



A Sociological Analysis of Unequal Economic Opportunities in Karachi: Perception of Persons with Disabilities

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Abstract

Globally, persons with disabilities (PWDs) are the poorest and most disadvantaged section of society, and present lower employment rates. However sociological research on stratification and inequality often overlooks disability, which is highly stigmatized status and linked with unequal economic opportunities. Therefore, the researchers conducted this research in Karachi, Pakistan. The theoretical framework was conflict theory. It is primary and explanatory research with a small sample. The sample size was 10 persons with disabilities (PWDs). Purposive sampling method was used. The universe was Karachi, Pakistan. The researchers gathered data through in depth interviews. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) perceive and experience unequal economic opportunities in almost similar ways in Karachi, Pakistan. Moreover, societal attitudes and prejudices towards persons with disabilities (PWDs) shape their access to economic opportunities in Karachi in various ways. Moreover, they shared their coping strategies and resilience mechanisms. The results of this study may help policy makers about how PWDs perceive and adopt resilience. Further research is recommended to explore the viewpoints of those employers who have hired PWDs.

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Introduction

Globally, persons with disabilities (PWDs) are the poorest and disadvantaged section of society (Carew et al., 2019; Pinilla-Roncancio & Gallardo, 2022). Especially those people who were born normal but later had some disabilities, face more economic challenges (Kasim et al., 2022) compared to those who are not disabled, and experience social stigma (Brown, 2019). Persons with disabilities (PWDs) present lower employment rates (Pinilla-Roncancio & Gallardo, 2022). However sociological research on stratification and inequality often overlook disability, which is highly stigmatized status and linked with unequal economic opportunities (Pettinicchio et al., 2022).

There are lots of barriers for PWDs when they try to participate in society (Naseem et al., 2021; Liedtke, 2024). The absence of disability normalization is a significant obstacle to their independent life, which means instead of focusing on actual and environmental causes, perceived medical limitations of PWDs are increasing challenges (Wasserman & Aas, 2022). Life is full of barriers in all areas, pushing PWDs towards poverty (Pandey & Nidugla, 2023), and economic insecurity (Pettinicchio et al., 2022). PWDs having unstable employment and unemployment (Donnelly et al., 2020) lead to an increased level of dependence on the government or other people (Pandey & Nidugla, 2023) and increase challenges for global poverty governance (Wang et al., 2023). Policy makers and other stakeholders should know the factors behind unequal economic opportunities to integrate PWDs in the socioeconomic sphere (Al-Hendawi et al., 2022), such as:

- Attitudinal,
- Communication,
- Environmental,
- Policy,
- Programmatic,

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- Social barriers (Wickenden et al., 2020; Liedtke, 2024)

Resources and a functional support system are required to improve performance of PWD. “Disabled” is a term used for PWDs (Pandey & Nidugla, 2023), but it does not have a universally accepted definition (Hussain et al., 2020). Ahmed et al., (2011) define it as a person who is unable to do work due to sickness, accident or hereditary condition. After world war two, the disability rights movement was formed (Liedtke, 2024). It is a basic human right to participate in social life, and this basic human right can be achieved by PWDs if they get extra care and support, otherwise it will remain a challenge in developing countries (Kunnath et al., 2023), including Pakistan (Naseem et al., 2021). The attention to this issue here remains far off goals (Razzaq & Rathore, 2020).

In the face of adversity, resilience is the ability to adapt positively (Al-Jadiri et al., 2021) and rise again by a person who faced misfortune (Kasim et al., 2022). Previous research has shown a connection between resilience and coping (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006; Chen et al., 2019). Coping means mental and behavioral strategies to manage stressful happenings (Dachez & Ndobo, 2018; Ghanouni & Quirke, 2022). There is limited research on resilience and coping mechanisms of PWDs (Ghanouni & Quirke, 2022). Therefore, the researchers conducted this research to do sociological analysis of unequal economic opportunities in Karachi, Pakistan.

Objectives

- I. To highlight the perception and experience of persons with disabilities (PWDs) about unequal economic opportunities
- II. To find out the societal attitudes and prejudices towards persons with disabilities (PWDs)
- III. To find out the coping strategies and resilience mechanisms adopted by persons with disabilities (PWDs)

Research Questions

1. How do persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Karachi perceive and experience unequal economic opportunities?
2. How do societal attitudes and prejudices towards persons with disabilities (PWDs) shape their access to economic opportunities in Karachi?
3. What are the coping strategies and resilience mechanisms adopted by persons with disabilities (PWDs) in response to the unequal economic opportunities in Karachi?

Literature Review

This literature review highlights some key points, for example: lack of education (Hussain et al., 2022), employment opportunities (Uddin & Jamil, 2015), societal discrimination (Sumalinog et al., 2023), and regional disparity (Rajan & Mishra, 2020). Persons with disabilities (PWDs) face challenges in education due to societal attitudes and a lack of accessible facilities (Hussain et al., 2022).

This limited education translates to fewer employment opportunities, leading to poverty (Uddin & Jamil, 2015). Persons with disabilities (PWDs) experience discrimination in various aspects of life, including employment (Sumalinog et al., 2023). The economic impact of disability varies across regions (Rajan & Mishra, 2020), however, there is a limited study with focus on Karachi, Pakistan (Pandey & Nidugla, 2023; Pinilla-Roncancio & Gallardo, 2022).

Societal Attitudes and Prejudices: This literature review also highlights how societal attitudes and prejudices can limit economic opportunities for persons with disabilities (PWDs), for example: employer attitudes (Piramanayagam & Seal, 2021), lack of awareness and support (Liedtke, 2024; Okonji et al., 2023), and prevalent discrimination (Okonji et al., 2023).

Employers, however, hold positive perceptions about qualities in persons with disabilities (PWDs) (Piramanayagam & Seal, 2021). However, negative biases also exist (Piramanayagam & Seal, 2021). Employers need to be aware of strategies for creating inclusive workplaces (Liedtke, 2024).

Support systems for vocational training and entrepreneurship might be inadequate (Okonji et al., 2023). Persons with disabilities (PWDs) face discrimination during recruitment processes (Okonji et al., 2023).

Coping Strategies And Resilience Mechanisms: This literature review also highlights coping strategies and resilience mechanisms for unequal economic opportunities in Karachi (Differently-Abled Individuals), resilience model (Kasim et al., 2022), self-employment and entrepreneurship (Norstedt & Germundsson, 2021).

Although, some more researches have been conducted in different countries and region, for example: USA (Liedtke, 2024), across 6 Latin American countries (Pinilla-Roncancio & Gallardo, 2022), Nigeria (Okonji et al., 2023), Botswana (Pletzen et al., 2021), Arab Gulf region (Al-Hendawi et al., 2022), India (Uddin & Jamil, 2015; Rajan & Mishra 2020; Pandey & Nidugla, 2023), and Pakistan Hussain et al. (2022). However, there is still a lack of research focused on Karachi, Pakistan.

There were some methodologies already used to understand how differently-abled individuals perceive and experience unequal economic opportunities in Karachi, for example: literature review (Hussain et al., 2022; Uddin & Jamil, 2015), case study (Pletzen et al., 2021), survey (Piramanayagam & Seal, 2021), interviews (Al-Hendawi et al., 2022; Okonji et al., 2023), grounded theory (Neiseh et al., 2023), etc. However, research with an explanatory approach is still insufficient.

Research Methods

This is primary research because the researchers are not relying on existing data sources only. It is a qualitative, cross-sectional study with queries aimed at comprehending the present circumstance. It is explanatory research with small sample size. This approach focuses on understanding the mechanisms behind a phenomenon. The theoretical framework was Conflict Theory. In this study, the researchers' universe was Karachi, Pakistan. The population consisted of persons with disabilities (PWDs). The study sample included ten persons with disabilities (PWDs). In this qualitative research, the researchers used a purposive sampling method to select respondents. In depth interviews were conducted to gather in-depth data through personal meetings with persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Karachi, Pakistan. For the interview, the researcher used an interview guide. The researcher used the thematic analysis method to evaluate qualitative data manually.

Results

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) are increasingly exposed to unequal economic opportunities. This research highlighted perceptions and experiences of persons with disabilities (PWDs) about unequal economic opportunities in Karachi. This research also explained the impact of societal attitudes and prejudices towards differently abled individuals on their access to economic opportunities in Karachi, Pakistan. This research also found some coping strategies and resilience mechanisms adopted by differently abled individuals in response to the unequal economic opportunities in Karachi.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Case no.	Gender	Occupation	Education	Ethnicity
1.	Male	Student	Bachelor's degree	Sindhi
2.	Male	Student	Intermediate/ A level	Urdu speaking
3.	Male	Self-employed	Master's degrees	Sindhi
4.	Female	Student	Bachelor's degree	Persian
5.	Female	Student	Intermediate/ A level	Urdu speaking
6.	Female	Student	Intermediate/ A level	Urdu speaking
7.	Male	Student	Bachelor's degree	Sindhi
8.	Female	Student	Intermediate/ A level	Saraiki
9.	Female	Student	Master's degrees	Baloch
10.	Male	Student	Master's degrees	Urdu speaking

After analysis, a total of three themes and eleven sub themes emerged from the data, as shown in figure 1. These themes are:

- Economic opportunities
 - Perception
 - Disadvantages
 - Factors
 - Challenges
 - Positive experiences
- Societal attitudes and prejudices
 - Effects
 - Personal experiences
 - Solution
- Karachi's economic situation
 - Impacts
 - Coping mechanism
 - Support system



Figure 1: Themes

Economic Opportunities

Perception: The respondents discussed the economic opportunities for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Karachi as shown in Table 2. There were mixed views on the availability of these opportunities, with some mentioning specific examples like call centers and others highlighting the challenges. The main challenge identified is the lack of accessibility in public spaces and buildings.

Table 2: Perception of Respondents

Case no.	Can you share your personal experiences and views on the economic opportunities available for differently-abled individuals in Karachi?
1.	There are some places where certain economic opportunities are available such as at call centers in banks for customer care representative posts.
2.	Yes, in personal experience, I saw no specific economic opportunity for differently abled individuals in Karachi.

3.	Being a job holder at national highway authority, my experience and views are positive in availability of opportunities.
4.	There are no opportunities according to me.
5.	Infrastructural limitations are barriers in the economic opportunities.
6.	I did not have any of them.
7.	There are not many opportunities.
8.	Some institutes are giving opportunities for disabled persons like call center telephone operating computer operator data entry jobs etc.
9.	There are very few opportunities, and if we go to avail them they usually reject us.
10.	There are so many challenges and barriers.

Disadvantages: The respondents highlighted the significant disadvantages compared to those without disabilities as shown in Table 3. persons with disabilities (PWDs) have fewer opportunities and higher unemployment rates. Societal barriers like inaccessible workplaces and lack of awareness about assistive technologies make it harder for them to find and keep jobs. They also face lower salaries compared to their non-disabled counterparts.

Table 3: Disadvantages

s.no	How do you feel these opportunities compare to those available for individuals without disabilities?
1.	These are more for them as compared to blind people.
2.	I strongly disagree with such a comparison. Disabled person's whole life is in black hole. Disabled person's life is dependent on another person's support.
3.	There is much accessibility for normal people. Being disabled, we face many more problems than any other individual.
4.	They don't treat people the same.
5.	Infrastructural limitations restrict mobility and independence in several ways for differently-abled individuals.
6.	I think they enjoy the opportunities more than the persons with disabilities (PWDs), because most companies look forward to a perfect person.
7.	I can't ponder on it.
8.	Without disability people have a lot of opportunities.
9.	Disabled persons do have more accessibility needs.
10.	There are many for them in every sector.

The respondents outlined several factors, as shown in Table 4. Such as social factors, environmental factors, and limited educational opportunities.

Table 4: Factors

s.no	What factors do you believe contribute to these inequalities?
1.	Poor governance and social stigmas to some extent.
2.	Mistrust.
3.	Society like Pakistan, favoritism.
4.	Just want people to believe that everyone is equal, no one is superior.
5.	Limited awareness, transportation, employment.
6.	I think a disabled person does not get enough rights for him/her to get or to contribute in their life.

7.	Everyone contributes to this thing.
8.	So many factors.
9.	Unawareness, illiteracy and negative mindset.
10.	Accessibility.

Challenges in Employment: The respondents highlighted the challenges, as shown in Table 5. These challenges were limited opportunities discrimination, physical barriers, lack of assistive technology, and educational challenges. These challenges create significant hurdles.

Table 5: Challenges in Employment

Case no	Can you elaborate on the specific challenges you face when seeking or securing employment opportunities?
1.	Most of the times I get rejected due to the nature of job or unavailability of jobs for specially abled persons in both private and public sectors.
2.	Disability to moving from one place to another and doing work.
3.	In the examination hall, there is no such writer who can write our views properly. So, it resulted in lacking.
4.	Limited opportunities, discrimination.
5.	I don't have personal experiences, but I can suggest coping strategies based on common practices.
6.	I haven't been employed anywhere yet so I can't tell you about it.
7.	No.
8.	Yeah I have to use stairs to go to work. This is the biggest challenge for me.
9.	No proper material, no technology, no accessibility.
10.	Nope.

Positive Experiences: The respondents showed mixed experiences regarding positive support, as shown in Table 6. Some found support from friends, family, or kind individuals who helped and encouraged them. Accessible workplaces were highlighted as positive initiatives. Several responses indicated a lack of such positive experiences.

Table 6: Positive Experiences

Case no.	Have you encountered any positive experiences or initiatives that helped you overcome these challenges?
1.	Faisal bank helped me get the job of Customer Care Representative.
2.	No.
3.	There should be special laptops for us, as we can avail access in any opportunities.
4.	Yeah, someone that understands you is so precious.
5.	Community support, workplaces, hiring practices.
6.	Not yet.
7.	Haven't yet.
8.	Yes, I found people who helped me and gave me the courage to do the things I want to do like my friends and family.
9.	Yeah, I have but in some places, but not every time.
10.	Very few people are also kind enough to help and understand us without making us feel bad.

Societal Attitudes and Prejudices: As shown in Table 7, the respondents argued that societal attitudes and prejudices in Karachi significantly affect economic opportunities, by negative views, social exclusion and discouragement of education.

Table 7: Societal Attitudes and Prejudices

Case no.	In your opinion, to what extent do societal attitudes and prejudices towards differently-abled individuals affect their access to employment, education, and other economic opportunities in Karachi?
1.	Almost forty percent.
2.	Societal attitudes towards differently abled persons definitely affect their access to education and employment opportunities as there are no specified seats available for differently abled persons in such places.
3.	My perception is that our education system is outdated. Reforms are required.
4.	People don't treat them equally. So, they think that they are inferior and always try to humiliate them.
5.	Infrastructural limitations restrict mobility and independence in several ways for differently-abled individuals.
6.	I think people mostly look forward to such a person who is able to do all things rather than a disabled person. So, I think a person with a disability affects their access to employment, education etc.
7.	Yes, that affects a lot. Prejudice discourages families from investing in a disabled child's education.
8.	High impact on a person, how they do work, how they work, how they go to any other place etc. people think that we are useless.
9.	People show sympathy behavior and they believe we are unable to do any task.
10.	We face barriers to accessing quality education due to inaccessible infrastructure, lack of support services, and negative attitudes from peers and educators.

Personal Experiences: The respondents highlighted personal experiences of how societal attitudes affect persons with disabilities (PWDs) as shown in Table 8. For example, multiple rejections for jobs due to having a disability, employers refusing to hire based on assumptions about a person's capabilities, Discouragement from pursuing education or desired careers, Feeling misunderstood and isolated due to negative attitudes. These real-life stories illustrate how prejudice creates hurdles throughout a disabled person's life, limiting their opportunities.

Table 8: Personal Experiences

Case no.	Can you share any specific examples of how these attitudes and prejudices have impacted you or someone you know?
1.	I got rejected multiple times for having a job in some organizations.
2.	These attitudes personally impacted me several times. When I visited the work place, most of the employers refused to give me employment as they think I can't meet their targets.
3.	Due to an extra interaction with disabled persons my views on those attitudes lead to disabled distress and depression.
4.	Like when people don't understand you that hurts a lot.
5.	No.
6.	Yeah one my sister has an eyesight problem through which it affects her studies.

7.	People discourage us from doing the things we want to do.
8.	So many things that he was tired of listening and attempted suicide.
9.	People react differently when they get to know our disability.
10.	Sometimes people want to do something, but they can't, because they don't have access.

Solution: As shown in Table 9, the respondents outlined several ways to challenge negative attitudes, as shown in Table 9, for example, raising awareness, building empathy and enforcing equality.

Table 9: Solution

Case no.	How do you think these attitudes and prejudices could be challenged and transformed?
1.	By a constructive role of academia, media and religious scholars for promoting awareness for rights of especially abled persons. Along with these, robust legislation needs to be done.
2.	These attitudes can be challenged by providing equal opportunities and equal rights to differently abled persons like providing specific transportation services for differently abled persons.
3.	The government should look after and create such sectors that provide accessibility for disabled as they could avail economic opportunities.
4.	People should understand someone's difficulties and their behavior because they don't know what someone is going through.
5.	Promote education, provide training.
6.	I haven't thought about it yet.
7.	Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) type paper pattern for these people.
8.	People have to change themselves.
9.	Specific work places and systems for differently abled people.
10.	It lowers our self-esteem and confidence. They believe that we are a misfit in this world. And they make us feel that the world is not for people like us.

Karachi's Economic Situation

Impacts: As shown in Table 10, the respondents explained how Karachi's economic situation can worsen the struggles such as, lack of social safety nets, discrimination, and workplace discrimination. These economic factors create additional challenges on top of the pre-existing social barriers faced by persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Karachi.

Table 10: Impacts

Case no.	How do you think the economic situation in Karachi, including job availability and wages, plays a role in the economic struggles faced by differently-abled individuals?
1.	You see limited job availability, lack of social safety nets and many more.
2.	Yes these economic situations play a vital role as the law and order situation is not good in Karachi.
3.	There are no proper opportunities for disabled people. Instead of a quota, we are deprived of it.
4.	It doesn't affect the economy.
5.	I don't have personal experiences, but I can suggest coping strategies based on common practices.
6.	They don't give independence.

7.	I am optimistic but can't see any.
8.	In Karachi, I have to face difficulties because there are no facilities for differently abled people.
9.	Without a job, we face many challenges and we have many expenses.
10.	The economic condition is the worst for everyone.

Coping Mechanisms: As shown in Table 11, the respondents showed a mix of coping mechanisms used by persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Karachi. For example, facing challenges head-on, lowering expectations, informal work, seeking external support, and building skills and networks. The limited positive responses suggest that many persons with disabilities (PWDs) struggle to find effective coping mechanisms in Karachi's challenging economic environment.

Table 11: Coping Mechanisms

Case no.	How do you personally cope with the challenges of accessing economic opportunities in Karachi?
1.	Most of the time. I got rejected due to my disability.
2.	By doing petty work.
3.	NGOs are the ones who can transfer our issue to officials.
4.	I just want to go home alone, that's it.
5.	I don't have personal experiences, but I can suggest coping strategies based on common practices.
6.	It's pretty difficult.
7.	Will do when on me.
8.	I face them and overcome this by building skills, networking etc.
9.	I have no experience yet.
10.	I work very hard to cope with it.

Support Systems: As shown in Table 12, the respondents highlighted the scarcity of support systems for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Karachi. Many responses indicated a lack of helpful community. Some suggested government intervention, technology and job creation, online resources and education as potential resources.

Table 12: Support Systems

Case no.	What support systems or community resources do you find helpful in navigating these challenges?
1.	Introducing friendly technologies and jobs for especially abled persons.
2.	No support system is available in Karachi.
3.	Everyone has warmly welcomed and received us by assisting us.
4.	Nothing.
5.	I don't have personal experiences, but I can suggest coping strategies based on common practices.
6.	I think to navigate these challenges Karachi has different transports and buses to travel which is the great research for the community to navigate these challenges.
7.	Online platforms, educational institutes.
8.	I found some NGOs and government people which are helpful.
9.	The government should make policies for disabled persons' jobs and implement them.
10.	There is nothing like community support or anything. We are on our own.

Discussion

A past study indicated that persons with disabilities (PWDs), who were adults with Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and had issues with particular functions, often assumed to malfunction in all kinds of works in society (Ghanouni & Quirke, 2022). Similarly, another study revealed that employers misperceived blindness precludes employment therefore PWDs were unable to get a job (Okonji et al., 2023).

However, a study highlighted that PWDs workers were having same income and education, but facing more social inequalities e.g. transportation access (Carew et al., 2019). In a past study, fear of trust and lack of confidence were experienced by PWDs while thumb printing on documents (Sumalinog et al., 2023).

A past study found that disability sensitive education may improve the perception of people about PWDs workers (Liedtke, 2024). Advocacy and education are crucial coping mechanisms to build resilience. Development of coping mechanisms and resilience was influenced by several social factors, in a past study (Ghanouni & Quirke, 2022).

Disability does not have to limit potential. Stephen Hawking (physicist) and Helen Keller (lecturer) were the powerful examples of persons with disabilities (PWDs) who achieved a great deal despite having a disability. PWDs need employment roles that would not be affected by their disability, while making sure that they are not disadvantaged (Pandey & Nidugla, 2023). However, it is not easy for PWDs to find employment, so they need to start a business (Norstedt & Germundsson, 2021). Inclusive growth is required for social justice and prosperity in a society (Uddin & Jamil, 2015).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded that persons with disabilities (PWDs) perceive and experience unequal economic opportunities in almost similar ways in Karachi, Pakistan. Moreover, societal attitudes and prejudices towards persons with disabilities (PWDs) shape their access to economic opportunities in Karachi in various ways. Therefore, they shared some coping strategies and resilience mechanisms in response to the unequal economic opportunities in Karachi. There are limited economic opportunities due to a lack of accessibility, societal prejudices, and limited social safety nets. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) experience discrimination, lower salaries, and unemployment compared to their non-disabled counterparts.

This research also details some coping mechanisms used by persons with disabilities (PWDs) and suggests solutions to create a more inclusive society. Religious authorities should advise the people about the rights and welfare of PWDs. The media may also raise awareness about the specific needs of PWDs. faster and better integration of PWDs may be attained by encouraging digital labor and work from home opportunities for them. The results of this study may help policy makers about how PWDs perceive and adopt resilience. Further research is recommended to explore the viewpoints of those employers who have hired PWDs.

Author Contributions:

The Conception and design: Syeda Saba Hashmi. Collection and assembly of data analysis and interpretation of the data: Drafting and Critical revision of the article. Intellectual content Management.

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