



EXPLORING PSYCHOSOCIAL BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AMONG PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY DISABILITIES IN DISTRICT SWAT

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Abstract

This research explores the various psychosocial obstacles that create barrier for individuals with mobility disabilities in District Swat from achieving economic independence. The study's objectives include identifying the psychosocial barriers that limited economic independence. This study evaluating how these barriers affect job opportunities and financial well-being and exploring the coping strategies and resilience of the individuals involved. By reviewing existing literature, this research place itself within the broader field of disability studies, providing insights into societal attitudes, workplace adjustments, and the emotional aspects of disability in the employment context. In terms of methodology, the study will use a purposeful sampling approach to select participants from the District Swat community with mobility disabilities. Data will be collected through interview guide, and group discussions method. Thematic analysis will be employed to interpret the data. By uncovering the psychosocial aspects of economic independence, the research aims to contribute to the development of practical interventions and support systems that promote inclusivity and empower individuals navigating mobility disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency. In conclusion, this research aims to shine a light on the psychosocial complexities of economic independence for individuals with mobility disabilities in District Swat. Through its findings, it hopes to foster a more inclusive society, ensuring that economic opportunities are within reach for everyone, regardless of physical abilities.

Keyword: Psychosocial Barriers, Mobility Disabilities, District Swat, Economic Independence, Finding Employment and Financial Well-Being.

Introduction

In a diverse group of people, disability is not about lacking ability, it is about having unique strengths waiting to be discovered and adopted. The term 'disability' usually refers to a physical or mental condition that limited an individual's ability to do daily activities or participate in society equally with others (Hussain, 2022). Disability encompasses both biological and social components. Biologically, disabilities can arise during prenatal or postnatal development, while socially disability are influenced by societal beliefs and practices, which can either facilitate or hinder individuals' full participation in societal activities (Thomas, 2006).

Achieving financial independence is a fundamental goal for everyone, including individuals living with mobility disabilities (Irshad & Iqbal, 2013). People with mobility disabilities present many obstacles to securing employment, pushing individuals into lower-paying jobs and creating financial insecurity (Nord & Luecking, 2013). Many people with mobility disabilities do more struggle for the basic things. For them, even a single unexpected expense can make vulnerable their financial well-being and independence (Ahmed, 2012). These financial

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challenges can compromise access to basic needs such as housing, food, and healthcare, essential for overall well-being (Batavia & Beaulaurier, 2014). Limited financial resources can worsen vulnerability, leading to bankruptcy, deteriorating health, dependence on others for financial aid, and, in severe cases, homelessness or institutionalization (Oliver, 1996). Individuals with mobility disabilities often have restricted earning potential, making them vulnerable to financial crises and at high risk of descending into deep poverty cycle (Kaye, 2011).

In District Swat, individuals with mobility disabilities encounter significant challenges in achieving financial independence and accessing opportunities in various aspects of their lives. Thus economic dependency not only hampers effective problem-solving but is also exacerbated by psychosocial barriers, such as societal attitudes towards workplace inclusivity. Specific psychological elements, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, along with economic considerations like employment opportunities and financial support, significantly impact their ability to achieve independence. This research aims to comprehensively investigate these psychosocial barriers, going deep into the experiences and perspectives of individuals with mobility disabilities. By Engaging stakeholders, including employers, policymakers, and supporting organizations, the study seeks to provide crucial insights for targeted interventions and policy recommendations. Addressing these psychosocial barriers is crucial for fostering economic independence, enhancing overall quality of life, and promoting inclusivity for individuals with mobility disabilities. In choosing District Swat as the focal point of this study, this study recognizes its distinct socio-cultural landscape and the unique challenges faced by individuals with mobility disabilities in their pursuit of economic independence. The region's specific dynamics, cultural differences, and economic details play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of people with mobility disabilities. The research study aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform targeted interventions, policies, and support systems adapted to the specific needs of this community.

Research Questions

The study has the following questions:

1. What are the psychosocial barriers faced by individuals with mobility disabilities in access to employment opportunities in District Swat?
2. What are the factors that affect both social and economic aspect of individuals with mobility disabilities to achieve financial independence?
3. How can economic independence be achieved by using certain ways and means among people with mobility disability?

Literature Review

Social work and disability studies are interdependent, addressing challenges of individuals with disabilities (Smith et al., 2010). Social work, as a profession committed to social justice and well-being for marginalized populations. It plays an essential role in advocating for the rights and empowerment of individuals with disabilities (Hamid & Khan, 2011). Disability studies provide a theoretical framework that challenges traditional ideas about disability and highlights the importance of societal structures in shaping the experiences of individuals with disabilities and providing ways to empower people with disabilities

psychologically, socially, and economically (Jones & Brown, 2012). Within the context of social work, disability is increasingly recognized as a key dimension of diversity that requires specialized knowledge and practice (Iqbal, 2017). Social workers engaged in disability-related fields attempt to create inclusive environments, challenge discriminatory practices, and promote the full participation of individuals with mobility disabilities in all aspects of life (Muhammad & Ali, 2010). The principles of social justice set in social work harmonize with the objectives of disability studies, the goal is to break down unfair beliefs about abilities and create a society that is fairer and includes everyone (Iezzoni, 2013).

Mobility disability is defined by limitations in physical movement and functionality, encompasses a diverse range of conditions that significantly impact individuals' daily lives. Conditions such as musculoskeletal impairments and neurological disorders contribute to a spectrum of physical limitations, posing substantial challenges for those affected (WHO, 2021). The psychosocial dimensions of mobility disability are evident in both the internal struggles of individuals dealing with physical restrictions and the external factors imposed by societal attitudes and environmental barriers. The impact of mobility disability extends beyond the physical area, influencing mental well-being, social interactions, and economic opportunities (Smith et al., 2010).

People with mobility disabilities confronted persistent psychological stigmas ingrained in societal attitudes and perceptions. Stigma was a social phenomenon, and this concept was particularly relevant when exploring the psychosocial challenges faced by individuals with disabilities (Goffman, 1996). The prevailing societal view often positioned disability as a deviation from the norm, fostering stereotypes that portrayed individuals with mobility impairments as inherently dependent, helpless, or in need of pity (Muhammad & Khan, 2018). Stereotypical thinking towards disability could lower self-esteem, increase self-consciousness, and make people with disabilities accept negative views about themselves (Jones & Smith, 2009). Fearing judgment or discrimination could worsen emotional well-being for people with disabilities. This might lead them to hide their disability or avoid seeking support, ultimately limiting their participation in social, professional, and personal life (Corrigan, 2004). Understanding and addressing these psychological stigmas was imperative for fostering inclusive environments that recognized the capabilities and contributions of individuals with mobility disabilities.

The overall disabled population in Pakistan accounts for 0.44% of the total population, a significant decrease from the 2.38% reported in the 1998 census. Disability rates by gender have seen a notable shift over the past two decades, with an increase in disability among males (from 41.73% in 1998 to 61.89% in 2017) and a decrease among females (from 58.27% in 1998 to 37.71% in 2017). Rural areas constitute 63.62% of Pakistan's population, while urban areas make up 36.38%. The literacy rate among the disabled population stands at 31.6%, significantly higher than the national average of 41.09%, with 585,436 disabled individuals (68.4%) being illiterate. Economic activity among the disabled population is notably varied, with nearly a quarter (22.7%) employed and around one-third (28.7%) involved in housekeeping. Moreover, more than two-thirds (69.89%) of the disabled population reside in rural areas compared to 30.11% in

urban areas. Specific disabilities are prevalent among the disabled population, with blindness, deafness, dumbness, physical disability, and mental retardation accounting for 5.28%, 6.77%, 79.36%, and 8.58% respectively.

In Pakistan, the systematic care of individuals with disabilities gained prominence in the 1980s, coinciding with the United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981. This highlighted the necessity for their education, rehabilitation, and care, prompting both government and private sectors to recognize the need for a comprehensive National Policy on the matter. Despite previous attempts to establish a formal National Policy for Special Education. It did not come to completion. Alongside efforts aimed at enhancing the well-being of individuals with disabilities. This policy has recently achieved the milestone of finalizing the first-ever comprehensive policy revised in 2002. The national policy for persons with disabilities aims to address and enhance the well-being of individuals with disabilities. This policy was formalized after a lengthy consultative process involving the relevant Federal Government Ministries, such as Education, Health Labour and Manpower, Housing and Works, Science and Technology and Planning and Development, and their views were incorporated in this document (National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002). The Provincial Social Welfare and Education Department and the prominent NGOs were also consulted in finalizing this exercise. The first draft was prepared by the Task Force on Disability created in the year 2000 and headed by appointment, Justice (R) Aamer Raza. The team realized the importance of the international focus on care, education, and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, which demands a multi-disciplinary approach. This policy document incorporates a Vision; it is a Goal, a Mission Statement, and the Guiding Principles.

Methodology

The topic under investigation has been approached using qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research, widely used in social sciences and other fields, employs techniques such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis to deeply explore research topics (Creswell, 2014). This study encompasses the entirety of District Swat, located in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. In this exploratory research, the term "universe" refers to the complete set of units or items from which information is sought. District Swat was deliberately chosen as the universe for several compelling reasons: it is a hub of diverse cultures, provides ample opportunity for observing psychological barriers, and has numerous organizations available for study. The chosen research methodology, a cross-sectional study, was selected to thoroughly examine the psychosocial barriers affecting economic independence among individuals with mobility disabilities in District Swat. This approach was preferred as it allows for the simultaneous examination of various factors, including psychosocial elements, economic indicators, and mobility challenges experienced by this population within a specific timeframe. For data collection, the purposive sampling technique was specifically chosen. This method involves the deliberate selection of respondents with knowledge and experience directly related to the psychosocial phenomenon under investigation. The study utilizes the Social Model of Disability by Mike Oliver, which views disability as a construct shaped by societal attitudes and structures. By utilizing this model, the study identifies societal barriers such as inaccessible infrastructure and discriminatory attitudes that hinder financial participation among individuals with mobility disabilities in District Swat.

Addressing these barriers and advocating for inclusivity could mitigate psychosocial obstacles to economic independence. Additionally, the paragraph suggests the importance of the Social Model in understanding the economic challenges faced by individuals with mobility disabilities, emphasizing principles of empowerment and inclusivity as foundational to this understanding. Strengthening the paragraph could involve providing specific examples of inaccessible infrastructure or discriminatory attitudes encountered by individuals with mobility disabilities in District Swat and discussing potential strategies for addressing these barriers within the framework of the Social Model. Additionally, exploring existing literature or research findings that support the assertion that addressing societal barriers can alleviate psychosocial obstacles to economic independence would further enhance the argument (WHO, 2001).

Analysis of Data

i. Interpretation of Attitudinal Barriers to Employment

People with mobility difficulties normally come across with negative attitudes while seeking employment (Malik, 2011). Although the government of Pakistan has increased the employment quota up to 2% for people with disabilities in the Disability Act 2002, misunderstandings often shape attitudes toward individuals with mobility disabilities. This simplistic perspective can undermine their confidence in job searching. Instead of focusing on their personal skills, employers and colleagues may dwell on the challenges of mobility, thus defining their professional identity solely by their physical limitations. Such beliefs create a challenging environment for job seekers with mobility difficulties. It is crucial to challenge these misconceptions to foster an inclusive job market that recognizes the capabilities of individuals facing mobility challenges (Hodge, 2016).

According to the respondent

[In every movement of life, as we go into different places, we are constantly being watched by others who pay close attention to how we look and act. They often make judgments about us based on their own opinions rather fully realized the abilities that we have. This kind of attitude make the limited options remain for us to financial activity. That make it seem like for us only choices are to ask for help from others or rely completely on your family 'support, which can be a heavy weight to carry by the family]

The above statement individual with mobility disability has talking about experiencing "stereotyping." This means someone is making a simple idea about a whole group of people, assuming they are all the same. It is like putting people with disabilities into one group without seeing their differences. Stereotyping can lead to unfair judgments and misunderstandings because it does not think about each person as an individual (Blum, 2004). This kind of thinking makes it hard for them to be financially independent and causes stress for people with mobility disabilities.

ii. Interpretation of Fears of Rejection and Discrimination among Individuals with Disabilities

The fears of rejection and discrimination among individuals with disabilities are significant (Ahmad & Rizwan, 2018). These fears stem from worries about not being accepted or treated fairly, affecting various aspects of their lives, such as work and social interactions. For instance, they may fear missing out on job opportunities due to their disability, impacting their self-esteem and mental health. Negative attitudes and misconceptions about disabilities exacerbate these fears (Green & Davis, 2005). Despite protective regulations, discrimination persists, highlighting the need for continued efforts to raise awareness and promote education. research study deals with these worries is really important for making places where people with disabilities can do well without always being scared of being treated unfairly (Ahmad & Rizwan, 2018).

[I have faced a lot of rejection in the job market, and people are not easily ready to give space for the opportunity to job. Sociocultural attitudes and misconceptions make it challenging to believe that my skills and capabilities will be recognized. Overcoming this fear requires not only personal spirit but also societal changes that promote inclusivity and understanding]

The person stresses that it is hard to believe that their skills will be acknowledged, indicating the need for society to change its views. Mentioning personal strength highlights the inner challenge for people with mobility disabilities to show their value despite outside biases. However, the statement also states that beating this fear requires more than just personal strength. It requires broader changes in society and support for people with disabilities.

iii. Interpretation of Social Barriers

Social barriers not only affect the financial aspect of individuals with mobility disabilities but also have broader implications on their overall well-being and quality of life. Beyond just limiting their earning potential, these barriers create a pervasive sense of exclusion and marginalization, leading to feelings of isolation and inadequacy (Rath & Harter, 2010). Moreover, the attitudinal barriers stemming from societal misconceptions can erode the self-esteem and confidence of individuals with mobility disabilities, making it even more challenging for them to pursue their aspirations and goals. Furthermore, the perpetuation of negative perceptions about people with mobility disabilities can lead to systemic discrimination in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social interactions.

According to the respondent

[In society, there is a prevailing tendency to overlook individuals with disabilities when it comes to job opportunities. Many people prioritize hiring those who are considered "normal" by societal

standards, often leaving those with disabilities sidelined. In private settings, there is a noticeable lack of accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Unfortunately, private set up often fail to provide the necessary space and facilities to accommodate to the needs of individuals with disabilities]

In the above themes the respondents experience that many people do not want to hire individuals with disabilities for jobs because they prefer those who are considered "normal". Also, private businesses often do not have enough space or services for people with disabilities, especially when they need quick assistance. This lack of inclusion makes it harder for people with disabilities to fully participate in society and access the same opportunities as others.

iv. Interpretation of Limited Social circle

Individuals with mobility disabilities face challenges access to social events, public spaces, and transportation, leading to a restricted social circle. This limitation not only affects their ability to engage in community activities but also contributes to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Hamid & Khan 2012). A limited social circle among people with mobility disabilities can exacerbate existing barriers to employment, education, and healthcare. Research indicates that individuals with smaller social networks may have fewer opportunities for social support, networking, and access to resources.

[According to the respondent people with mobility disabilities in experienced financial difficulties. They have limited opportunities to connect with others. Without these connections, it is more difficult to find job opportunities and receive career advice. It is very difficult for the people for the mobility disability to move and connect with the relevant people for the information sharing and employment opportunity]

The paragraph emphasizes the impact of limited networking opportunities on the financial challenges encountered by individuals with mobility disabilities in Swat. The lack of connections makes it more difficult for them to access job leads and career advice. The proposed solution involves the need for initiatives that consider mobility constraints, such as the implementation of virtual networking sessions and the creation of accessible meeting spaces.

V. Interpretation of Salary Disparities and Equal Compensation

Salaries disparities and equal compensation among individuals with mobility disabilities are critical issues that warrant careful examination and remedial action. Research and surveys consistently highlight the existence of significant wage gaps between individuals with mobility disabilities and their non-disabled counterparts. This disparity not only reflects an unjust economic imbalance but also raises concerns about the equitable treatment of disabled individuals in the workforce (National Council on Disability, 2021).

[I have always felt that there is a disparity in salaries between me and my colleagues who are without mobility disabilities. It is not just about the work we do but also the challenges we face in daily routine activities. The lack of equal compensation and cooperation sends a message that our efforts are not valued equally by other colleagues]

In the light of the above statement, the participant consistently perceives a salary disparity linked to mobility disabilities, emphasizing that it extends beyond job responsibilities to encompass the daily challenges faced. The participant contends that unequal compensation conveys a broader message, indicating a lack of equal value assigned to the efforts of individuals with mobility disabilities in the workplace.

Conclusion

Disability is issue in Pakistan, especially in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, including Swat. Disabilities pose significant challenges in the Swat region, particularly for individuals with mobility disabilities. These people have a very limited social circle and few opportunities; they face numerous psychosocial barriers in the sphere of financial and social life. Multiple research studies and survey show that most people with disabilities are heavily dependent on financial support from their families or outside assistance. Additionally, there is a lack of care and support systems in public institutions. A similar situation exists within the community, where people do not readily accept individuals with disabilities in any social role, especially in terms of financial independence. People feel that differently able individuals cannot fulfill responsibilities and roles, and there is an unconscious bias in the minds of many due to discrimination in salaries and opportunities.

Negative stereo typicality is one of the stumbling blocks for the growth in their field. People did not accept easily disabled individuals because of their unconscious attitude and perception exist in society. People of the community think that disabled individuals should rely on external assistance and family support they do not need to do the job and any other activity. But in reality, people with disabilities are more talented and can-do work in the most efficient ways. There is only the family and community support. According to the different respondent view, infrastructure is the most dominant barrier for economic opportunity. Everywhere it is made for the normal people but not given attention to the people with disabilities. We have found the opportunity in some remote places but there is a need for the car or other transportation to go there, in some cases the existing building do not supports people with disability.

There are many organizations which work for people with disabilities in Swat like; Rozan is a non-governmental organization that focuses on mental health and psychosocial support, Handicap International Humanity & Inclusion. This organization may operate in different regions, providing support and services to people with disabilities. Chhipa Welfare Association: Chhipa is a non-profit organization that operates in different regions of Pakistan, including KP, swat. It is involved in various humanitarian and social welfare activities, including support for people with disabilities. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Special Education Foundation (KPSEF):

The first strategy entails establishing a platform for fostering entrepreneurial skills, as indicated by respondents expressing a desire to initiate their own businesses when presented with the opportunity. The second one is to give the opportunity to teach the different skills which they can utilize for themselves. That skill will be relevant according to their disability and they will be comfortable with that. The third one is to learn how to use technology and social media platforms for the betterment of one's life and the last one is the community support because without the support of the community it is not possible to achieve one's goals. Properly needed to mobilize the community people through different platforms to support special people is the part of the community.

Lastly, everyone is gifted with unique abilities. It is important to recognize and nurture these talents for personal growth and the prosperity of society. Empowering individuals helps them become self-reliant and contributes to collective progress. Everyone should have the right to use their skills for shared success and well-being. Individual independence leads to broader societal transformation. When one person becomes self-sufficient, it positively affects their family's well-being. Empowering one person creates a network of strength and prosperity for many. Our religious teachings emphasize helping those in need and supporting those facing challenges. It is a basic philosophy of Islam (Sahih Bukhari Volume 75, 26). Fostering a culture of empowerment aligns with our faith, creating a society where everyone's strength contributes to the well-being of all human being.

The study gives the following recommendations

1. Mastering Essential Technological Skills for a Bright Future
2. Embracing the Entrepreneurial Spirit within You
3. Enhanced Soft Skills
4. Elevating Your Social Network for Success

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