



# Breaking Down Employment Stigmas: Perspectives on Disability and Work

## *Barriers, Stigma and Discrimination faced by PWD in employment*

Anmol Varma<sup>1</sup>, Nargis<sup>2</sup>

Assistant Professor<sup>1,2</sup>

Psychology Department <sup>1</sup>, Visual Impairment Department<sup>2</sup>

Vision Institute of Applied Studies, Haryana, India<sup>1,2</sup>

**Abstract :** Even while everyone is working to ensure that people with disabilities (PwDs) are included in all facets of society, they remain a vulnerable population that faces social marginalization. Individual marginalization causes unemployment and hence poverty, which impedes meaningful engagement in society activities. Disability, social isolation, and poverty are closely linked; despite disability acts, advocacy campaigns, and programs aimed at reducing poverty, these marginalized handicapped people continue to be victims. Disability-related job hurdles prevent people with disabilities from working, which has led to low employment rates. People with disabilities who are employed and succeeding in their careers can offer invaluable experience to other job seekers. Such data regarding the obstacles and enablers of PWD employment in various industries is scarce in India. Developing nations like India are still having difficulty establishing an inclusive society because of structural, systemic, and mental limitations. This article offers solutions for the obstacles that people with disabilities must overcome in order to start the process of successful inclusion.

**Keywords :** Employment, Disability, Barriers, Discrimination, Accommodation, Schemes

## Employment

Employment is a pillar of societal functioning, allowing individuals to contribute to the economy while also pursuing personal and professional goals. Beyond simply providing financial support, employment generates a sense of purpose, belonging, and self-esteem in individuals, confirming their place in the social fabric. It acts as a means of honing abilities, realizing objectives, and cultivating networks, so benefiting not only the individual but also the larger community.

In economics, employment refers to the state of having a job or being employed. If one has to employ someone, they must pay them. The person who hires people is known as employer, and the person who is getting paid for providing the services is known as employee. Employers may include individuals, business, etc. People can work for themselves and run their own businesses as self-employed individuals.

Employment helps in engaging in paid work or holding a job in exchange for wages or salary. It involves individuals offering their skills, labor, and expertise to an organization or employer in return for compensation. Employment can take various forms, including full-time, part-time, temporary, contract, or self-employment. It is a crucial aspect of socioeconomic participation and contributes to individuals' financial stability, personal fulfillment, and overall well-being.

Employment is a keystone of societal functioning, linking economic prosperity with personal fulfillment and social cohesion. Its relevance extends beyond monetary recompense to embrace concepts of identity, purpose, and community. Furthermore, employment plays a pivotal role in shaping social identities and relationships. Studies such as those by Ashforth et al. (2000) and Pratt et al. (2006) have emphasized the significance of work in defining one's self-concept and social identity. For many individuals, their occupation serves as a primary source of identity and status, influencing perceptions of self-worth and social esteem. Moreover, employment provides opportunities for social interaction, networking, and community engagement, thereby fostering social cohesion and solidarity.

## Disability

Disability is an umbrella term that covers impairments, limitations in activities as well as restrictions in participation. Disability refers to any limitation or incapacity arising from impairment to carry out an activity in a way or within a range that is deemed typical for humans. Disability is the loss of functional ability due to an impairment; handicap is a measure of the social and cultural effects of an impairment or disability; impairment relates to the physical components of health.

Impairment is considered as a problem in body structure or function; activity limitation is a difficulty that's encountered by a person in executing an action or task; whereas a participation restriction is a problem that's experienced by a person in involvement in life situations. It has been used to highlight the constraints or challenges a person faces as a result of physical, mental, or emotional impairments, as well as the participation restrictions they encounter in situations when the environment is not supportive. As a result, the term "disability" has been used to refer to nearly every conceptual element connected to the ability continuum that affects the individual, as well as the effects of the environment that have a feeding influence from the context outside the individual. Some disabilities are apparent from birth, others may develop due to heredity, injury, illness, or aging. Regardless of its origin, disability is an integral part of the human condition, affecting individuals across all ages, races, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds.

According to RPWD Act 2016

Disability has been defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept.

The types of disabilities have been increased from existing 7 to 21 and the Central Government will have the power to add more types of disabilities. The 21 disabilities are given below:-

### 1. Physical Disability

#### Locomotor Disability

- Leprosy Cured Person
- Cerebral Palsy
- Dwarfism
- Muscular Dystrophy
- Acid Attack Victims

#### Visual Impairment

- Blindness
- Low Vision

#### Hearing Impairment

- Deaf
- Hard of Hearing

#### Speech and Language Disability

### 2. Intellectual Disability

- Specific Learning Disabilities
- Autism Spectrum Disorder

### 3. Mental Behavior (Mental Illness)

### 4. Disability caused due to-

Chronic Neurological Conditions such as

- Multiple Sclerosis

- Parkinson's Disease

#### Blood Disorder

- Haemophilia
- Thalassemia
- Sickle Cell Disease

#### 5. Multiple Disabilities

- Persons with "benchmark disabilities" are defined as those certified to have at least 40 per cent of the disabilities specified above.

### Need of employment for Person with Disabilities

1. **Financial Independence:** Through employment, people with disabilities can become financially independent, supporting themselves and lowering their dependency on government assistance programs.
2. **Social Inclusion:** By giving individuals who have disabilities the opportunity to interact with coworkers, form relationships, and give back to their communities, gainful employment promotes social inclusion and gives them a sense of purpose and belonging.
3. **Enhanced Self-esteem :** Disability-related self-esteem and confidence can be increased by employment because disabled people who work feel proud of their accomplishments and more confident about themselves.
4. **Improved health outcomes :** Studies suggest that employment correlates with improved physical and mental health outcomes for individuals with disabilities, including decreased rates of depression and increased overall well-being (McDonough & Revell, 2019).
5. **Skill Development:** Employment provides chances for skill development and personal development, allowing people with disabilities to improve their current abilities, learn new ones, and become more marketable.
6. **Contribution to Society:** Through employment, individuals with disabilities can actively contribute to society, utilize their talents, and make meaningful contributions to their workplaces and the broader community, challenging stereotypes and promoting diversity and inclusion (DePoy & Gilson, 2021).

### Barriers in employment for PWD

Despite the legal protections offered by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, people with disabilities frequently experience barriers and discrimination in the workplace in India. Typical examples of barriers include:

1. **Discrimination:** Discrimination in recruiting, promotion, and retention processes is still a substantial barrier for people with disabilities. Even when anti-discrimination laws are in place, prejudice and stereotypes persist, limiting equitable job prospects.

Imagine going to a job interview excited to showcase your skills and experience, only to feel the interviewer's skepticism when they notice your disability. Despite being fully capable, you might be passed over simply because of unfair assumptions about what you can or cannot do

2. **Lack of Accessibility:** Many workplaces lack appropriate modifications and accessibility features, making it difficult for people with disabilities to do their jobs efficiently.

Picture trying to access your workplace, only to find there are stairs everywhere and no ramps or elevators. Inside, essential tools and technology aren't adapted to your needs, making every task a struggle.

3. **Limited Educational Opportunities:** Persons with disabilities often face barriers in accessing quality education and vocational training, which can impact their ability to secure employment in competitive fields.

Imagine being denied access to education because the schools lack the resources or accommodations needed for your disability. Without proper training or qualifications, finding a job becomes incredibly challenging

**4. Negative attitudes and stereotypes:** Attitudinal impediments, such as stigma and misconceptions about disability, can lead to social isolation and limited employment possibilities for people with impairments.

Think about facing constant skepticism or pity from coworkers who assume you're less competent simply because of your disability. These attitudes not only affect your morale but also create invisible barriers to advancement

**5. Financial Barriers:** Persons with disabilities often face financial challenges, including higher healthcare costs and limited access to affordable transportation, which can impact their ability to seek and maintain employment.

Imagine struggling to afford the specialized equipment or transportation services you need because they're not covered by insurance or are prohibitively expensive. These financial barriers can severely limit your ability to participate in the workforce

**6. Lack of Flexible work arrangements:** Many employers do not provide flexible work arrangements or appropriate adjustments, making it difficult for people with disabilities to balance work with their medical needs or caregiving duties.

Consider needing regular medical appointments or adjustments to your work schedule to accommodate your disability. Without flexibility from your employer, maintaining both your job and your health becomes nearly impossible

**7. Inadequate Support System:** Many persons with disabilities lack access to comprehensive support systems, including vocational rehabilitation services and peer support networks, which are essential for finding and maintaining employment.

Picture feeling lost in your job search because there's no one to guide you through the process or connect you with resources tailored to your needs. Without adequate support, navigating the complexities of employment becomes overwhelming.

## Stigma

Despite gains towards openness, stigma and prejudices surrounding disability linger, promoting misconceptions and impediments to equality. Negative attitudes toward disability can lead to social isolation, discrimination, and limited possibilities for people with impairments. Combating these biases involves proactive efforts to promote awareness, build empathy, and amplify the voices of those who have lived experiences with disabilities.

## Workplace accommodation and accessibility

People with disabilities may face certain functional difficulties and barriers (physical, digital, information, administrative, attitudinal, social etc.) in a workspace due to which, they may either not be able to apply/compete for a job or may not be able to participate/contribute/grow as an employee in an efficient manner.

The following list contains a few instances of appropriate workplace accommodations.

- Providing a screen reading software for a person with visual disability.
- Rescheduling the workday from 10 AM to 6 PM to 7 AM to 3 PM in order to accommodate a psycho-socially disabled employee who experiences weariness in the late afternoon and nighttime.
- Modifying the height of the worktable and/or chair for a person who is short-statured.
- Reorganizing the job description to include more chat and email inquiries and fewer call-based inquiries for an individual with a hearing impairment.

The term 'Accessibility' refers to making buildings, software and products and Services compliant based on certain national/international standards.

For example,

- ◆ Constructing a ramp with appropriate gradient, railings, surface, landing, width etc. as per standards is accessibility.
- ◆ Adding captions to a film is accessibility accommodation, on the other hand, focusses on addressing specific individual needs of a person with disability. It is not just restricted to providing accessible goods, technology and services. It could be related to working conditions, timings, Job restructuring, leave, training/supervising methods, accessing benefits and many other aspects.

- ◆ A larger monitor for a person with low vision.
- ◆ A light touch ergonomic keyboard for a person with repetitive stress injury.
- ◆ Assistance in getting food and coffee from the cafeteria/pantry for a person with mobility disability
- ◆ A reserved parking space closer to the lift for a person with thalassemia who feels fatigue.
- ◆ A sign language interpreter at a training session for a deaf person.
- ◆ Headphones for noise cancellation for a person with autism.
- ◆ Choosing an accessible restaurant for team dinner in order to make it inclusive for a team member using a wheelchair.
- ◆ Extra paid leave for a person who acquires disability.

Providing the needed assistive devices and technologies

- Mobility devices, such as wheelchairs, crutches, artificial limbs, callipers, sticks, etc. Used in office premises.

Providing accessibility in the built environment

- Ramps
- Lifts
- Accessible doors
- Reserved Parking
- Handrails on steps/ramps
- Accessible toilets/washrooms
- Accessible counters and controls
- Accessible microwave, coffee machines, glasses/cups, sink etc.
- Accessible furniture
- Accessible gates, pathways, corridors, wide aisles for maneuverability of wheelchair, uncluttered place
- Adjusting the height of signages and information boards
- Resting rooms
- Automation (for controlling lighting level, adjusting temperature in rooms, operating appliances/switches, etc)
- Availability of wheelchairs
- Availability of evacuation chair

These features must adhere to accessibility standards.

Making recruitment inclusive

- Have an accessible venue for the interview.
- Remote interviews through video conference.
- Provide accessible tables/chairs for writing tests.
- Provide information to candidates regarding availability of accessible washrooms, ramps, lifts, parking spaces etc.
- Ensure availability of a wheelchair. Provide assistance if required.
- Give priority in interview so that the waiting time is not long.

#### Other accommodations for Traveling

- If transport is being provided for employees, then it should be ensured that it is accessible for people with disabilities i.e. make sure that the vehicles used have a low floor (buses, cars, golf carts etc.), hire cabs with larger boot space, procure wheelchair accessible vehicles with hydraulic lifts/ramps, provide door drop/pick up if needed, etc. If the person has her/his/their own vehicle, they can be compensated for the costs or given a travel allowance.
- For outstation travel, allow an escort to travel along if required or provide an extra daily allowance for hiring a caregiver.
- Ensure an accessible mode of travel and hotel stay for outstation travel.

#### Other accommodations for Training programs and employee engagement activities

- Accessible venue
- Accessible seating
- Accessible stage/podium
- Inclusive activities (outdoor activities should consider a person's accessibility needs).

#### Other accommodations for Working efficiently and progressing in work

Permit working from home or from a convenient place.

Permit taking breaks to adjust posture, take medication, etc.

- Allow the person to have food at the workstation area.
- Allow participation through teleconferences.
- Allot extra medical leave/time off for therapy, surgery, rehabilitation etc.
- Provide home modification costs in case of transfer to another city, apart from other relocating costs.
- If the company provides a car as a benefit, then allow for an additional allowance for modifying the car to make it accessible.
- Provide human assistance for supporting the person in certain daily living activities / allow the person to bring their own personal assistant.

#### Developing a personalized emergency preparedness plan

- Consult with the employee regarding the most suitable evacuation method for them. Some may be able to move out of the building using the staircase with the support of handrails, some may need an evacuation chair, some may need a person to escort them and so on.
- Train the person in operating the Manual Call Points (MCPs) and Emergency Door release (EDRs) and ensure that they are able to reach these.
- Ensure that emergency evacuation maps are within their vision zone as per standards.
- Ensure that the pathway to a safe assembly area is made accessible. Appropriate seating should be made available in safe assembly areas for those who may not be able to stand for long.

### Schemes and policies by Government

The government has created a number of programs to support people with impairments in work and education, including

- **Assistance to disable persons for purchase of fitting of Aid Appliances (ADIP Scheme)**

The objective of this Scheme is to provide good quality prosthetics and assistive devices to disabled persons through Voluntary Organizations. These assistive devices help to reduce the dependency of disabled persons and to enhance their Social, mental, Economic and Physical capabilities. Under this Scheme, free prosthetic devices are provided to those disabled persons, who suffer from 40% disability and has monthly income below Rs. 20,000 P.M.

### ● **AdHoc allotment of quarter to Handicapped employee**

Ad hoc allotment of quarter to handicapped employees may be considers in the following cases:-

- The blind i.e those who suffer form either of –

(a) Total absence of sight. (b) Visual Acuity not exceeding 6/90 or 20/200(snellen) in the better eye with correcting lenses. (c) Impression of the field of the vision subtending an angle of 20 degree or worse.

- The deaf, having hearing loss of more than 90 decibels in the better ear (profound impairment)or total loss of hearing in both ears.

- The orthopedically handicapped to the extent of 40% and above disability,

- Mentally handicapped/ spastic dependents – SR317-B-9,GIO(1).

### ● **Reservation for Person with Disabilities**

Categories - (a) Blindness or low vision; (b) Hearing impairment; (c) Locomoter disability or cerebral palsy. [Includes al cases of orthopedically handicapped persons.]

Reservation is admissible only for those who suffer form not less than 40 percent of relevant disability.

### ● **Relaxation and Concession.-**

Age.-

For Groups 'C' and 'D' - 10 years for recruitment through

Posts/ services SSC/Employment Exchange

For Groups 'A' and 'B' - 10 years for recruitment through

Posts/services Open Competitive examinations

And 5 year in other cases.

### ● **Special Allowance for child care for women with disabilities and Education Allowance for disabled children of Govt. employees.**

Women with disabilities shall be paid RS. 1000/- per month as Special Allowance for Child care. The allowance shall be payable from the time of the child's birth till the child is two year old. It shall be payable for a maximum of two children.

- Responsibility has been cast upon the appropriate governments to take effective measures to ensure that the persons with disabilities enjoy their rights equally with others.
- Additional benefits such as reservation in higher education (not less than 5%), government jobs (not less than 4 %), reservation in allocation of land, poverty alleviation schemes (5% allotment) etc. have been provided for persons with benchmark disabilities and those with high support needs.
- Every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education.
- Government funded educational institutions as well as the government recognized institutions will have to provide inclusive education to the children with disabilities.
- For strengthening the Prime Minister's Accessible India Campaign, stress has been given to ensure accessibility in public buildings (both Government and private) in a prescribed time-frame.

## **Conclusion**

Depending on their gender, reading level, kind of disability, and whether they live in an urban or rural location, people with disabilities have varied employment experiences. While India has made great strides in the area of disability legislation and has recently attempted to implement policies for poverty alleviation that specifically target people with disabilities, the advantages of these efforts may be hampered if these disparities are not taken into consideration.

Policies that are adopted nationally without taking into account regional quirks are unlikely to increase PwDs' quality of life in an equitable manner. A deeper understanding of the obstacles to PwD employment is necessary, as is the possibility that these obstacles varied depending on the type of disability in various Indian districts. With this information, much-needed evidence might be obtained for the creation of more successful municipal policies. The findings that are offered here provide a starting step in expanding this knowledge by highlighting notable variations across gender, kind of impairment, and urban and rural locations.



## References

- Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., & Fugate, M. (2000). All in a day's work: Boundaries and micro role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(3), 472-491.
- Baldwin, M. L., & Johnson, W. G. (2020). Disability and the labor market: An overview of recent trends. *Industrial Relations*, 59(2), 201-229.
- Bhattacharjya, D., & Sharma, S. (2021). Disability and employment: Understanding the challenges. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 63(Suppl 3), S295-S299
- Das, S. (2017). Attitudes of employers towards persons with disabilities in the context of employability and workplace discrimination. *Disability, CBR & Inclusive Development*, 28(3), 5-18
- DePoy, E., & Gilson, S. F. (2021). Social justice, disability, and employment. Springer.
- Hernandez, B., Keys, C. B., & Balcazar, F. E. (2018). A meta-synthesis of employment interventions and their impact on the employment outcomes for people with disabilities. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 28(2), 220-234.
- Kaye, H. S. (2018). Disability and employment: Recent trends, innovative practices, and persistent challenges. *Industrial Relations*, 57(3), 347-372.
- Kumar, A., & Ram, S. (2019). Vocational education and employment of persons with disabilities in India: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 5(1), 54-68.
- McDonough, K., & Revell, G. (2019). Work and well-being of individuals with disabilities: A conceptual model of employment outcomes. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 85(3), 36-45.
- Smith, D. L. (2019). Disability, poverty and the new development agenda. Cambridge University Press.
- Sharma, A., & Shukla, A. (2018). Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016: An analysis. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research & Development*, 9(8), 77-80.
- Shetty, A., & Chatterjee, A. (2020). Rights of persons with disabilities act, 2016: Are employers equipped to implement it? *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 62(Suppl 2), S263-S266.
- Sinha, A., & Thakur, P. (2016). Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in India: Policy framework and strategies. *International Journal of Development Research*, 6(8), 8905-8911.
- Warr, P. (2007). Work, happiness, and unhappiness. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- <https://sswcd.punjab.gov.in/en/assistance-to-disable-persons-for-purchase-of-fitting-of-aid-appliances-adip-scheme>
- [https://ncpedp.org/documents/Reasonable-accommodations\\_booklet.pdf](https://ncpedp.org/documents/Reasonable-accommodations_booklet.pdf)