

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR IMPEDIMENTS TO EDUCATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: People living with disabilities encounter many disadvantages in society and are often subject to stigma and discrimination. 'Women with disabilities' suffer a double discrimination, both on the grounds of gender and of impairment. The consequences of deficiencies and disablement are particularly serious for women. Women with disabilities are subjected to social, cultural and economic disadvantages, which impede their access to, for example, health care, education, vocational training and employment. The Biwako Millennium Framework highlights the low status of women and girls with disabilities and the discrimination faced by them while accessing education, vocational training, employment and income generation opportunities. The framework focuses that due to the denied opportunities for development, they lack a sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Education is urged to be a powerful tool for the welfare of all. But when it comes to educational experiences of women and girls with disabilities- one of the most marginalized group in society, it is seen that disparities exist. This paper briefly reviews the scholarly articles and research studies focusing on the educational status of the women with disabilities and their impediment to education. Various studies indicated the neglected state of education of women with disabilities. Access to educational opportunities was limited for disabled women than disabled men and non-disabled women. Several barriers contributing in the low educational status of these women is stated in the studies reviewed.

Keywords: Education, Women with disabilities

I. INTRODUCTION

People living with disabilities encounter many disadvantages in society and are often subject to stigma and discrimination. 'Women with disabilities' suffer a double discrimination, both on the grounds of gender and of impairment. The consequences of deficiencies and disablement are particularly serious for women. Women with disabilities are subjected to social, cultural and economic disadvantages, which impede their access to, for example, health care, education, vocational training and employment. The Biwako Millennium Framework highlights the low status of women and girls with disabilities and the discrimination faced by them while accessing education, vocational training, employment and income generation opportunities. The framework focuses that due to the denied opportunities for development, they lack a sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

Education is urged to be a powerful tool for the welfare of all. But when it comes to educational experiences of women and girls with disabilities- one of the most marginalized group in society, it is seen that disparities exist. This paper briefly reviews the scholarly articles and research studies focusing on the educational status of the women with disabilities and their impediment to education. Various studies indicated the neglected state of education of women with disabilities. Access to educational opportunities was limited for disabled women than disabled men and non-disabled women. Several barriers contributing in the low educational status of these women is stated in the studies reviewed.

Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to review the scholarly articles and research studies focusing on the educational status of women with disabilities and to find out the probable causes for their impediments to education.

Method

An online and offline search was done. Offline search was done at the libraries of Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi and NCERT, New Delhi.

Online search was done in the following database – Google scholar, ERIC. In addition search engines like Google were also searched. The search includes studies conducted in India and abroad.

Results

The results revealed that impediments to education of women with disabilities were common in most of the studies. Three barriers - lack of educational facilities, gender disparities and attitudinal barriers were reported in the studies. Besides that being a disabled was also one of the reason as barrier to education.

Lack of educational facilities:

In a study on women with physical disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago Huggins (2003) studied the status of women with disabilities by using several variables important to physically disabled persons such as education level, employment, and income, access to resources, mobility, and rehabilitation and concluded that WWD are positioned at the lowest levels in society. Women with physical disabilities included women with visual impairment, arthritis, and amputation of limbs, poliomyelitis, and cerebral palsy. The experiences shared by women with different degrees of disability on education level revealed that access to educational opportunities and facilities was less for disabled women than disabled men and non-disabled women. Problems of mobility such as lack of transportation to and from school or the unavailability of an aid such as pair of crutches or a wheel chair were also barriers in accessing educational opportunities (Fairchild, S., 2000). Similar problems were found by Dhungana (2006) while examining the problems faced by physically disabled women in Nepal. He has shown from the analysis of data that disabled women were cast down, stigmatized, and rejected and excluded by family, community and by the government officials. They were positioned at the lowest social level in Nepal. His research revealed that none of them received any legal provisions such as free education, free health facilities, employment opportunities, and self-employment facilities, traveling facilities and free legal aid services as in the law.

Hershey (2001) interviewed Elly Macha who examined the educational, economic, and other issues affecting women and girls with blindness and other disabilities living in Tanzania in her research project. She looked at the cultural, economic obstacles encountered by visually impaired women in Tanzania in accessing education. She also looked at the policy issues, disability policies, or special education policies in Tanzania, which articulated the needs of visually impaired children and disabled children in general. The findings showed that only few schools were providing education for visually impaired children. Most schools had no facilities and parents were not able to afford the equipments needed for the children.

Gender disparities:

The barriers which adversely affect the educational opportunities of girls and women with disabilities have also been addressed by Rousso (1999) in his report 'Education for All: A Gender and Disability Perspective' prepared for the World Bank. In the report he mentioned that girls with disabilities are large and diverse groups whose educational needs have gone unnoticed by those committed to either gender equity or disability equity. They fare less well in the educational arena than disabled male or non-disabled female counterparts do. Literature related to disabled girls and their education, is sparse and this holds true for countries at all levels of development, including the United States. The report mentioned many barriers, which hinder the path of these girls to quality education. These barriers include: 1. Cultural bias against women and rigid gender roles 2. Sexual/disability harassment and violence in school 3. Distance to school 4. Inaccessible school buildings 5. Limited access to special education services and supports 6. Non-existent or gender and disability biased vocational training and counseling.

Traustadottir in 1997 examined the lives of women with disabilities and the effects of double discrimination faced by them. It was seen that access to education was a major problem for people with disabilities and women with disabilities received less education in comparison to both non-disabled women and men with disabilities. The education of boys with disabilities was given priority and had better opportunities in terms of love, food, treatment, education and social gatherings and the daughter was denied these facilities (Rousso, 1999). Disabled boys were seen as in need of special education services in order to develop the skills so that they could be able to support themselves and a family later on. In higher education also, women with disabilities faced challenges unlike men with disabilities. They faced accessibility problems; accommodation problems and lack of special services such as readers for blind persons.

Bramley *et al.* (1990) conducted an Australian project, which investigated the ways in which gender issues affected adolescent girls with disabilities and associated educational implications. One eighty (180) girls and women with mild and moderate disabilities ranged from 12-29 years of age were interviewed. Besides that, additional information was also collected through questionnaires and discussions with parents and educators. Results from the interviews with girls with disabilities revealed mixed views of girls. Experiences regarding the positive aspects of regular school, girls reported that the teachers were understanding and helpful. They also treated them alike normal students. Negative aspects of regular school were related to inadequate special services, insensitive teachers or students, work load and physical environment of the school. Making friends at school was reported by most but not all of the girls with disabilities. Most of the girls faced problems to describe themselves. Some of the girls had high- self esteem and some of them showed low self-esteem while describing about self. It was also found that most of the girls did not perceive themselves to be disabled and had strong sense of independence in the sense of overcoming disability, of acting and looking like non-disabled and of 'fitting in' with the non-disabled population.

Attitudinal barriers:

Available researches suggest that educational status of women with disabilities is low due to the attitude of family and society. Examining the legislature and political environment affecting women with disabilities in four different countries-India, U.K., U.S., and South Africa Fairchild, S. (2000) summarizes that the disability legislature policies particularly in India have moved from the medical model to social model, but strong patriarchal traditions toward women still dominate relationships and social policies. According to her, the literacy rate of women with disabilities is low due to social attitudes. For example in a review of Indian researches conducted on disabled women, Kulshreshtha and Sharma (1985) found that the adverse social attitude of parents and society is a big hurdle in the way of education and rehabilitation of these women. Similarly, five case studies of girls with visual disabilities undertaken by Julka (2006) in India revealed that girls experienced negative attitudes and discrimination and had to suffer not only because of disability but also because of sex stereotyping. The paper also highlighted that they had very few opportunities to develop their talents and skills for procuring suitable employment to their independence and empowerment.

In a study on the situation of women with disabilities in Bangladesh Yasmin (2003) says that most of the time women with disabilities are neglected by their family members as well as society. Though laws exist in Bangladesh but there is no provision for protecting the rights of the women with disabilities. Only 23 percent women with disabilities know that they have some rights, others do not have any knowledge about their human rights or equal rights. Facilities are very limited and only a small number of WWD's are getting education through special education, vocational training and home based education. Disability is a barrier to education for women with disability and situation for them becomes more awkward because of attitude, accessibility and also social security. In a similar study in 2003, Nagata analyzed the situation of Arab women with disabilities. Analysis showed that

literacy among women with disabilities was far lower than that of men with disabilities, labor force participation of Arab women with disabilities was also limited.

An intensive study on situation of disabled women and adolescent girls with disability in Bangladesh was undertaken by Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID) in 2003. The study aimed to come up with a comprehensive socio-economic and psychological analysis of status of women and adolescent girls with disabilities in Bangladesh. The purpose was to provide information to planners of programme development for designing and implementing need-based development interventions for women and adolescent girls with disabilities. Findings were represented in forms of types and degrees of disability; treatment; education; employment and other features, psychological phenomenon; human rights issue; and ability, dignity and self esteem. The study showed that disability was a barrier to education. In the women with disability group, only 3.75 percent had proceeded on to university education. The highest enrolment could be seen in the primary school at 21.25 percent for women with disabilities and 30.67 percent for girls with disabilities. 36.06 percent of the women with disabilities and 36.58 percent of the girls with disabilities were either teased or their ventures to study were not supported by other members of their surrounding environment. People concerned with education management and family members were the basic factors for isolation of disabled persons as a whole in the prevailing system of education. Enrolment in special education schools was much lower being expensive, urban based, and not being fully accessible due to far distance. Persons with hearing, visual, intellectual and multiple disabilities had to face various problems for enrolment in such schools. The school authorities refused to enroll disabled learner because of doubt of their potentials and lack of proper policies. Disabled girls residing in hostels had problems due to absence of female house parent, which limited sharing of feminine and other essential needs. The most humiliating thing was that the teachers were also involved in teasing the disabled learners.

Discussion

The review was carried out to throw light on the educational status of women with disabilities and to focus on the barriers to their education. The studies included in the review demonstrate that the educational status of women with disabilities is very low (Rouso, 1997) and the three main impediments to education which were highlighted by most of the studies included lack of educational facilities, gender disparity and attitudinal barriers.

Perusal of the literature revealed that low educational status was common feature in all the studies and barriers to their education were more or less similar in most of the studies. Being a disabled was also a barrier in education as reported in one of the study. Within the lack of educational facilities problems of mobility such as lack of transportation to and from school or the unavailability of an aid such as pair of crutches or a wheel chair were barriers to education of women with disabilities. (Huggins, 2003; Fairchild, S., 2000)

It was also noted in one of the study that due to low social level none of the women with disabilities received any legal provisions such as free education, free health facilities, employment opportunities, and self-employment facilities, traveling facilities and free legal aid services as in the law. (Dhungana, 2006)

Most schools had no facilities and parents were not able to afford the equipments needed for the children. (Hershey, 2001)

In the studies reviewed which talked about gender disparity as one of the barriers, it was revealed that women with disabilities faced double discrimination both as women and disabled. They received less priority and chances to avail facilities in comparison to disabled men and non - disabled women and men were minimal. (Rouso, 1999; Traustadottir, 1997; Bramley *et. Al.*, 1990)

Studies indicating the attitudinal barriers highlighted that society and especially family had a very negative attitude towards women with disabilities. They had doubt in their capabilities and that is why they were ignored and access to education and other facilities was denied. (Fairchild, S., 2000; Kulshreshtha and Sharma, 1985; Julka, 2006; Yasmin, 2003)

Conclusion

Despite the fact that women with disabilities should be treated as any other individual and access to education being a right of every individual, they still lack behind in availing this opportunity. Administrative set up in schools lack behind the educational facilities required to meet the needs these women. Besides that gender discrimination and attitude of family & society also creates hurdle in getting equal treatment with disabled men or non-disabled peer. To improve the educational status of women with disabilities and to remove the impediments it is needed that governments work on policies related to people with disabled especially for women with disabilities. Awareness raising programmes and campaigns for family and society should be conducted.

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