

Factors Influencing Employability of Persons with Disabilities in India: A Systematic Review Protocol

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ABSTRACT

Employment is a social determinant of health. There is compelling evidence that work improves general health and well-being and reduces psychological stress. People with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed and generally earn less even when employed. Despite the recent strides in terms of legislative frameworks aligned to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) 2004 (which India ratified in 2007) like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) act 2016, the social reality of the employment status of the Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) is in stark contrast. Several barriers contribute to the disadvantages experienced by people with disabilities while seeking jobs and retention of meaningful employment. Literature showed many studies regarding employment-related issues particularly employability of PwDs, but very few have studied local factors coming into play. This study aims to develop a systematic review protocol to systematically analyze and synthesize the existing knowledge within this area in India for planning future interventions. The protocol has already been registered to PROSPERO International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews. (Registration ID. CRD42023407717)

Keywords: Persons with disabilities, Systematic review protocol, Employment, Health care, Sustainable development, Indian context, Rights of persons with disabilities

INTRODUCTION

Everyone needs a job and income for a living including PwDs.¹ Meaningful employment is necessary for independent living, community integration, improved self-esteem, and for quality of life.² Many authors have found that it is the primary aspiration of persons with disabilities (PwDs) worldwide, including India.³ Out of approximately 62% of the Indian population of working age (15-59 yrs.)⁴ and the estimated 5-7 million people entering the workforce every year⁵ persons with disabilities form a very meager portion. Out of 2.21% of people with disabilities in the total population of India, 26% are employed.⁶ Globally only 48.7% PwDs are employed whereas 72.9% are without any disability.⁷ People with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to deficiencies in services such as health care, rehabilitation, and support and assistance.⁸ Many times they have no or less access to training for skill development and opportunities at employment.⁹ A scoping review of 54

studies revealed that for a majority of persons with disability, work continued to be meaningful and important. Common themes across all types of disability included work being a source of identity, feelings of normality, financial support, and socialization.¹⁰ It becomes all the more important because of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals; SDG 1: Poverty alleviation and SDG 8: Decent work for all outlined in Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.¹¹

There are many studies done in this area yet there seems to be a dearth of empirical studies and of studies with summarized findings to guide best practices. In the Indian context, reliable prevalence data for persons with disabilities itself are not available.³ Most of the data regarding the employment of persons with disabilities are through government reports, reports of reputed organizations, and a few research papers. Hence, it is necessary to collate the existing evidence within this highly neglected area to determine research gaps, guide policy decisions, etc. Also, persons with disability in rural and urban areas have different factors contributing to their employment.^{12,13} This further strengthens the belief that local factors might have an impact on the employability of Pwds. In India, employment opportunities differ between rural and urban areas; urban areas rely on offices, malls & factories, while rural areas rely mostly on agriculture.¹² A similar study on persons suffering with mental illness in India demonstrated higher rates of work in rural areas (77.8%), where most work was in family agricultural businesses, than in urban areas (48.9%).¹³ Further, disabled people are not a homogeneous group.¹⁴ For each type of disability, there is a range of associated and specific needs that are required to be fulfilled to increase employability. Studies regarding factors that contribute to differences in employment rates within the heterogeneous group of PwDs have received less attention lest aside from any evidence-based program for such.

Although many researchers all over the world are engaged in these issues, work is missing that examines how disability may be viewed differently in different cultural contexts and what impact any such differences may have on adopting an international perspective.¹⁵ Also, inconsistency in data available for disability, in general, makes international comparison difficult.¹⁶ Hence a plan for an Indian Study. The findings will help develop corrective measures for the barriers to employment and devise intervention programs to promote inclusive employment.

Objectives

To develop a systematic review protocol for identifying the factors influencing the employability of PwDs in India.

Review question

What are the factors influencing the employability of PwDs in India?

METHODS

Study method

The systematic review will follow the guidelines of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA).¹⁷ This systematic review protocol has been registered to the PROSPERO International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews. (Registration ID CRD42023407717)

Search Strategy

The search strategy was based on PICOS¹⁸ & (sampling strategy, type of study, approaches, range of years, limits, inclusion and exclusions, terms used, electronic sources) STARLITE¹⁹ guidelines for qualitative studies

The search strategy included both text and index terms related to the following two areas: (1) Employability and (2) Persons with Disabilities. Please see the online supplementary document for the search strategy. ([Appendix](#))

Manual Searches

In order to identify additional potentially relevant studies the reference list of the included studies in this systematic review, relevant systematic reviews, and other relevant publications will be manually searched.

After preliminary research and idea validation selection criteria for including studies in the review using PICOS format to be defined for e.g. **P**opulation: persons with disabilities, working-age (16-65 years) of any gender, **I**ntervention: NA, **C**ontrol/Comparator: NA, **O**utcome: employment status and **S**etting: rural/urban/private/public enterprises

A) Inclusion Criteria for the Review-Articles that meet the following criteria will be included:

- had been published between January 1995 and December 2021
- Indian studies in the English language.
- study designs: Any of the study designs (including qualitative study /observational/cross-sectional/quantitative)
- the working-age population (16 to 65 years as per Census of India 2011)²⁰
- Persons with disabilities as per the RPWD²¹ act 2016
- reported on factors regarding employability with at least one of the following work outcomes:
 - maintain a job/ return to work
 - obtain a job/ employment status (previously employed/unemployed)

B) Exclusion Criteria for excluding studies not covered in inclusion criteria-Articles will be excluded if any of the following criteria are met:

- included participants with mainly other chronic diseases as the ones defined in the RPWD act
- included participants aged <16 or >65 years
- were case reports/case series, psychometric studies, letters, comments,

editorials, and overviews without empirical primary or secondary data.

- should be about employability for PWDs specifically.
- were in other languages than English
- were published before 1995
- had no abstract available.

C) Search methods

Electronic databases selected to be searched are PUBMED/MEDLINE, Google Scholar, COCHRANE, and Web of Science databases {as per AMSTAR (assessment of multiple systematic reviews) guidelines which recommend at least 2 databases}.¹⁸All search strategies are described in the supplementary material. (See [Appendix](#))

Citation Manager will be used for removal of duplication using two functions (1) the same title and author, published in the same year, and (2) the same title and author, published in the same journal, would be deleted. Title and abstract screening and decision about eligibility (based on inclusion and exclusion criteria) will be done by two trained reviewers followed by full text downloading and screening.

Other methods to be used for identifying relevant research includes a thorough hand/manual search in 5 steps- reference checking of the selected studies, contacting the authors of the relevant search for the full-text articles, screening for related articles in Pubmed and Google Scholar, and contacting experts in the field. For all hand/manual searches, journal and date of search include a rationale for selecting the article to be included.

D) Methods of review

Details of methods: Two reviewers to perform screening & selection of studies and a third to resolve in case of any disagreements with discussion. Data extraction method and terminology or codes to be used to be clarified beforehand.

Quality assessment

Quality Assessment (QA) Tools or checklists to be used with references or

URLs (eg (JBI or CASP tool for qualitative research)

The literature critique/ appraisal method to use a suitable QA tool for assessing the quality of relevant content and methodology used in each of the selected papers to be included.

Data extraction

A Pilot-tested data extraction form in Word or Excel to be used to record data.

Suitable citation manager (e.g. Mendeley/ Zotero) to be used to keep track of references. Reviewer 1 will review first, followed by reviewer 2 independently. If necessary, reviewer number 3 will review in case of disparities between the two initial reviews. data checking – double data extraction method to be used to counter bias. Statistical analysis, if required, and double data checking to be done.

Narrative synthesis

A narrative synthesis will be done using a framework

1. Exploring how the factors influence the employability of PWDs in the Indian context
2. Developing a preliminary synthesis of findings of included studies
3. Exploring relationships within and between studies
4. Assessing the robustness of the synthesis.

Methodological and bias risk assessment (using ROBIS TOOL) for the review to be done.

Presentation of results in the form of summary tables, and flow charts of the whole process as per PRISMA Guidelines 2020 for reporting systematic reviews to be followed. Plots of studies (if applicable) to be included in the final review. Additional material is to be included in the Protocol Data extraction form and tables. The intended outputs from the review are report submission followed by manuscript writing, revision, submission to a reputed journal, dissemination through conference presentations, etc.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review will present a comprehensive review of the impact of various factors on the employability of PwD, particularly in the Indian context which will be relevant for rehabilitation professionals, policymakers, and PwD

As such, it will be helpful for healthcare providers and researchers who are interested in developing interventions and technologies to promote the economic independence of PwD and facilitate community integration of PwD.

A recent study indicated that lack of support and transportation are the top reasons, why unemployment is so rampant amongst PwD.²² There are also financial benefits in developing an intervention for this population, in particular developing a targeted rehabilitation approach early on.⁸

Hence, it must analyze the barriers and facilitators that influence employability.

There is a knowledge gap in this area about Indian PwD, and this review can provide critical knowledge that may quell the need for information for guiding successful occupational/vocational rehabilitation. In addition, this will provide valuable insights regarding the need for evidence to support employment needs from the perspectives of both PwD and their educators/employers/health care providers/vocational trainers. The difficulties user experiences in navigating the job market could lead to failure to gain employment. Understanding the users' needs, employers' expectations, workplace demands, and the environment will increase the chances of getting employed. This review will serve as a guide to intervention program developers, policymakers, and researchers, who are exploring and developing new practice models in this area for PwD.

As it is a systematic review, we do not expect patients and the public to be involved.

Declaration by Authors

Ethical Approval: Not Applicable

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Search strategy

Based on PICO format

Population: persons with disabilities, working-age (16-65 years), any gender

Intervention: NA

Control/Comparator: NA

Outcome: Employment status

Keywords

(Key words/search words/phrases)

Employability

Barriers/Facilitators

Work/Job

Employment status

Inclusive employment

Inclusive workplace

Persons with disabilities

Skill Development

India

Any acronyms or abbreviations---- PWDs, PwDs

Any Phrases - *persons with disabilities*, factors influencing employability

Any Truncations- -----employ *

Other adjacent words: Work, Job

An example of a search string for a concept in the systematic review.

employability [All Fields] AND ("disabled persons"[MeSH Terms] OR ("disabled"[All Fields] AND "persons"[All Fields]) OR "disabled persons"[All Fields] OR ("persons"[All Fields] AND "disabilities"[All Fields]) OR "persons with disabilities"[All Fields])
