

Barriers Faced by Persons with Disabilities in Formal Employment in India

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: According to the World Report on Disability, prepared by the World Health Organisation and the World Bank (2011), people with disabilities still face substantive discrimination in the world of work. An ILO report (2014) on "Disability and corporate social responsibility" identified some serious issues why employees with disability throughout the world still face discrimination and human rights violation. This study attempts to examine the severity of the multiple barriers faced by employees with disability in the course of their employment.

Method: Descriptive research design was used. By stratified random sampling, 100 persons with disabilities (mainly visual, hearing and physical impairments) were contacted and interviewed.

Results: Most of the respondents were between 20-30 years of age and 70% were males. Around 41.2% were graduates, yet most of them had low earnings. A large proportion (87.5%) was employed in the private sector. While most of the respondents (65%) reported facing a high level of physical barriers, a large proportion (52.5%) reported high levels of psychological and information, communication and technological (ICT) barriers.

Conclusion: Employees with disability mentioned several barriers and limitations with regard to transport, the attitudes of employers or colleagues, anxiety or lack of confidence, and issues relating to access and support. To ensure inclusive involvement in an organisation, employers must be sensitised on disability issues. A non-discriminative recruitment policy, an accessibility audit to minimise barriers, role-mapping of suitable positions, and adaptation of equipment to suit employees, are recommended.

Key words: Employees with disability, barriers, employment.

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INTRODUCTION

In India, for a long time, disability has been understood to be a result of past 'karma' or sins of people (Ghai, 2002). Dalal and Pande (1999) found in their study that persons with disability, their families and other community members believe that disability is a result of God's will and a consequence of bad karma of past births. Therefore if a child with a disability is born into a family or the child acquires a disability, it tends to be viewed by society as a result of sins done in the past and people accept it unhesitatingly as they feel that they deserve it.

Persons with disabilities are those who have any kind of mental or physical impairment. This impairment, either in the organs or in the senses, restricts the functioning of an individual. It does not allow the individual to fulfil the roles that society expects of him. It is obvious that the nature and extent of the impairment can vary in individuals. It is very important for society, and especially for employers, to understand "what disability is and the problems of people with disability", in order to create a disability-friendly environment in their workplaces so that people will be able to function with dignity. Unfortunately this is not the current scenario in India.

Employment and Persons with Disabilities

Decent work for everyone is the fundamental objective of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and that includes people with a disability.

An ILO report (2014) on "Disability and corporate social responsibility" identified some serious issues, namely outdated vision of CSR linked with voluntarism that has not yet integrated the human rights impact-approach; the failure to identify disability as a relevant issue in reporting; lack of expertise on disability and knowledge on how to manage disability from an employment perspective; the absence of information systems in place to gather accurate and comprehensive information and data on disability; and why disabled employees throughout the world still face discriminations and human rights violations

There is now well-established literature on the negative attitude that attaches to disability in the employment sphere. Barnes (1991) has detailed how discriminatory attitudes and institutionalised practices tend to disproportionately disadvantage disabled people in employment in Britain.

Persons with disability face a number of barriers and difficulties at work. Often they do not get enough opportunities to work. The following data suggests the

status of persons with disability in the formal employment sector. In 2003, within the European Union (EU), 40% of persons with disability of working age were in a job, compared to 64.2% of people without disability. In addition, 52% of persons with disability of working age were economically inactive, compared to 28% of the population as a whole.

In the United Kingdom, around 75% of people with an intellectual impairment and of working age are unemployed. In Switzerland, intellectual impairment has become the main reason for claiming social security benefits, accounting for 40 % of the total (Handicap International, 2011).

Barriers Faced by Persons with Disability in Employment

Persons with disability face a wide range of barriers to access employment. These can be physiological (health conditions), or educational (poor levels of schooling or lack of vocational skills). The challenges can range from their lack of education and training to lack of financial resources which limit access to labour markets. Other reasons include the nature of the workplace or occupation, and employer-perceptions of persons with disability. Attitudes of employers, family and the society at large create hurdles for linking persons with disability to employment.

According to Kulkarni and Valk (2011), many employers also assume that co-workers may react negatively if people with disabilities are hired by the organisation. People with disabilities often shy away from applying for certain jobs, fearing social stigma and adverse reactions from potential co-workers. This is more likely when people with disabilities are treated differently post entry into the organisation. In the absence of an effective integration process, people with disabilities often feel shunned by their co-workers.

People with disabilities in India have often been neglected and have faced discrimination on the grounds that they have disabilities. They not only lack opportunities to participate equally in education, social, and economic activities, but also the programmes designed for economic empowerment, education and social welfare are not inclusive, and do not take their needs into consideration. However, there are many organisations in the country which offer need-based services to people with disabilities. Due to the proactive efforts of such organisations, people with disabilities have proven that they are equally competent to work in banks, industries, and many other sectors in India. However, they cannot perform efficiently in inaccessible job environments, and this often leads them to quit their jobs.

This study aimed to document the types of barriers faced by persons with disabilities in their day-to-day work, and the level of difficulties they face. The findings could help organisations understand how to ensure inclusive employment opportunities and growth of employees with disabilities in their ranks. It would enable them to make necessary policy changes and strategic planning towards achievement of sustainable livelihood of their employees with different disabilities.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the barriers - physical, psychological, information, communication, technological - faced by the persons with disabilities in the course of employment.
2. To suggest relevant policies and programmes towards inclusive, sustainable livelihood opportunities for persons with disabilities in organisations.

METHOD

Study Design

Descriptive research design was used, as the primary objective of this study was to describe the level of barriers and difficulties faced by persons with disabilities.

Sample

Stratified random sampling method was used in this study. The study sample consisted of 100 people with disabilities (mainly people with visual impairment and low vision, hearing impairment and physical impairment) who had been supported in obtaining employment by Blind People's Association, in Ahmedabad city in India.

Data Collection

A structured interview schedule was used for data collection. Prior appointments were made for the interviews. The purpose of the study was clearly explained and the respondents gave their consent to participate. The researcher took the help of a sign language interpreter to conduct interviews of respondents with hearing impairment.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Most of the respondents (65%) belonged to the age group of 20-30 years and the majority of them (around 70%) were males. The highest representation of female respondents was from the physical impairment category. Based on the type of disability, 40% of the respondents had physical impairment, 30% had visual impairment, 23.8% had hearing impairment, and 6.2% had low vision. Around 41.2% of the respondents were graduates. While 51.2% were earning only between Rs 5001-8000, a meagre 12.5% earned more than Rs 20,000. A large proportion (87.5%) of respondents was employed in the private sector.

Table 1: Level of Barriers faced by Respondents

Type of Barriers	Level of Barriers		
	High Level	Low Level	Total
Physical Barriers	52(65)	28(35)	80(100)
Psychological Barriers	42(52.5)	38(47.5)	80(100)
Information, Communication and Technological Barriers	42(52.5)	38(47.5)	80(100)

It is obvious from Table 1 that a high level of physical, psychological and ICT barriers are faced by the majority of respondents. While the highest proportion of respondents (65%) reported high level of physical barriers, a large proportion of respondents (52.5%) reported high level of psychological and ICT barriers.

Physical barriers faced by respondents were: access to appear at examination centres and interview boardrooms, travel from home to office by public transport / in office vehicle / private vehicle, access to workstation/department from main gate, access to attendance system/ notice board, access to other important departments of the organisation, access to canteen facilities and to lavatory facilities of the organisation, access to fire exit area of the organisation, and, access to equipment, tools, and machinery required to perform their job.

The psychological barriers identified by the respondents included: difficulty in working with colleagues without disability or with other colleagues with disability in the organisation, communicating disability-specific needs to the management or to lower level staff in the organisation, travelling with colleagues for office work or on tour, working with the opposite sex in the organisation,

participation in office events conducted by the organisation, maintaining interpersonal relationship with colleagues/higher level management/lower level staff, adjusting to a newly assigned job or role in the organisation, transfer to another place or another department, proving one's abilities in a sympathetic environment wherein people with disabilities are treated charitably, handling work pressure and meeting work deadlines, getting support from colleagues to complete an assignment, and, maintaining a balance in personal and professional life.

Barriers in ICT as reported by the respondents were: filling up offline or online job application forms, access to information shared in training and meetings, communication in training and meetings, communication with colleagues without disability, communication with customers/clients, communication with higher level management / lower level staff / staff of other departments, handling desktop, laptops and other computer-related equipment, handling web-based internet, intranet and applications, and, handling video-audio and multimedia products.

If access to the important facilities in an organisation is difficult, life of employees with disability can be miserable and it is a violation of their basic rights. Very often this would be a significant reason for them to remain absent or leave their jobs, or be perpetually unhappy and stressed in the workplace. Similarly, psychological barriers may prevent them from considering their workplace as a pleasant environment, and ICT barriers can block their development opportunities by their inability to gain maximum benefit from ICT training and workshops organised for the growth and upgradation of employees.

Coleman et al (2013) also found that there are more and varied obstacles to employment that affect people with disability as compared to people without disability. People limited by a health condition or disability mentioned several barriers and limitations with regard to transport, the attitudes of employers or colleagues, anxiety or lack of confidence, and issues relating to access and support.

According to Hagner et al (2002), respondents with disability are also more likely than respondents without disability to have experienced a negative outcome from a workplace problem, such as a negative impact on physical or psychological health or well-being, on financial well-being or on personal relationships. This has been confirmed by the findings of the current study.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to identify the types and severity of physical, psychological and ICT barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the course of their employment. Findings of this study prove that persons with disabilities certainly face all types of barriers. The majority of the respondents reported that these barriers caused high level of difficulties.

Suggestions

To ensure inclusive involvement of employees with disability in an organisation, first of all there should be a non-discrimination policy for recruitment as well as in behaviour and attitude towards persons with disabilities. An accessibility audit should be undertaken by the employer to identify barriers in the work environment and make it disability friendly. The corporate social responsibility wing of an organisation can take the initiative and do much towards promoting the inclusive growth and development of its differently abled employees.

The Government should promote policies for accessible environments and reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. The employers and non-government organisations should be sensitised on disability issues. Role-mapping exercises can be undertaken to identify potential posts for persons with disabilities. At the same time, access audit should be made mandatory, and there should be emphasis on equal opportunity policy. The transportation system should be made accessible for persons with disabilities, and machines, tools, and technology should be adapted for them. A detailed research on accessible work environment for persons with disability in India needs to be carried out.

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