



## Employability of Persons with Disabilities in Various Work Environments

### KEYWORDS

barrier free environment, discrimination, locomotor disability, reservation

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**ABSTRACT** *The employability of persons with disabilities in various work environments are explored. Case study research design and purposive sampling are adopted. The participants had poor perception with regard to the issue; they showed thoughtless attitude and discrimination against disabled individuals even based on their caste. Participants had apprehension in providing barrier free environment. The participants ranked the disability categories for providing employment. Mild locomotor disability was ranked first by all; mental retardation, mental illness and leprosy cured was ranked sixth, seventh and eighth. The realisation of Universal Declaration of Human Rights is far away.*

### Introduction

The United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 3 (General principles) stresses on non-discrimination, full and effective participation, inclusion in society and equality in opportunity. Article 27 (Work and Employment) urges to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment opportunities. India ratified UNCRPD in 2007, yet the situation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) are abysmal. National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) conducted a survey on top 100 companies in 1999, the rate of employment of PWDs was 0.28% in private sector and 0.05% in multinational companies (Shenoy, 2011). The World Report on Disability (2011) outlined lack of access, misconceptions about disability, discrimination and productivity differentials are the reasons for non-employment of PWDs. This paper explores the perception, opportunities and challenges of their employability in various work environments.

### Materials & Method

Case study research method (Yin, 2003) was adopted and the work environments were chosen purposefully. Two private schools, cell phone service centre, desktop publishing (DTP) works, super market (grocery), pharmacy, two NGOs, packaged drinking water shop and two stationary shops were chosen in Cuddalore district (Tamil Nadu, India). Using Self-prepared interview schedule, in-depth Interviews were conducted with the principals of two schools and the owners/heads of the other organizations. The participants were posed with questions such as whether there is any PWDs employed in your their organization, the reasons for the PWDs being employed or not employed, the perception, their acceptance, the need of reservation for PWDs in employment and what qualification required to PWDs to secure a job in their organizations, will the barrier free environment be provided if PWDs are appointed, does the organization's head consider them as a burden or not and any special rules will be laid on them. The participants in the study were also asked to rank the disability. The disability categories were taken from The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunity, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) act, 1995 and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (draft), 2012.

### Discussions from the Interview

Of the four, two principals from the private schools refused to take part in the study. They replied "the questions in the interview schedule do not fit school setting. Moreover, children with disabilities are studying in the school. No persons with disabilities have applied for teaching positions so far".

In packaged drinking water shop, a person with hearing impairment had been working for some years but he left the job. The owner said that the person was insincere; but he had supported the person to get the hearing aid through the shop owners' association when he was an employee there. Likewise, in one of the stationary shops and in an NGO, a person with locomotor disability took care of accounts but they left the job. In all the other places PWDs were not employed. In one of the schools the principal said 'till date no one has approached, if applied with adequate qualification the candidate may be considered', while in the other school principal had the perception that PWDs might not be qualified for teaching position. In grocery shop, the owner said "I do not have any aversion toward PWDs, but it is a retail shop and they don't fit in". The project head of an NGO said "to teach children, people should be healthy, PWDs are not acceptable in teaching children and no PWDs will be entertained in education sector". In packaged drinking water shop the owner said "they can't carry weight." One of the stationeries owner said "salesman position is vacant but PWDs can't afford to salesman post".

On employment of PWDs eight participants accepted employing PWDs; two said that they would not accept owing to the job nature (NGO, DTP work). On reservation for PWDs eight participants said that reservation was needed to ensure their rights but three participants (a stationary shop, packaged drinking water shop and an NGO) refused reservation for them. Participant from a stationary shop said 'if they are committed in work, then there is no need for reservation'. The participant from the school said that PWDs had to complete Bachelor in Education degree to apply and other participants believed completion of twelfth standard is enough to secure a job. When enquired whether the participants feel PWDs as burden working together, two participants said 'yes' (school and a stationary shop) and eight said 'no', while one of the participants gave an equivocal response "it depends on their psychological belief".

All the participants said that no special rules (either supporting or offending) would be laid down in the organization if persons with disabilities were employed. They added that the existing rules and regulations in the organization will bind the PWDs.

The participants preferred the PWDs to have the knowledge on computers to manage accounts and manage stocks. Everyone had the perception that PWDs could take desktop work only. The participants favoured PWDs who are residing nearby the organization to be employed and they added commutation would be a problem from faraway places to the workplace.

On barrier free environment participants had mixed responses. Six participants denied changing the existing infrastructure to suit PWDs but the project head of an NGO said 'safety is a concern' and infrastructure should be changed to suit their needs.

- Management has to decide regarding the provision of barrier free environment (school)
- Providing barrier free environment depends on their working interest (school)
- They (PWDs) have to adjust to the system. Providing barrier free environment is not in the purview of the management (stationary shop)
- If they (PWDs) work only for a week how management can spend? It also depends on situation (stationary shop)
- For an individual it is difficult to make any changes in the existing infrastructure (pharmacy)

The owner of cell phone service centre said that person with disabilities of marginalized communities were not preferred to work here. To the surprise the owner belongs to the minority community. The percentage of PWDs, belonging to marginalized communities is 2.45% of total 26,810,557 PWDs (Census of India, 2011). The shade of caste in employment is evident and this haunts PWDs too.

#### Ranking of PWDs

The types of disability presented before the participants were visual impairment, low vision, mental retardation, mental illness, locomotor disability, hearing impairment, speech and language disability and leprosy cured. Speech and language disability was not addressed in PWD act, 1995 but it was included in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (draft), 2012.

The ranking of category for giving employment varied with respect to the nature of the work in the organizations. Mild locomotor disability was ranked first by all the participants in preference to other disabilities except in packaged drinking water shop. The owner of the packaged drinking water said that mobility and carrying water bottle cases

was the prime focus and he ranked hearing impairment first, speech and language disability second and locomotor disability as last. The DTP work's owner did not rank but said 'employment can be given to PWDs, only if right candidate is not available'. The owner of the pharmacy said that owing to the work nature, persons with mild locomotor disability could only be given job. The category, leprosy cured was ranked last. They also had inhibition in providing job to persons with mental retardation and mental illness. All of them ranked these two categories sixth and seventh respectively.

#### Conclusion

The study revealed poor perception, thoughtless attitude, discrimination and stigmatization towards PWDs in their employability. Even the job opportunity was given based on humanitarian grounds rather than considering their ability. Unemployment contributes to the "social exclusion", of some groups, and it leads to losses of self-reliance, self-confidence and psychological and physical health (Sen, 2000). Neglecting persons with disabilities in employment deprives their participation in development. Article 23 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states 'everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment' but the realization is yet to happen with respect to the persons with disabilities.

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