



## Accessibility and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Pakistan: A Secondary Analysis

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### Abstract

The main purpose of the study was to critically analyze the past literature regarding challenges, constraints, needs, and problems faced by Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Pakistan. This study was qualitative, and all the past literature reviews were analyzed from 1990 to 2018. Similarly, reports, government officials, and online documents were also part of the critical literature review. The study found that education and rehabilitation services are insufficient for PWDs. For instance, PWDs face limited mobility, lack of access to information and advanced technology, less exposure and lack of opportunities, financial constraints, resource unequal distribution, and lack of adequate policies and their implementation in Pakistan. In light of the above facts, it is suggested that existing allocations and reservations in jobs should be strictly implemented, and the restoration of PWDs as productive citizens and non-governmental organizations should work on life grievances.

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### Introduction

In the present time, living a life is very difficult for human beings. Still, it is extremely tough for a person with disabilities to lead a satisfactory life because of huge socio-economic challenges. Although human beings have to do great struggle to fulfill daily needs, a person with disabilities becomes more vulnerable to realizing her needs because they somehow depend upon others. On the other hand, in the 21st century, the sensitization of rights and needs for people with disabilities is increasing throughout the world (Ahmed et al., 2011). Pakistan accepted the Convention on the Rights of PWD in this respect (UNCRPD), which guarantees the providence of socio-economic, cultural, and political rights both by the state and the society. Statistically, according to the census of 1998, 2.5 % of the total population is suffering from various kinds of disabilities (GOP, 1998). The latter statistical report of WHO claimed this figure is 10 to 12 % in Pakistan (CHIP, 2014). Figures would be increasing in case of negligence on the part of stakeholders.

According to the World Health Organization (2011), disability is a general term that encompasses impairments, limitations in activities, and restrictions on participation. It refers to the adverse consequences of relationships between the person with a medical condition and their contextual factors, which include both exclusive and ecological aspects. The definition provided is consistent with the UNCRPD's preface, which states that disability is a dynamic concept that results from interactions between people with disabilities and environmental barriers that prevent them from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others. People may have a variety of disabilities, such as physical, mental, or intellectual impairments, as well as other medical disorders, according to the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2014). These kinds of impairments may be temporary, permanent, or rehabilitative. With the emergence of Human rights awareness all around the globe, including in Pakistan, the efforts to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable communities have been accelerated. One of the most suppressed communities is the people with disabilities. Due to a lack of facilities and hurdles, PWDs are struggling hard (Sheikh et al., 2011). Considering the right-based

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approach, it is admitted that PWDs cannot develop themselves properly without the social, cultural, and political rights envisaged for them. General welfare policies and plans may not be sufficient to protect them. Societies have a sympathetic approach toward PWDs, and this fact is precisely ignored, as they have the same abilities and facilities as normal human beings (Deepak & Sharma, 2001). However, in Pakistani society, being a disabled person is a sign of social stigma both by parents and for PWDs. This stops the entry of PWDs into routine life, and psychosocial barriers are placed before them. It impedes their participation in social life. However, the efforts of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are admirable. Enough realization has been made in society about these people. They should have equal rights, and their special needs must be solved. They should be accepted in all walks of life with certain liberties and relaxations (Rehman, 2010).

The PWDs are trying hard to survive in society even though they are facing various challenges that make their life difficult. They face ignorance of their basic needs from both family and society at large. There is a lesser realization of their need to be treated as a special person. Society does not consider them special in any respect, and they are rather considered as signs of sympathy. Another important need of the PWDs is inclusive education. They do not have enough opportunities to get an education in their life (Ahmed & Yousaf, 2011). It is direly hard for them to adjust to a job market where unsuitable infrastructure is available for them. They have less opportunity in public and political life; Fewer laws are in place to support and defend the rights of individuals with disabilities (Ahmed & Khan, 2010).

Given that Pakistan has ratified and signed the agreement on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), all the provisions outlined in the contract must be provided without addressing the challenges and special needs required for PWDs. Without these, a society cannot claim to be civilized and developed. Similarly, to create a positive image of the country in the global world, it is pertinent to comply with the needs of disabled persons. The growing demand for reclamation in the socio-economic status and role of PWDs has encouraged the researchers to conduct this study examining the needs, challenges, and problems of PWDs and to construct concrete recommendations.

### **Objectives**

1. To find out current challenges and constraints facing by the PWDs in Pakistan.
2. To explore the needs and problems of the PWDs in Pakistan.
3. To review the efforts of United Nations, Government and CSO's for the development of PWDs in Pakistan.
4. To propound necessary suggestions/recommendations for the improvement of PWDs' condition in Pakistan.

### **Methodology**

This study used qualitative research method and documentary analysis of the past scientific literature. The relevant literature was reviewed from 1990 to 2018. Similarly, the researcher consulted various books, related journals, reports, reviews of relevant Government official documents, and internet resources to explore the challenges of PWDs.

### **Discussion and Findings**

The researcher found the following problems of PWDs in Pakistan in the old critical literature review.

### **Challenges and Constraints for PWDs**

At the micro level, different studies were conducted on the diverse aspects of PWDs. Identifying the difficulties that people with impairments face is crucial. In previous decades, this essential element was overlooked. However, the researcher found the following challenges through consultation with a large amount of relevant material.

1. Inadequate policymaking and enforcement frameworks are significant constraints for PWDs. In this regard, the Disabled Persons (DPs) (Occupation and Treatment) Ordinance 1981 has

various safety nets. However, it needs to be amended over time to align it with the present needs of people with disabilities (Ahmed et al., 2011).

2. There is an unequal distribution of resources among rural and urban communities; generally, urban communities have more access to resources than rural communities.
3. The mobility of PWDs is severe for their well-being due to resource constraints and other barriers to access. They are not aware of their rights and due to unnecessary delays in procedural formalities, have impeded quick access to services.
4. There is an absence of reliable and accurate data about the extent and prevalence of disability in Pakistan, which creates a hindrance to proper policymaking.
5. No scientific inquiry has been done properly to meet the problems and needs of the PWDs in Pakistan. The possession of any project depends on the personal interest of the donors and organizers, while merely the paperwork is done to pretend the real and valid efforts.

### **Problems Faced by PWDs in Pakistan**

#### **Lack of Networking**

In Pakistan, there are not many networks that gather and share trustworthy information regarding DPs and the organizations that work for individuals. PWDs have a difficult time joining disability networks as a lack of knowledge and contact to get them registered at the provincial and national levels is a great obstacle for them (Sheikh et al., 2011).

#### **Independent Mobility**

The basic problem for people with disabilities is independent mobility since the buildings of both private and public sectors are not constructed according to the needs of the PWDs. It is a great hindrance for them to travel independently in private and public institutes, parks, markets, etc., as no special ramps and toilets are available.

#### **Scarcity of Necessary Equipment**

The necessary equipment to cater to the social needs of PWDs is not available. Moreover, it is awful that the required material for PWDs is not even manufactured in Pakistan, which creates problems for their survival in society.

#### **Weak Enforcement Mechanisms**

Due to a lack of understanding among decision-makers and an inadequate enforcement system, laws and regulations pertaining to the well-being of DPs are not adequately implemented. Although the Supreme Court noticed that 50% of the specified positions for PWDs in the government ministries were unfilled, the 2% employment quota for PWDs in every field has not yet been enforced.

#### **Efforts of the United Nations**

PWDs have spread around the world with different socioeconomic statuses since the prevalence of disability is not restricted by social categorization, geographic limits, economic level, or gender. In contemporary communities, it is normal practice to observe the academic and health requirements of people with disabilities and to implement rehabilitation and support programs for them (Farooq, 2012).

The United Nations designated 1981 as the Year of Disabled Persons and 1983–1992 as the Decade of Disabled, with the goal of developing a national plan to address the issues facing PWDs across all categories. (Yousaf & Ahmad, 2011). It was a significant step in raising awareness of the needs, issues, difficulties, and circumstances of PWDs worldwide under the auspices of the

UN. As a result of this endeavor, the Pakistani government established ministries, programs, and organizations to improve the lives of people with disabilities. The 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which the UN endorsed, required allies to establish a legislative framework that would provide equal opportunity in all areas of life. In this regard, Pakistan took several actions to assist individuals with special needs as observers of the treaty. (Ahmed and others, 2011).

According to the 2011 World Health Organization Report on Disability, over 1 billion individuals worldwide—roughly 15% of the global population—struggle with a disability that falls into any of the categories. The World Health Survey (2002–04) and the Global Burden Disease Study (2004), which estimated the disability rate at 15.6% and 19.4%, respectively, served as the foundation for the present study on disability. Without a doubt, the projected results were much greater than the earlier findings of the WHO research from 1970. According to the disability report, the disability rate is greater in emerging nations than in industrialized ones. Based on concrete information about employment prospects, educational chances, and other aspects of life in less developed nations, these results further clarified why people with disabilities were in danger of being destroyed. The findings also showed that PWD homes had lower living circumstances than typical households, particularly when the relative leader was disabled. According to the overwhelming evidence, people with disabilities become the most disadvantaged and at-risk population in the world, especially in less developed nations (CHIP, 2014).

### **Current Magnitude of PWDs in Pakistan**

Few relevant data are available. The most current results are from the 1998 census or a few micro-level surveys carried out by civil society groups. However, the 1973 constitution stipulates that the state must "complete the fundamental requirements for survival such as food, shelter, cloth, medical and educational establishments to all citizens, who are struggling to earn a livelihood through disability, disease or any other reason," protects the rights of people with disabilities.

According to the recent census (1998) in Pakistan, the PWDs are 2.54% comprising 3.29 million people (GOP, 1998/a). Almost 65% of the PWDs were living in the rural areas (GOP, 1998/b). Currently, the disability prevalence in the country is higher than the census report of 1998. The findings of the census 1998 related to disability are heavily criticized by the experts that merely asking the single question of whether there is a disabled person at home largely depends on the personal understanding of the respondents as there are various types of disability that are extremely possible to be unrecognized by the respondent himself. Therefore, the results obtained from the 1998 census are verily invalid from this point of view (AKFP, 2013).

Several private companies employed people with moderate disabilities in various areas for low-paying, unskilled jobs like sweepers, municipal workers, cultivators, etc. Despite their efforts, none of the official agencies in the nation, including NADRA, possessed a complete and current list of the PWDs. Additionally, scholars nationwide show little interest in the problem of disability (CHIP, 2014). Pakistan was classified as a low- to middle-income nation in the World Disability Report. However, the Global Burden of Disease Study projected that about 9.6 years of total health loss owing to disability per 100 people nationwide; the World Health Survey found that the worldwide incidence of disability is 13.4% (WHO, 2011). According to the disability report, Pakistan is among the top four nations with the highest prevalence of polio and the leading cause of disability in the nation. Mirza et al. (2009) noted that the absence of awareness about mental impairments in the local community and the observation of family care for the children showed the degree of societal prejudice in Pakistan. Although a comprehensive situational study of Pakistan's PWDs is in addition to the purview of the disability report, the results of emerging nations may be roughly related to Pakistan's present disability condition.

### **Initiatives of the Government of Pakistan**

There are a few programs, understanding inducing movements and programs organized by the government. The federal government took the initiative to provide systematic care for PWDs with the declaration of 1981. As the year of disabled persons under the umbrella of the United Nations (Sheikh et al., 2011). With this step, public and private organizations step forward to achieve this honorable responsibility. Pakistan saw significant growth in the 1980s. The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was promulgated in 2002, marking the introduction of the first national policy for the construction of a legal framework in this area. In addition, the National Plan of Action (NPA) was introduced in 2006 to translate and execute earlier initiatives. This strategy emphasized numerous services, including education, healthcare, vocational training, accurate evaluation, job opportunities, recuperation, public advocacy assistance, funding, and building construction tailored to the requirements of people with disabilities (Pakistan, 2002). Recently, the Chief Minister of Punjab, Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, approved the summary of the exemption of fees for job applications in all the government departments of Punjab. Undoubtedly, it is a commendable step for encouraging disabled persons to come forward and serve the country (PPSC, 2015).

Pakistan signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2008. Even then, there was a lack of adequate legislation on the part of people with disabilities, and few government departments extended services or took initiatives for the rehabilitation of PWDs. (CHIP, 2014)

### **Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance 1981**

The main fundamental attempt by the state authorities to provide special care for PWDs in Pakistan was this ordinance (APCD, 2008). The National Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons was established by this legislation to provide guidelines for the welfare, employment, and rehabilitation of disabled people. The council was also in charge of providing medical care and conducting a survey of PWDs who wanted to get rehabilitation. The provincial administration was obligated under the ordinance to implement the programs designed for the betterment and recovery of this underprivileged group. The provincial governments were given the duty of directing the appropriate entities for the execution of government projects. Provincial councils were also involved in the development of education and occupational facilities to provide individuals with special needs with the skills they needed.

After the Special Education and Social Welfare Division was established in 1982, the Director General of Special Education (DGSE) created Vocational Training Projects, Special Education Centers, and higher learning institutions at the University in 1985. In order to address the growing need for human resources, the National Institute of Special Education (NISE) was established, which was a historic accomplishment (Sheikh et al., 2011). A one percent quota for special individuals was set aside in both the official and business industries under the Disabled Individuals Ordinance of 1981; this quota was subsequently increased to two percent.

### **National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2002**

To address the needs of disabled people in terms of learning, care, and treatment, it was the first comprehensive special education policy at the national level. The primary focus was placed on instruction, learning, and treatment for a substantial portion of the nation's population. The policy's main objective was to enable disabled people to reach their full potential in all areas of life, regardless of their caste, creed, gender, or religion. The categorization of disabilities such as Physically Handicapped (19%), Visually Impaired (8.6%), Mentally Handicapped and Insane (14%), Hearing Impaired (7.40%), Multiple Disability (8.21%), Others included as disability (43.33%), indicated in the census of 1998 provided an incredible guide for planning. (GOP, 1998/a)

### **National Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities 2006**

Measures for the operationalization of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities 2002 were proposed in the National Plan of Action (NPA). The NPA's fundamental tenet was that isolated



interventions make it almost difficult for PWDs to have access, inclusion, and equal opportunity. Therefore, all available resources should be used to build programs for people with impairments. By evaluating the severity of issues with the service delivery system, the National Plan of Action determined 17 areas for action. It showed that long-term measures would be implemented by July 2025, while short-term actions would be implemented by June. Each task has a deadline for completion, and different departments and agencies are assigned different responsibilities.

The creation of a data bank, a survey of people with disabilities in particular districts, the use of primary and secondary preventive care to lower the incidence of disabilities, the reinforcement of disability prevention programs, the organization of disability detection and interventions in institutions, the promotion of inclusive education, the extension of medical rehabilitation, the reinforcement of vocational training, employment opportunities, legislative support, public opinion, and support for non-governmental organizations are some of the short-term actions. Long-term plans call for updating laws and creating a suitable physical environment for people with disabilities in all public, private, and commercial facilities (Ahmed & Khan, 2010).

### **Special Citizens Act, 2008**

The Special Citizens Act 2008 provides access at every public place to the PWDs with the special allocation of seats on public transport, providing facilities on footpaths, especially to blind persons. Moreover, special citizens will be given priority in crossing the road, and the responsibility to support crossing roads will be given to traffic police. Under this act, the concerned authorities are bound to construct buildings accordingly and provide the facility with wheelchairs, especially for the physically disabled (Ahmed et al., 2011).

### **Special Citizens (Right to Concessions in Movement) Act 2009**

This statute provides exceptional people with concessional prices on all public and private transportation, regardless of whether they are employed or unable to pay regular fares. This law required airlines, railroads, and other transportation agencies to reduce or eliminate rates for exceptional citizens.

### **Initiatives of Civil Society Organizations**

Civil Society Organizations working at the grass root level to promote sustainable and equitable development, utilize local resources, organization training programs to enhance local capabilities and establish integration between government and community-based organizations, donor agencies, financial departments, and private businesses for support development projects at the local level (CSHIDP, 2008). Even before Pakistan was established, the private sector was the first to provide PWDs education, treatment, and educational services. However, in the 1950s, provincial authorities started offering similar services. The efforts of CSOs were incited immensely with the entitlement of Mazoori Majboori Nahin in 2006 by the Pakistan development market so that disabled persons can play an effective role in national development (Pakistan Taraqi Bazar, 2007).

In the present time, numerous CSOs working under regional mechanisms such as the Network of Organizations Working for PWDs, Pakistan Disabled Persons Organization (PDPO), Sindh Disability Forum, KPK Disability Forum, etc. A national-level organization, Sight Savers, endorsed regional and sub-regional cooperation for taking action toward a free, right, and inclusive society for PWDs in Asia. In August 2008, Sight Savers, STEP, AIER, and Telenor Pakistan endorsed a leadership conference in Pakistan for persons with disabilities, which resulted in the establishment of the Islamabad Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

A regional leadership conference for the PWDs was arranged with the remarkable support of regional organizations in August 2010, which resulted in the South Asian Disability Forum (SADF) and various NGOs and DPOs regarding disability issues to address regional perspectives in South Asia. With the collaboration of governments, NGOs, corporate sectors, APCD, regional and sub-

regional agencies, agencies of the United Nations, and other associates, SADF is expected to perform the fundamental role in bringing about a regional focus on PWDS as a development priority (Sheikh et al., 2011).

According to the analysis of SWOT about Pakistan, certain weaknesses are in DPOs. There is a lack of trust in people, no remarkable plan for leadership, limited communication skills, lack of presentation skills, limited vision, weak advocacy skills, less understanding of the national and international laws, less involvement of front role organizations, internal and political conflicts, overstretched staff, lack of priority based skills, lack of delegation, absence of sharing responsibilities, weak monitoring, poor evaluation and accountability system.

## Conclusion

PWDs in Pakistan face a number of difficulties, according to an analysis of the data gathered for this research. The education and rehabilitation services for PWDS are not according to the needs and demands of PWDs. The challenges faced by the PWDs in Pakistan include limited mobility, lack of access to information and advanced technology, lacking exposure opportunities, financial constraints, unequal distribution of resources, and lack of adequate policies and their implementation. In the initial years of Pakistan's creation, the efforts of the government for the rehabilitation of PWDs were few. However, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) diligently worked to uplift and improve the well-being of the PWDs, mainly in urban areas. With the declaration of the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981) and the Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-92), the Government of Pakistan also put its efforts into PWDs. As a result of United Nations initiatives, the Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance (1981) and the commencement of special education in 1985 were commendable steps of the Government of Pakistan. Besides this, with the collaboration of governments, NGOs, corporate sectors, APCD, regional and sub-regional agencies, agencies of the United Nations, and other associates, SADF was expected to perform the fundamental role in bringing about a regional focus on PWDs as a development priority. Moreover, with the presence of a number of policies and initiatives disabled persons are still struggling hard to achieve reasonable livelihood. So, in the current scenario, it is direly necessary to expand services and facilities for the neglected portion of society, i.e., PWDs.

## Recommendations and Suggestions

- There is a dire need for existing allocations and reservations in jobs to be strictly implemented.
- It is of utmost importance to determine the real numbers of PWDs to find out real statistics for effective resource allocation.
- There is a great need to make the discussion about the rights and issues of PWDs a part of the national discourse. Media and civil society should discuss these issues publicly and frequently rather than occasionally.
- It is also necessary to eliminate the existing social stigmas related to PWDs. For example, they need empathy, not sympathy.
- In order to provide a conducive and competitive environment for PWDs in societies, it is extremely demanded that the government make equipment and materials that are inevitably required to make their lives easier available at the lowest cost and tax-free.
- It is encouraging that the government of Pakistan has ratified the CRPD, which ensures socio-economic, political, and cultural guarantees to PWDs. The government should take steps to pass the necessary legislation to include PWDs in all spheres of society.

**Author Contribution**

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