defects and is unable to do a job or join any profession. These include persons who have a visual impairment, hearing problems and are mentally and physically disabled.

Worldwide, one billion of the total population is suffering from disability, whereas the number of disabled persons is more in developing countries (Braithwaite & Mont, 2009). These persons with disabilities (PWDs) belonged to

various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (World Health Organization, 2011). Pakistan is the world's fifth most populous country and ranks the second largest South Asian country. The sixth population and housing census held in 2017 reveals Pakistan's population has increased by 57 per cent, from 132.3 million in 1998 to 207.7 million. It also reveals that men constitute (51%) while women (49%) of the total population. Pakistan is a signatory to various international agreements for the provision of equal rights to the women – the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, *Beijing Platform for Action*, the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women*, and the *Sustainable Development Goals* (UN Women,

[2021](#)). Throughout the world, fulfillment of the needs of PWDs is considered a sacred duty by the society. In this connection, a celebration of the year of the Disabled Persons 1981 under the umbrella of the United Nations is a symbol for the creation of awareness regarding the needs, problems and prospects for PWDs (Farooq, [2012](#)).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) asks for the rehabilitation and provision of maximum facilities to PWDs. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clearly elaborates that due to a disability, a person cannot be denied access to his/her basic human rights (Singal, [2016](#)). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework takes into account of seven targets, which clearly refer to persons with disabilities, and six further targets on persons in a vulnerable state, which include persons with disabilities (World Bank, [2021](#)).

In Pakistan, the Directorate General of Special Education and the Department of Social Welfare is responsible for looking after and meeting the needs of PWDs. After the enactment of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, the functions of this directorate have been delegated to the provinces. Many other laws regarding PWDs have been enacted since the 1980s which includes the *Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance 1981* (Ahmed, Khan, & Nasem, 2011). After that, the *National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (2002)* and a *National Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities (2006)* were introduced. These were followed by the *Accessibility Code of Pakistan, 2006*, the *Special Citizens Act, 2008*, and *Special Citizens (Right to Concessions in Movement) Act, 2009*. Still, these laws could not be implemented in the real sense. Moreover, Pakistan has also ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)* organized in the United Nations general assembly in 2008. The Government of Pakistan approved the UNCRPD on 5th July 2011 (Rieser, [2012](#)).

The world disability day is celebrated throughout the world on 3rd December every year by organizing seminars and awareness-raising walks. Functions are also organized by private sector organizations working for the rights of PWDs, where disabled persons and their family members are invited to share their experiences with other people regarding their needs and issues. Still, in many developing countries including Pakistan, the realization of the problems of this marginalized section of the society is still a distant dream (Razzaq & Rathore, [2020](#)).

As far as the problems of these vulnerable segment is concerned, accurate information is not available regarding their lives in Pakistan. This weaker segment of the society has been ignored by the people as well as government functionaries in all fields of life. The voices of these marginalized people are unheard while their problems are unseen (Singal, Bhatti, & Malik, [2011](#)). The available facilities are not sufficient, and the government seems less interested in lessening their miseries. They need support not only in the form of provision of services but also need positive attitude from the public at large (Mitra, Posarac, & Vick, [2013](#)). So far, very little research has been done in the field of disability in Pakistan. The current study has, therefore, conducted to reach a conclusion to know about the problems faced by PWDs in availing education, health, and employment opportunities in Pakistan.

Objectives of the Study

The study by reviewing the available literature, aims to identify the problems faced by PWDs in accessing education, health facilities, and employment opportunities in contemporary Pakistani society. The study also recommends various steps for the solution of problems faced by this weaker section of society.

Methodology

The study is based on the review of existing literature whereby online books, journals and magazines were consulted in order to gain insight into the issues faced by PWDs in accessing education and health services in Pakistani society. Newspapers and online sources were also accessed for getting updated information on the subject.

Literature Review

Education

Education which is the basic right of every citizen of the country is essential for preparing them for their future roles. PWDs are also part of this society and they have the right to get an education so that they can lead a self-sufficient life (Ahmad & Yousaf, [2011](#)). As education is the need of every individual, PWDs are not given equal chances of getting an education (Hafeez, [2020](#)). In rural areas of Pakistan, there is a lack of special schools for PWDs. The available schools are situated in urban centers which are inaccessible for the people of rural areas. In addition, the special schools lack trained teachers, specially designed curriculum, lack of resources, poor infrastructure and high dropout rate (Arsh & Darain, [2019](#)). Similarly, the private sector which is actively engaged in the provision of education to the children is inaccessible for poor parents as they want to spend money on the education of their children without disabilities (The Economist Intelligence Unit, [2014](#)).

Globally, there are 150 million children living with disabilities. Mostly, they are not provided with equal opportunities of education due to their disabilities. Children with disabilities are 10 times less likely to attend school than those without disabilities. Even if they attend school, they use to drop out early and the level of their education is not at par with their other classmates. In addition, the infrastructure of the school is also in poor condition (Malik, Raza, Rose, & Singal, [2020](#)). Moreover, the teachers are untrained and lack understanding of the needs of

these special children (Plan International, [2021](#)). Students with Disabilities (SWDs) drop out before the completion of their levels due to multiple reasons which include discrimination, lack of training in inclusive education and lack of accessible schools (Awais & Ameen, [2015](#)).

During the past few years, there has been an increased global realization for addressing the discrimination in society. The Sustainable Development Goals also stresses on disability and advocating for right based approach where development efforts include all marginalized people of the society. In the context of Pakistan, the focus is on poverty, negative social attitudes and discrimination due to which the miseries of these PWDs have increased manifold (Singal et al., [2020](#)).

Education is considered as the main tool for empowerment of girls (Rueckert, [2019](#)). In the context of Pakistan, girls without disabilities face difficulties in getting education due to cultural norms (World Bank, [2020](#)). While the girls with disabilities are more prone to these constraints (Sherwood and Pearce, [2016](#)). Families think that as the male prefer to marry a girl having no disability, therefore, they invest less on Girl with Disability (GWDs). In addition, disability is considered as stigma due to which they use to hide such girls and don't allow them to get an education (Rohwerder, [2017](#)).

Another constraint to girl's education is distance of the school from the home due to which girls either do not attend the school, or drop out at early levels because the parents do not allow their daughters to go to school which is far away (Fahd et al, [1997](#)). In Pakistan, special education centers are located in urban areas which are inaccessible for poor families while rural areas lack such facilities. Similarly, education of girls with disabilities are not kept on the top priority by the head of the house (UNFPA and Women Enabled International, [2021](#)). Another reason for the high dropout rate GWDs is lack of proper washroom facility in the schools for GWDs. The educational institutions lack

accessible classrooms and washrooms. In addition, GWDs need special assistance during their menstruation. Owing to lack of such facilities the parents of such students are demotivated to send their children to schools (Rousso, [2003](#)). In Pakistan, most of the educational institutions have no arrangements for sign language practice for the deaf and no brail teaching for students with visual problems. This situation is not encouraging both for the children with disabilities and for the literacy of the country as well.

In Pakistani society, PWDs have less chances of completing their education as compared to person having no disability. This situation became more badly when COVID-19 resulted in to closure of educational institutions throughout the country (Nasir & Hameed, [2021](#)). To reduce the impacts of disruption in education, various measures were introduced for online learning. However, SWDs were facing various problems in online learning which includes unavailability of internet, required instruments and material. Resultantly, many SWDs lagged behaving especially students with intellectual disabilities (United Nations, [2020](#)).

The education of girls with disabilities is more affected by COVID -19 which is a major setback in the rights of the whole generation of GWDS (Dlamini, [2021](#)).

Health

In developing nations, the health sector is not on the top of the agenda of the governments where these governments allocate less for health care (Rizvi, 2021). As a result, the marginalized section of society including PWD mostly depends on their families for treatment. In Pakistan, 62% of men with disability and 87% of women with disability are financially dependent on their families and relatives. Similarly, in India, inadequate equipment/hospital infrastructure were the major causes of the sufferings for PWDs (Ahmad, [2013](#)). In Pakistan, PWD with physical impairments reported significant physical

hurdles, due to the built environments, in reaching out to health services (Rathore & Qureshi, [2021](#)). These include transportation, and outdoor and indoor environments in which health services are provided, including buildings, waiting areas, washrooms, examination tables, beds etc. In Pakistan, this weaker section of the society lacks access to reproductive health services and lack sufficient know how about preventive measures for tuberculosis, hepatitis, and HIV/AIDS (Gudlavalleti, [2018](#)).

COVID-19 has impacted different countries in different manner. For instance in United Kingdom, probably there are 11 million in United Kingdom who are suffering from diabetes or hypertension due to which they are more prone to COVID-19 (British Academy, [2021](#)). Owing to their disability and restrictions on movements, they have been negatively impacted and they need supportive devices like walking sticks and wheelchairs (Wilbur and Hunt, [2020](#)). They may also need more assistance to follow basic hygiene practices like washing hands time and again in order to spread COVID19.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, these PWDs were more prone to this infection. They faced more problems in accessing health care facilities due to unavailability of information and lack of healthcare professionals and medicine. In addition, due to lock down and stay at home they found themselves helpless due to unavailability of medicine making their lives more difficult (United Nations, [2020](#)). According to the United Nations, “Persons with disabilities in the world are among the hardest hit by COVID-19” (United Nations, 2021). PWDs have a high risk of COVID-19 infection (United Nations, [2021](#)). Owing to the mobility issues, it is difficult for PWDs to wash hands frequently or keep social distancing as they are totally dependent on others for the fulfillment of their basic needs. Since they have limited movement, therefore, they are more at risk of developing obesity, cardiac and lungs diseases. In Pakistan, PWDs faced discrimination in getting healthcare services even before the

onset of COVID-19 pandemic (Rathore & Qureshi, [2021](#)).

Employment

Unemployment or lack of suitable job opportunities is the major problem confronted by PWDs in Pakistan (Roggero et al., [2005](#)). There are various reasons for lack of employment opportunities which includes lack of access to the workplace, unavailability of equipment, inaccessible road and rail network and unapproachable transport systems. In addition, attitudinal barriers like negative behavior, social stigma and abuse by the employer are the various barriers to employment of PWDs (Wickenden et al., [2020](#)). In Pakistan, PWDs are dependent on their families for the fulfillment of their different needs. Owing to this dependency PWDs consider themselves as burden on their families. Resultantly this dependency leads to loss of respect and honor and they are not treated properly (Ali, [2007](#)).

To protect the rights of PWD's and to make them useful members of society by providing them work opportunities, the constitution of Pakistan guarantees the rights of PWDs to employment opportunities. In this regard, the provision of fixed job quota for PWDs in both government and private sector is the major policy step. The ex-president of Pakistan, Zia-ul-Haq in 1981 issued "Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance (DPO-1981)" in which 1% job quota was reserved for them, whereas in 1998 Prime minister Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif increased PWD's job quota from 1% to 2%. At present, the job quota for PWDs is 2% in all provinces of Pakistan apart from Punjab province where it is raised to 3 percent in 2015 (Arsh et al., [2019](#)).

Although Pakistan has introduced various policies for PWDs since 2002 which clearly shows that Pakistan is part of those nations who have not only ratified ILO Convention 159 but has also tried to make sure job quota for PWDs. Despite these efforts on the part of the government of

Pakistan, PWDs are still deprived of their basic rights and are neglected in all sphere of life (Siddiqi, [2020](#)).

Conclusion

The study summarizes that PWDs are that segment of society who are suffering not only due to their disability but also due to the attitude of people at large. In addition, the government functionaries are also least interested in the solution of their genuine problems. Owing to this inapt attitude of the people and lack of attention from the government, these PWDs are lagging behind in education. There is lack of educational institutions, especially in rural areas for these vulnerable people. The existing schools which are located in urban areas are inaccessible for people of rural areas. The teachers of ordinary schools are not well trained in the art of teaching to SWDs. Educational institutions are inaccessible, whereas class rooms are poorly designed which does not fulfill the needs of SWDs. There is a lack of ramps and other assistive devices for facilitation of these vulnerable students. Girls with disabilities are facing so many problems in getting an education. The family members are less interested in their education as they consider them as burden and source of shame for the family. The family members of PWD tries to invest on education of boys than girls as they think that in future the boys can become the earning members and will contribute to the purse of the family.

PWDs also have issues in getting the required health facilities due to which their miseries are increasing day by day. The doctors and nurses are not trained in handling PWDs during their treatment process. They lack access to health facilities due to transportation problems while the buildings, waiting areas and washrooms are also designed in such a way which is creating more problems for PWDs. During COVID-19 these PWDs were more exposed to infection as they were facing other health related problems due to their movement issues. Those who on account of their physical disability were suffering from

obesity, hypertension, and were more exposed to COVID-19. Furthermore, due to lock down their access to hospitals and clinics was limited due to which they were suffering from tension, anxiety and depression. Girls and women with disabilities who were pregnant passed through difficult times due to lack of access to health facilities during lockdown measures.

As far as employment opportunities are concerned, there is discrimination in the provision of jobs to PWDs. Although various laws and policies have been introduced but practically those legislation and policies are not implemented for the provision of jobs. That's why they are suffering from various socio-economic problems.

Recommendations

The study on the basis of findings recommends that for addressing the problems of PWDs, the government should keep the needs of this weaker segment of society on top of the agenda. Government should allocate more resources in the budget, especially for education and health of those who are living in rural areas. The doctors and nursing staff should be trained in the treatment of PWDs while mobile health units should be introduced to cater for their health needs at their door steps.

Education is also one of the main problems faced by PWDs. In order to address this problem, inclusive education should be introduced at all levels so that they can get education easily. Disabled friendly transport should be introduced which should have the lift facility.

The religious leaders i.e. the Imam of the mosque should guide the people regarding the rights of PWDs in the light of the Holy Quran and Hadith. The print and electronic media can also play an effective role in creating awareness regarding provision of maximum facilities to PWDs.

Professional social workers can also play a pivotal role in helping them solve their problems

on a sustainable basis. As these professional social workers are trained in the art of provision of assistance to all vulnerable sections of society including PWDs, therefore, they should be involved in the identification of their problems. In addition, they can help the government departments as well as NGOs in the solution of their problems.

The government should establish training institutes of PWDs where they should be taught new skills regarding mobile repairing, software development and other online skills so that they can earn their livelihood in a respectable manner.

Since the authors of this study did not focused girls with disability (GPWDs) due to the nature of the study, other researchers are therefore, suggested that GPWDs should be more focused as they are the most disadvantaged and the most vulnerable segment of the society if they are compared with the normal persons of the society.

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