



## **Barriers in the employment of persons with disabilities**

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### **Abstract**

This article aimed to investigate the barriers in employment of persons with disabilities. The article is framed by reviewing the literature from all sources relating to the barriers in employment. The article has the following aims: 1) To define disability and the types of disabilities; 2) To summarize the barriers in employment of persons with disabilities; 3) To overcome these barriers through adopting appropriate recommended strategies. The article summarized with the need of interventions and co-operations at various levels, global, international and national level to bring awareness through research, education and innovative program to remove the negative attitude towards the disabled persons and other barriers in the work environment. Thus, it can be concluded that when only the barriers are surpassed, then programs for inclusion of disabled persons in employment can achieve a positive result.

**Keywords:** barriers, employment, disabilities

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### **1. Introduction**

According to the latest report of the World Bank approximately one billion or 15% of the world's population experienced some form of disability [39, 40]. However, persons with disabilities face many challenges throughout history when they look for a job for employment in the labor market because disability is often associated with social stigma or social disapproval. Usually, the family and community have a prejudice for disabled persons and so consider them as incompetent or incapable to perform a job. The society usually has demarcation in their attitude and behavior, labeling, or rating their disabilities as abnormal or deviant. As a result, persons with disabilities are considered as the leading inferior groups of society due to these limitations, both physically and socially even though they constitute a major portion of the world's population. Even though the United Nations and governments of many countries have passed inclusive legislation to improve the status of disabled people, still there is prevalent of many problems for people with disabilities in terms of equal rights to employment or status. This has been supported by studies that stated that employers have lacked confidence in people with

disabilities in terms of performance [10, 21, 29]. As a result, a person with a disability has less demand in the employment market. Consequently, persons with disabilities are an underemployed group of the workforce in the labor market [6]. This causes persons with disabilities to have higher poverty rates than the normal persons on a world-wide basis [40]. So, there are many causal effects due to disability, including increasing poverty, through lack of employment and education opportunities, lower wages, and increased cost of living. So, the issue of disability and employment has gained importance on the global stage because it is one of the high-ranking goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [35, p.5].

Due to the efforts of the United Nations, global awareness of disability-inclusive development is increasing. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clearly states that disability cannot be a reason or criteria for lack of access to development programming and highlighted the realization of human rights. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework includes seven targets, including persons with disabilities, and six other targets on persons in vulnerable situations. The SDGs address essential development domains such as education, employment, and decent work, social protection, resilience to and mitigation of disasters, sanitation, transport, and non-

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discrimination, including persons with disabilities—all of which are important areas of work for the World Bank. The New Urban Agenda specifically focuses on promoting measures to facilitate equal access to public spaces, facilities, technology, systems, and services for persons with disabilities in urban and rural areas. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) promotes the full integration of persons with disabilities in societies. The CRPD specifically mentions the importance of international development in addressing the rights of persons with disabilities. In recent years, an increasing number of organizations have also developed disability policies to provide international aid. Similarly, at the national level, the number of disability discrimination laws and constitutional provisions have increased significantly.

The article is framed by reviewing the literature from all sources, both internet and printed, relating to the barriers of employment of persons with disabilities. The article is organized as introduction, definitions of disability, review of literature, barriers in the employment of people with disabilities, recommended strategies to overcome the barriers, and lastly conclusion. The article has the following objectives:

1. To discuss the meaning, and the types of disabilities
2. To summarize the barriers in employment of persons with disabilities
3. To overcome these barriers through adopting appropriate strategies and recommendations

**Definition of disability** Disability is defined in various ways, depending on various factors, both environmentally as well as physically, in different countries. It is “the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual’s contextual factors (environmental and personal factors)” [40, p.4].

Disability is defined as a health condition or problem that has a degree of permanence and impairs one’s ability to carry out day-to-day activities. Disability is created when this impairment comes up against a disabling environment. A disability is also shaped by physical, institutional, and social barriers, including attitudes and assumptions about differences and impairments [9]. So, disability is synonymous to impairment, causing an impaired or disabled person limitation in social participation and is generally a phenomenon that refers to the loss of any physical function of an individual

According to the UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disability [34], ‘Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with

others’.

Disability is a state of decreased functioning associated with a disease, disorder, injury, or other health conditions, which in the context of one’s environment is experienced as an impairment, activity limitation, or participation restriction. Understanding both the health and the environmental aspects of disability allows for the examination of health interventions that improve functioning as well as interventions to change the environment to improve the participation of people with disabilities [3].

‘Disability can be a physical deprivation or deficiency, but it can also be social, cultural, economic, or psychological’ [1]. To identify the barriers faced by people with disabilities, it is important to identify the types of disabilities available in the literature.

It is useful to examine the categories and types of disability to identify the difficulties that individuals with disabilities may encounter in their educational lives and to identify their needs. Disability can be classified into impairment, disability, and handicap [1]. Impairment refers to a psychological or anatomical abnormality, loss, or deficit in terms of structure or functions such as cognitive deficits, psychological deficits, speech deficits, hearing deficits, visual deficits, and so on. Disability on the other hand refers to situations that prevent or reduce functioning normally, which can be behavioral, communication, movement, skills, or inability to perform personal care. Handicap, on the other hand, refers to a lack of social, age, or gender-defined roles due to disability. When we look closely at the disability categories as well as the types of disability, it is clear that the obstacles about the participation of people with disabilities in social life, in professional life and education in addition to the physical, cognitive or psychological limitations of the disabled individuals, also includes a complex structure that includes the perspective of the society, the individuals to be educated together and their families. For this reason, it should be carefully studied and taken into consideration while framing welfare policies and this has to be designed and implemented in a way to create social awareness for the successful employment of the disabled.

## 2. Literature Review

Even though employment is an income-generating activity for all people including people with disabilities, to date only a few kinds of research have been conducted about the disabled employee, barriers in employment of persons with disabilities, the factors causing the barriers, and the impact and strategies to intervene the barriers. So, [5] analyses factors that act as barriers in employing disabled people in Thailand by conducting qualitative research of 20 physically disabled Thai women. The result of the research found the following barriers as (i) passing of disability

laws and related regulations without sufficient study; (ii) social stigma, prejudice and attitude of people in society; and (iii) overprotection of family members for the disabled members. Some of the recommendations include introduction and interventions by the government of Thailand, NGOs, and disability organizations.

Another previous article by [4] critically reviews the disability and rehabilitation issues in Thailand and pointed out that disability rehabilitation policy in Thailand has predominantly been under a medical model since the government agencies view people with disabilities as ones who are helpless and waiting only to be cared for. According to him, generally in Thailand, the voices of disabled people are persistently ignored in policymaking and implementation and concluded with the government's failure to understand the magnitude of disabled people's rights in terms of many issues, including rehabilitation, education or employment.

Governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) programs in rural and urban areas in Thailand along with the vocational training component included in the school curricula was examined by [23]. The study focused on different training provided, including admission to the course completion, and its outcomes, particularly in terms of employment and self-employment. The detailed study findings and recommendations were presented in annexes report. Annex 2 describes the Thai Government policy on training and employment of people with disabilities and outlines the measures taken to promote employment. There is a growing importance of increasing research on disability employment due to the decline in the working-age population, especially in European countries along with the complexity of defining disability [36]. This study accepts the WHO definition of disability, recognizing that disability barriers arise from the interaction of a person with the environment and concluded with the need for more concrete research agenda on disability and employment to provide recommendations for practice through in-depth research.

The study on the workforce participation barriers for people with disabilities in Australia confirmed the findings of previous studies that people with disabilities are less likely to be employed and if employed are likely to be under-employed and underpaid [15]. The study also discussed the strategies for enhancing employment outcomes of people with disabilities.

The impact of disability on employment varies depending on the requirements of the occupation and the type of disability was discussed by [18]. The article aims to identify key themes and issues in the literature relating to the impact of disability on the labor market. The low work participation issue of people with disabilities has received growing attention from policymakers and a range of legislative and other reforms aimed at securing employment of persons with disabilities and to improve their social status.

Research on barriers and enablers associated with hiring people with disabilities at work was discussed by [36]. Some of the barriers include employer's and coworkers' attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities, while the enablers are policies to protect employees with disabilities against unfair dismissal. Several studies have investigated the attitudes of people with disabilities and reported a high degree of prejudice and social distance towards people with disabilities [6, 14, 19].

Many people have stereotypes about people with disabilities while predicting their job performance even though some of them were highly qualified [7]. Commonly, people seem to rely on stereotypes they have about people with disabilities when predicting future work performance regardless of their qualification [7, 8]. Some research has the hypothesis that employer's attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities may depend on the size of their organization. For instance, employers of smaller organizations perceived individuals with disabilities as less qualified and less capable in performance as compared to employers of large organizations [12, 17].

Meanwhile, employers appreciate being informed or disclosed about the disability and how far it affects performance at the time of applying for a job rather than concealing it [33]. So, the main factors in employing individuals with disabilities are the employer's attitude, openness, experiences, and limitations due to the type of disabilities.

The facilitators and barriers of employment of people with disabilities were examined qualitatively by interviewing 10 participants from various organizations as reasonable work conditions, adjustments, and accommodations. Employment offers disabled people the chance of social participation and social recognition. Among the factors leading to barriers in disabilities employment includes prejudice, unequal opportunities in job position, underpayment, low level of education, etc. The study concluded with the need for an innovative policy promoting inclusion of people with disabilities in work participation. Implementing accurate government policy would enable these people to work participation, improve social status, and providing their rights as citizens.

Many attempts of both governmental and organizational, the proportion of disabled professionals in full-time employment are rather small due to the prevalence of many barriers that disabled people face in seeking and qualifying a job for full-time employment, especially in the top-ranking job [38]. The study data was collected using qualitative interviews and it was found that many people with disabilities faced problems associated with inadequate opportunity, resources, and support.

The reasons for the barriers faced by disabled people in accessing employment was discussed by [30]. The result found many reasons as to why the barri-

ers exist and the strategies to amend the barriers as well as the limitations of analysis that exclude impairment type and severity, social welfare, welfare policy implementations, and underestimations by the cultural system and wider social and economic system.

Social policy issues to amend the social exclusion of disabled people from the British labor market were discussed by [2]. The study made a critical examination of sociological theories of work, unemployment, and under-employment of disabled people and concluded that as the analysis of work and disability have failed to address the various social and environmental barriers met by disabled people at work, it has been suggested to re-consider disabled people's perspectives including the philosophy of independent living in work policymaking.

The employment situation of people with disabilities by doing in-depth case studies investigation from three countries, that is, the US, Japan, and Malaysia were analyzed [13]. The first case study examines the United States regulation for the promotion of disabled persons' employment - Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. The introduction of ADA can be considered an important milestone in the history of employment of persons with disabilities. However, the unemployment rate among the disabled person does not seem to decrease after the implementation of the ADA. The second case study analyses Japan's quota system for the employment of disabled persons. After the introduction of the quota system, the employment of disabled persons, especially people with intellectual disabilities, in Japan has gradually increased. The third case study examines a Malaysian welfare non-governmental organization (NGO) named the "Asia Community Service (ACS)" and its effort to promote the disabled persons' employment. In 2000, the ACS established a workplace named the "Stepping Stone Work Centre" to provide job opportunities to people with intellectual disabilities.

The key challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the Indian labor market along with an overview and strategies adopted by the major organizations and institutions for employing persons with disabilities in India. Among the challenges include poor education, training, inadequate financial resources to apply for employment has summarized by [31]. Also, there are other challenges such as the nature of the workplace or occupation, perceptions of employers, and co-workers leading to a negative attitude towards people with disabilities. Many disabled people leave their job or are asked to quit due to these negative attitudes, resulting in job discrimination without rational analysis of their contribution to the labor market. Besides, many qualified disabled people were discriminated against in terms of payment and promotion. Employers too are influenced by society or social attitude about the hiring of people with disabilities.

So, generally, they underestimate or do not have

confidence in their performance or competence at the time of recruitment. This resulted in people with disabilities to lose self-confidence and skip from applying for certain jobs, fearing social stigma, and adverse reaction from potential co-workers. Along with it, disabled people have fear and insecurity due to their disabilities. For instance, a crippled bank employee in a wheelchair has worries whether the office has an elevator or staircase. Similarly, a hearing retarded employee has worries about whether she will be able to note down the details from the important meeting or group discussions.

There is a report of a study undertaken to identify facilitators and barriers in employment and employability for persons with disabilities in Hyderabad city of Andhra Pradesh. The study aims to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Indian employment market. The specific objectives of the study are: 1) identify employers' barriers in employing persons with disabilities; 2) employee barriers comprising of physical access, information and communication access; 3) identify enabling factor among specific industrial sectors; 4) discuss the perspectives of the employers as well as a disabled employee concerning the Indian Persons Disability Act (1995). The result of the study found some barriers as physical access to and within the work site for an orthopedically disabled employee, communication barrier for speech, and hearing retarded employee. About the benefits, around 50% of the respondents were provided medical allowance and sick leave. Concerning the employers' views, all employers adjusted to help persons with disabilities to pursue and perform the job.

The differences in employment and wages between males with and without disabilities, using data from the Village Disability Survey conducted in Tamil Nadu, India was examined by [22]. The study shows that the employment rate of persons with disabilities is relatively low compared to that of the all-India working-age population, with great variations across gender, the urban/rural sectors, and states. The result of the study concludes that the employment gap between individuals with and without a disability is not due to differences in human capital and productivity, but may result from differential returns to characteristics and discrimination in access to employment.

Factors associated with the employment of persons with disability in India based on census data was analyzed by [24]. The study result found different factors affecting the employment of persons with disabilities in rural and urban areas. In rural areas, having mental disability decreased the likelihood of employment while being female and having movement, or sight impairment (compared to other disabilities) increased the likelihood of employment. In urban areas, being female and illiterate decreased the likelihood of employment but having sight, mental and movement impairment (compared to other disabilities) increased the

**Table 1.** Factors causing barriers in the employment of persons with disabilities.

Factors	Cause
Personal	Lack of education, professional skills, and knowledge, or low social esteem due to the subjective perception of the disabilities including stigmatization. Even when employers are willing to hire and accommodate people with disabilities, a disabled person may find other challenges in the practical process of integrating into the organization due to low social esteem was provided by [16].
Physical	Difficulties to access the office of the organization, barriers in traveling for those on a wheelchair or blind or communication barriers for the hearing impaired [43]
Institutional	Inadequate knowledge, a negative attitude about people with disabilities, inequality in job placement, salary, and promotion of job status [20, 44]
Social	Social factors as “aesthetic anxiety” that refers to the phenomenon of a negative perception of an employer in hiring the disabled employee [6]. But, it is significant to note that an employer has an important role in recruiting and integrating a disabled person for employment. Even though the legislators in many countries passed various laws to provide quota for employment of people with disabilities, still many employers are hesitant in hiring workers with disabilities due to many reasons, such as lack of knowledge concerning disabilities in general, unawareness as how to accommodate disabled worker, along with concerns for the cost for accommodation and training time to employees with disabilities. Moreover, an important barrier that a person with disabilities usually faces when joining an organization for the first time are co-workers’ and supervisors’ negative attitudes and stereotypes. Studies that investigated the attitudes of the general population towards people with disabilities report that people often feel a high degree of social distance towards people with disabilities [26, 37].
Psychological	Psychological factors causing hindrance to the integration of people with disabilities into the organization, which can be seen in different ways, including within the disabled person and the environment. This has been reported by [27] who found evidence that applicants disclosing their disability in their application documents, were invited less frequently to job interviews than applicants with a similar profile but without a disability.

likelihood of employment. The study concluded with the need for introducing and implementing poverty alleviation programs, designed for persons with disabilities in India. These programs should account for differences in employment by disability types and should be spatially targeted. Since persons with disabilities in rural and urban areas have different factors contributing to their employment, government planners need to account for these differences when creating programs aimed at underprivileged development.

Factors causing barriers in the employment of people with disabilities Some of the barriers in the employment of persons with disabilities can be categorized as in Table 1.

### 3. Recommended Strategies to Overcome Barriers in Employment of People with Disabilities

Some of the recommended strategies to overcome barriers in employment of people with disabilities are listed in Table 2.

### 4. Conclusion

The above review of the literature leads to various kinds of barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the work environment or while hunting for a job in terms of employers’ and coworkers’ prejudice, institutional, social, personal, and psychological barriers. When persons with disabilities want to join the employment market, they face many challenges more

than able people. Persons with disabilities are liable to face discriminative attitudes from many angles in the employment market, in terms of education, vocational training, physical access, recruitment process, allocation of job position, promotion, salary and participation in decision-making processes and sometimes leading some of them to untimely dismissal. Besides, even though the right to work, including the right to choose decent work and a safe working environment, is the fundamental human right of the United Nations, there are many problems associated with disabled persons while exercising this right to work, such as inaccessible workplaces, lack of transport, financial and employment assistance, discriminatory policies, and negative attitude or prejudice of the work environmental community. This resulted in psychological frustration and loss of social esteem for these disabled people around the world, compelling them to live in poorer health conditions, deprived them of higher education or status, and ultimately leading to lower economic participation with a higher rate of poverty.

Thus, it can be concluded that when only the above barriers are surpassed, then programs for inclusion of disabled persons in employment can achieve positive results. So, the United Nations, the pioneer global organization has made many timely interventions attempts to remove these barriers for inclusive growth and development of the global society, by addressing and uplifting the problems faced by people including disabilities with their innovative policies for development enhancement, poverty reduction and the right to employment. These interventions measure for persons

**Table 2.** Recommendations to overcome barriers in the employment of people with disabilities.

Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Availability of provision to provide better education and training for people with disabilities to help them find a decent job in the job market and to increase their status and living conditions [1].</li> <li>- More intervention research is needed to change the negative attitude of people towards the employment of persons with physical disabilities [20].</li> <li>- Public government policies should focus to address the barriers in employment of disabled people [25]. UN should create more integration between participating member countries, and other global organizations. Also, UN reports should include the latest statistics and rates, generate disability data periodically and all reports should be shared with the public through publications to bring awareness [35].</li> <li>- Environmental interventions to improve the participation of people with disabilities should be encouraged [3].</li> <li>- Policy intervention should aim to change the negative attitudes of co-workers as well as employers such as implementing policy programs that involve direct contact with disabled people; campaigns to provide information, awareness, education, and training about disabilities [11].</li> <li>- Inequality in job status, wages, and job placement should be addressed by the legislators as well as the hiring agents because most jobs offered to the disabled employee are underpaid, having the characteristics of restrictive communication with others, less opportunity for progress or promotion in the job hierarchy and low social benefits [28].</li> <li>- Organizational members or co-workers need to be educated to understand disability and the consequences of prejudice for a person with disabilities in a work environment [36].</li> <li>- There should be assistive technology for the disabled employee (such as adapted telephones, wheelchairs, magnifiers, and adapted computer equipment) or services to perform job functions efficiently and to increase their self-esteem [41].</li> <li>- There should be equal employment opportunities to everyone irrespective of caste, class, gender, disability for inclusive sustainable development along with providing a better prospect, fair income, equality, and social security in the workplace for persons with disabilities [35].</li> <li>- 2.2% of Thai people have some form of disabilities and they are considered as incapable to be employed due to low educational attainment. So it is highly recommended to provide educational and job opportunity facilities among the disabled people in Thailand [42] and also access to public transport for easy mobility of disabled Thai people [43]</li> </ul>

with disabilities can be successful with the support and cooperation of other organizations, governmental and non-governmental, nationally as well internationally, researchers and psychologists, having the aim to provide income and economic independence, by providing work and to increase self-confidence in being part of the global society. Due to these interventions of UN, national, international, NGO, and local organizations, it can be expected to bring awareness to the society to change the negative attitude or prejudice to overcome the barriers in employment of persons with disabilities.

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