

ENHANCING WORK AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWDs)

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ABSTRACT--Worldwide, it has been estimated that 15% of the total population have developed one or other type of disability. Among these persons with disabilities (PWDs), 80% belong to the working-age group. Mostly, PWD's are being denied to get involved in decent work and employment opportunities. They face attitudinal, physical and communication barriers during their daily life, especially at work. They lack social protection and live in extreme poverty as disability and poverty is a vicious cycle. It is evident that in low and middle-income countries, working-age persons having a disability are less employed than persons without disabilities. Less involvement in the labour market is the leading factor towards poverty of PWD's. To address these issues, different countries have formulated laws that prohibit discrimination based on a person's disability. Implementing such laws helps in the empowerment of persons with disabilities. Rehabilitative services in terms of vocational training, employment opportunities, skill development and self-employment for PWD's helps in their inclusion in society and restoring their capacities to get decent work and employment.

Keywords-- Persons with Disabilities, Workplace, Employment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Disability has been defined as “an umbrella term covering impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions” (The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, 2001). The Preamble of the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 mentions disability as “an evolving concept”, and lays stress that “disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. The same convention has been ratified by one hundred and sixty five countries upto the year 2016. Persons with disabilities (PWD's) face different problems in developing employable skills and getting good employment opportunities.

PWD's usually face numerous problems in workplace environment. The work and employment opportunities of PWD's are widely affected by the understanding of the models of disability accepted by employers. The models help in explaining various limitations and are essential to understand as they have a crucial role in framing the policies and schemes by the government and society in assisting to the fulfilment of the needs of PWD's (Shapiro 1994). Several models have emerged in the development of disability studies, but there are three essential models, such as the “Medical Model”, the “Social Model” and the “Biopsychosocial Model”. The Medical model is

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considered as one of the essential model in designing the strategies in the field of disability for over a century (Myhill and Blanck 2009). The main principle of the model is that disability is the outcome of health conditions and does not include the environment related factors of the individuals in which they live. Thus, the medical model considers person's health conditions while framing policies, interventions and other rehabilitative measures for them (Shapiro 1994). It views PWD'S with a medical condition who lack access to rehabilitative services, hence the focus is to provide rehabilitation services for different impairments (Myhill and Blanck 2009). It advocates for the proper care and all time support for PWD's. Following such approaches, PWD's have been excluded from participating in the daily routine work (Blanck 2008). As a result, it affects the employment opportunities of such persons and prohibits them from taking part in the decision-making process, becoming financially self-dependent and develop their skills regarding vocational training. Moreover, it strengthens the prevailing negative attitudes among employers and other community members regarding the incompetence of PWD's to work effectively (Shapiro 1994). The Nations that strictly follow the medical model of disability recruit very few PWD's and once employed, they are kept in separate settings (Lunt and Thornton 1994).

Another model of disability that has been acknowledged all over the world in modern times is the "social model of disability" (Myhill and Blanck 2009). As per this model, disability is the outcome of environmental, social and attitudinal obstacles that do not allow PWD's to make active participation in community activities (Blanck et al. 2009). It indicates that barriers are reduced, numerous individuals will develop capabilities and get more prominent chance to take part in the community activities, instead of possessing disabilities and the incompetence to make participation in social life. The social model varies from the medical model since it puts the emphasis on society rather than person's impairments. The model identifies the distinctive qualities and needs of every person, while the medical model provides same intervention approaches for similar disabilities (Shapiro 1994).

The "biopsychosocial model" was accepted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and is the approach that takes both medical and social models of disability into account (Jette 2006; Wright 2004). The WHO (2001) said that disability should not be understood in isolation and should not include only medical or social models of disability. In the biopsychosocial model, disability is seen as the outcome of the interaction between biological, psychological and social aspects. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, follows the biopsychosocial approach to deal with disability and recognizes the socio-environmental aspects, socio-demographic factors, and behavioural aspects (Jette 2006). The model is making advancements with the progressive improvements in medical and social models of disability (Wright 2004). Since the model is new, its effect on employment opportunities for PWD's is uncertain. On the other hand, it emphasizes on social and environmental factors, and it is realistic to accept that, similar to the social model, it would positively affect work and employment opportunities of PWD's.

II. Participation of PWD's in the Labour Market

PWD's and their family members need to work for their inclusion, and it can be made possible once they get access to work and livelihood opportunities, overcoming the vicious cycle of poverty and disability (Yeo R, Moore K, 2003). Some employers believe that PWD's are not qualified to perform quality work (Roberts S et al., 2004). However, it is evident that PWD's have proper skills, faithfulness, less percentage of absenteeism, and number of organisations has shown that it is useful and profitable to recruit PWD's (Unger D., 2002). PWD's must make active participation in the labour workforce by increasing mobilization of human resources. It is the responsibility of community members to respect the dignity of PWD's and enhance social cohesion. They need to get full freedom regarding decision making about their lives and to improve their capacities to higher levels (UNCRPD, 2006).

III. Wages

PWD's who are employed are paid less than those without disabilities, especially women with disabilities are more vulnerable as they get less paid as compared to men with disabilities. The wage gap persisting between two genders is alarming (International Labour Organization, 2007). Evidence-based studies in the United States show that PWD's who face discrimination get less wages and face problems of unemployment whereas prejudice affects very few men with disabilities and does not influence their wages (Baldwin ML, Johnson WG., 1994).

IV. Barriers to access labour market

PWD's are underprivileged when it comes to the labour market and employment. They may not get access to educational opportunities, capacity building programmes or other economic assistance and results in their exclusion from the labour market. The workplace environment can be inaccessible, and there could be negative attitudes of employers towards PWD's. Social protection organisations provide incentives for PWD's to not participate in employment and thus receive disability benefits (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010).

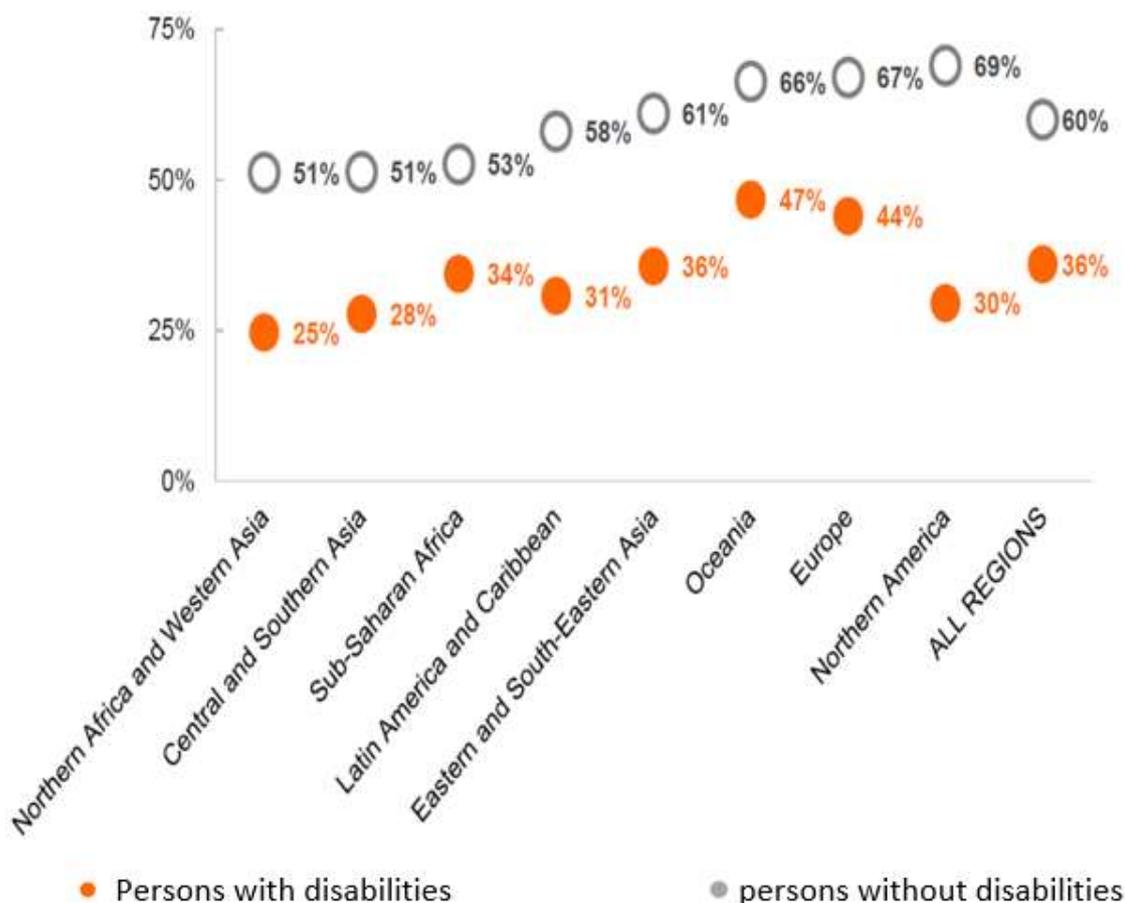


Figure 1: Employment to population ratios for persons aged 15 years and over, by disability status, by geographical region, in 2006-2016

Note: Based on data from 91 countries and territories. For some countries, data are for the age group 15 to 64
 Source: ESCAP10, ESCWA37, Eurostat11, IPUMS24

V. Lack of access

Education and training are two critical areas to be focused on economic development. Usually, young PWD’s do not get educational opportunities and the development of other abilities, especially in the area of information and technology (Burchardt T., 2004). There is continuously growing a gap in getting educational opportunities between the PWD’s and others without disabilities. PWD’s face environmental barriers that make challenges for them to gain employment. PWD’s may not be in a position to bear the daily travel expenses to reach to the workplace (Roberts P, Babinard J., 2004). They may also face physical barriers to attend job interviews and to participate in activities with their coworkers. Persons with visual impairment face more obstacles and may not be able to access information. PWD’s may not be able to get easy access to financial services to set up their livelihood. Women with disabilities are even more vulnerable to such cases of not getting access to financial services (International Labour Organization, 2007).

VI. Misconceptions about disability

Generally, people have misconceptions regarding the capabilities of PWD's to continue their employment and results in the loss of their work and employment opportunities. Employed PWD's often face exclusion within the organisation to develop in their career. Persons having negative attitudes and prejudice regarding disability believe that PWD's are not dynamic and fully-abled to develop themselves (Gartrell A., 2010). People may be prejudiced about the mental illnesses of PWD's and their adjustmental problems in the workplace (Jones MK, Latreille PL, Sloane PJ, 2006). PWD's themselves, as well as their families, develop negative attitude towards disability. PWD's having low self-esteem may be having fewer expectations on their capacities and it affects their level of motivation to work. The social barriers prohibit PWD's to participate in social events, particularly with families and community members, that further restrict them to find employment opportunities (International Labour Organization, 2006).

VII. Discrimination

Employers have misconceptions and prejudice regarding the capabilities of PWD's and get involved in discrimination and find it challenging to work with PWD's. PWD's having different impairments face negative attitudes, especially those having mental illnesses (Baldwin ML, Marcus SC, 2006). Among the persons having schizophrenia, twenty-nine percent face discrimination either in searching or doing the work and forty-two per cent are those who need to hide their disability while applying for job, education and training (Thornicroft G et al., 2009).

VIII. Addressing the barriers to Work and Employment

Worldwide, many steps have been taken to reduce the barriers in work and employment for PWD's. Steps such as policies and laws, tailored interventions, vocational training, self-employment and microfinance, access to social welfare schemes and working to develop positive attitudes help to overcome the barriers.

IX. Laws and regulations

Laws and regulations contribute to the effectiveness of the employment of PWD's. It includes anti-discrimination laws; however, the implementation of such laws are not wholly enforced (Opini BM., 2010). Anti-discrimination laws prohibit to make decisions regarding one's employment based on their disabilities. Such laws were enacted by Australia (1992), Canada (1986, 1995), New Zealand (1993), and the United States (1990). In the recent era, Germany and South Africa have included anti-discriminatory clauses related to disability (World Bank, 2004). In India, the "Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016" has been passed, which focuses on equality and non-discrimination. It ensures to provide equal rights and focuses on providing dignified and respectable life for PWD's.

In the formal sector, it is necessary to provide reasonable accommodation to PWD's to easily continue their work, and by providing so, it does not enforce unnecessary burden to the organisations in which they work (UNCRPD, 2006). The aim is to overcome the discrimination of employees, provide adequate access to the workplace, and make others able to understand the capabilities of PWD's to perform work and employment. Reasonable accommodation includes guaranteeing that there is accessibility for all in the process of recruitment

and other procedures related to work and employment, disabled-friendly environment, adjusting work timing and other work-related provisions and making the availability of assistive devices needed for PWD's.

There is combined evidence regarding the implementation of anti-discrimination laws in adjusting PWD's into the workforce. All in all, such laws appear to have been increasingly useful in the prevention of discrimination among individuals who are already involved in employment. Early research on the "Americans with Disabilities Act 1990" proposed that implementing such Act caused a decrease in work of PWD's (Acemoglu D, Angrist J., 2001). It is evident that employers maintained a strategic distance from potential prosecution basically by not providing employment opportunities for PWD's or may be the commitment to give sensible accommodation to staff with disabilities (Mitra S, Stapleton D., 2006).

X. Tailored Interventions

Quota system

Most of the Nations provide quotas for the work of PWD's in both general and private sectors. The embedded understanding is that without quota system, employers would dismiss PWD's on account of discrimination, fears about lower profitability, or the potential increment in the cost of work. Germany provides a reservation of 5% in employment sector for those who have a severe disability in such organisations/agencies where more than twenty persons are working. In South Africa, government establishments are directed by statutory bodies specifying that 2% of their workforce must comprise of PWD's. (Commission for Employment Equity, 2008). In India, The "Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016" directs government establishments to "appoint not less than four per cent of the total number of vacancies in the cadre strength in each group of posts meant to be filled with persons with benchmark disabilities of which, one per cent each shall be reserved for persons with benchmark disabilities under clauses (a), (b) and (c) and one per cent. For persons with benchmark disabilities under clauses (d) and (e), namely: (a) blindness and low vision (b) deaf and hard of hearing (c) locomotor disability including cerebral palsy, leprosy cured, dwarfism, acid attack victims and muscular dystrophy (d) autism, intellectual disability, specific learning disability and mental illness (e) multiple disabilities from amongst persons under clauses (a) to (d) including deaf-blindness in the posts identified for each disabilities".

Supported employment schemes can create a significant impact on the employment of persons with severe disabilities, especially those having intellectual disabilities and mental illness. Sustained employment can coordinate PWD's into the most struggling labour market where they need to put extra efforts to maintain their efficiency in employment. It gives guidance related to employment, specific job-related capacity building programmes, independently custom-made supervision, transport facilities, and provision of assistive devices, all to empower PWD's to learn and modify their skills in employment sector. Its overwhelming results has been reported for persons with severe disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, specific learning disability and traumatic brain injuries (Cook JA et al., 2005).

Sheltered work gives employment opportunities with distinct services, either in a shielded business or in a separated portion of an enterprise, and usually accommodates the individuals who are seen as unfit to work in the open working environment. For instance, in Switzerland, a nation with one of the most PWD's having employment has accommodated them in segregated settings. In France, sheltered employment provides standard compensation and full governmental support for persons having the work capability of one third or less and

provides symbolic compensation for the persons having more than two-third of work capability loss (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2003).

XI. Disability Management

Disability management is a set of interventions that are required to provide persons who are employed and acquire a disability during their work or employment. It focuses on providing effective case management, capacity building of employers, reasonable accommodation at the workplace, and rehabilitation measures to restore the abilities of such persons to return to their work. PWD's are a heterogeneous group and need a different approach of intervention. e.g., the difficulties faced by persons with speech impairment may be different from those persons with visual impairment. Major problems occur with those having intermittent problems such as persons with mental illnesses. Evidence-based research has shown that people from different countries who come back to work once they get disability ranges from 40% to 70% (Buys N., 2006).

XII. Vocational Rehabilitation and Training

Providing vocational training enhance and restore the abilities of PWD's so that they can take part in the labour market. The facilities mostly focus on delivering employment-related training, counselling and guidance and placement. In India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 directs governments to offer schemes and programmes, especially providing loans at low-interest rates to provide opportunities to PWD's in the employment sector. The Act also directs governments to include PWD's in all mainstream schemes related to skill development initiatives and provide specific training that helps actively them to contribute to market production.

XIII. Self-Employment and Microfinance

Providing economic support to initiate a small business enables PWD's to develop in the self-employment sector. For such programmes, PWD's need to have marketing skills, access to various credit systems, continuous support from both government and other non-governmental organisations and continuous supervision and evaluation. For the economic development of PWD's through self-employment initiatives, they need to have confidence among themselves to work continuously for their economic development. They need to have relevant knowledge and skills that enable them to do calculations and develop their technical and entrepreneurship skills. The social environment needs to be supportive in terms of political support and advocacy for the protection of their rights.

XIV. Social Protection

Social protection schemes can make a positive influence in the lives of PWD's. In reality, these services can play an essential role in decreasing the outcomes of unexpected life-changing encounters (for example the loss of business or changes within the family structure) and also in crises by actively contributing to reduce the impact of social and economic problems (UN, 2011). Such services can also contribute by reducing the impact of poverty and marginality, provide easy access to health-related services and promote inclusion and participation in developmental activities. Such services enable PWD's to be more productive and get access to employment and support for their social security (ILO, 2012). Implementation of such schemes reduce the barriers within the society

and provides opportunities for PWD's to access employment opportunities and livelihood related programmes, thus contributing to their overall economic and social development.

The provisions related to social security have been mentioned in the "Universal Declaration on Human Rights" (Article 22), the "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" (Article 9), the "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination" (Article 5), the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (Article 11), the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" (Article 26), and the "International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families" (Article 27). The right to social security is acknowledged explicitly in Article 28 of UNCRPD and directs the States to ensure easy and equal access to PWD's in social security schemes. The schemes focus on providing necessary facilities, poverty alleviation programmes, housing-related schemes, and other benefits related to retirement.

XV. Working to Develop Positive Attitudes

It is essential to develop a positive attitude towards PWD's for their inclusion in society. Organisations working for the rights of PWD's have the responsibility to work at the grassroots to change the negative perception of community people. Evidence-based research shows that working with PWD's in an organizational setup helps to develop positive attitudes towards them (International Labour Organization, 2006). Studies have shown that PWD's do not get equal chances for their promotion in jobs because of their disability and the chances are being given to others who are not disabled (Shakespeare T, Thompson S, Wright M., 2010). In the United States, it has been found that the persons having a high level of knowledge regarding laws and legislation about the employment of PWD's have less negative attitudes towards the rights of PWD's in the workplace (Hernandez B, Keys C, Balcazar F., 2000).

XVI. Conclusion

Usually, PWD's belonging to the working-age group are less employed. They do not have equal access to educational opportunities, skill development training, non-availability of financial assistance, inaccessible environment at workplace and negative attitude towards disability. PWD's can perform their work and employment effectively once they are provided with an accessible environment. Empowering PWD's in labour market and employment sector, various stakeholders need to perform their roles and responsibilities, including government establishments, community people, and employers. Government establishments have the responsibility to implement anti-discriminatory laws to provide a secure environment for PWD's. Public policies need to be framed to offer incentives and provide help to PWD's to get employment. There is a need to provide awareness regarding the negative perception of employers regarding disability. There needs a change in attitude among the general population, especially employers, that PWD's can work effectively by providing a barrier-free environment to them. Mainstream training programmes and other employment opportunities need to be accessible for the PWD's. Employers need to recruit PWD's by providing reasonable accommodation to them and implement disability management programmes to assist those employees with disability who wish to return to their workplace. Government need to focus on multi-sectorial approach and partnerships among local employment organisations,

educational institutes, skill development institutions and social enterprises to constitute an experienced staff that especially includes PWD's.

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