



The Educational and Occupational Trajectories of Adolescents and Youth with Disabilities in India

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Overview

While international conventions¹ obligate states to guarantee and safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights, empirical evidence globally highlights that persons with disabilities experience comparatively lower educational attainment, lower employment, and worse standards of living and poverty, than persons without disabilities (WHO 2011; DFID 2018). Evidence from low- and middle-income countries such as India is scarce: to date, there have been no longitudinal studies capturing the life-course trajectories related to education, occupation and family formation for persons with disabilities.

Given this shortage of data, the findings of a recent Young Lives India study on the educational and occupational trajectories of adolescents and youths with disabilities, undertaken in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, are vital.² The findings reveal that **persons with disabilities are disadvantaged in terms of both educational and employment opportunities compared to persons without disabilities** (Figures 1 and 2). Furthermore, there is a strong gender divide among persons with disabilities, with female persons with disabilities facing greater exclusion than their male counterparts.³

The study also identified barriers and facilitators for persons with disabilities in terms of education and employment (Table 1). These findings are vital to inform both policy and programme gaps in India.

Figure 1: Comparison of Level of Education Attained by Children with and Without Disability (at Age 15)

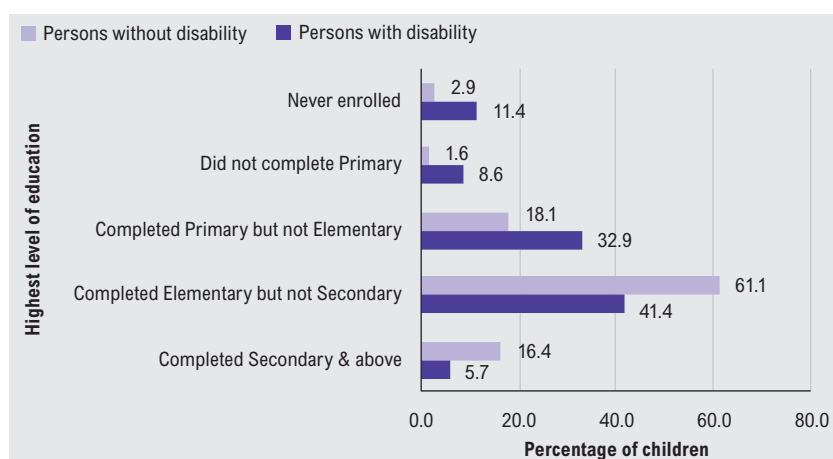


Figure 2: Comparison of Employment Between Youth with and without Disability (at Age 22)

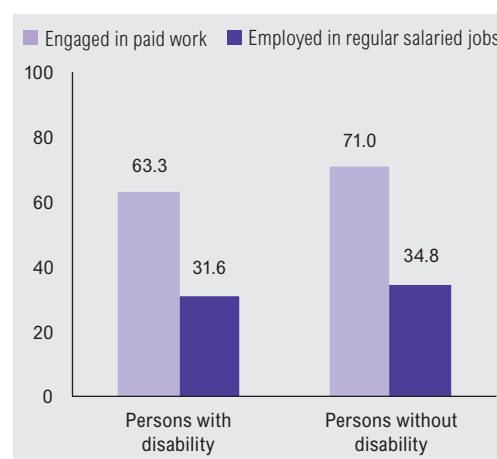


Table 1. Barriers and facilitators to education and employment

Domain	Barriers	Facilitators
Education	<p>School-related factors: Infrastructure, lack of inclusive practices such as accommodations and adaptations, bullying, lack of assistive devices and school transport, insensitive teachers, and corporal punishment.</p> <p>Out-of-school factors: poverty, death of a caregiver, marriage and limited access to government schemes, including difficulty obtaining disability certificates.</p>	High parental aspirations, resilience among persons with disabilities, as well as support systems within the family and outside (teachers and friends).
Employment	Lack of educational opportunities, absence of career counselling services, lack of skill training opportunities and limited awareness of government schemes.	Personal traits such as resilience and agency, as well as the support of family members and friends.

¹ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child obligates the state to meet the learning needs of all children, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities specifically refers to persons with disabilities and aims to promote, protect and ensure their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights.

² The study draws upon Young Lives panel survey analysis of data collected in five rounds (between 2001-2016), on the educational and occupational outcomes of 100 young people with self-assessed disabilities (a Younger Cohort aged 15 and an Older Cohort aged 22 in 2016); and qualitative findings from an in-depth qualitative study of a sub-sample of 34 young persons with disabilities and their caregivers, when the children were aged 18 (Younger Cohort) and 25 (Older Cohort) in November–December 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. See Singh et al. (2021) for full details.

³ An accompanying research brief provides detailed statistical analysis and commentary. See XXX (2021).

Policy implications and recommendations

1. Build awareness among caregivers and persons with disabilities about government provisions

It is imperative to build awareness on disability rights as well as the provisions of various laws and government schemes. In the qualitative study, fewer than half of the young people (three Older Cohort and 12 Younger Cohort) had a disability certificate and many families and youth with disabilities were not aware of existing government schemes. Those who had a disability certificate received the monthly pension of INR 3,000, many were either not able to get a disability certificate, had only done so with difficulty, or had received an erroneous certificate. Since many respondents were not aware of their entitlements, it is important that all public officials (for example, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers, regular and resource teachers, District Early Intervention Centres (DEICs) and District Disability Rehabilitation Centre (DDRC) staff) are aware of the provisions under various laws and schemes, to be able to provide the requisite information to children with disabilities and their families.

Policy recommendation:

Communications materials such as animated films, information brochures, and both social media and national radio/television could be used to generate awareness of existing policies, programmes, and entitlements.

2. Enhance inter-sectoral convergence

Better convergence of various schemes using a life-course approach is needed in order to provide seamless services for persons with disabilities. Under the leadership of district magistrates/district collectors, all departments (including *Panchayati Raj* institutions and municipalities), should work towards greater convergence to ensure the smooth transitions of persons with disabilities from early intervention services, to school and into the labour market.

Policy recommendation:

Prepare convergent action plans at the district level, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the line departments and specifying accountability mechanisms, so that nobody with a disability is left behind.

3. Strengthen existing programme provisions

National and state governments must aim to strengthen the existing programmatic facilities such as the DDRCs, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to ensure greater accountability and effective implementation of services at district and sub-district levels.

Policy recommendation:

Augment the financial and human resources allocated for all policy and programme provisions to ensure the successful realisation of government policies and schemes.

4. Expand the Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPWD) to cover epilepsy

Epilepsy is a disabling condition affecting children's right to education and their capacity to lead a full life. Though chronic neurological conditions are a category in the RPWD (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities 2016), epilepsy is not explicitly mentioned. Schools are currently not equipped to support the health and academic needs of young children with epilepsy.

Policy recommendation:

Expand the RPWD to include epilepsy under the category of chronic neurological conditions, to ensure that affected children and their families receive the benefits they need.

5. Provide inclusive learning environments

All learning environments should be equitable and provide a level playing field to persons with disabilities through the necessary accommodations and adaptations. *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan* and the National Education Policy 2020 make provisions for special educators to support the learning of students with disabilities. The number of special educators in the system remains very small, and they also face the challenges of being specialised in only one disability, and lacking knowledge of both content and whole class instruction. Hence, it is imperative to enhance their capacities and skills to be able to collaborate effectively with regular teachers and parents of children with disabilities to promote inclusion. School management committees must include representation of parents of students with disabilities, and school development plans must plan for inclusion and identify strategies for both the academic and social inclusion of students with disabilities.

Policy recommendation:

Curriculum developed under the new National Education Policy 2020 must use an inclusive lens to ensure that true inclusion is adopted by learning environments.

6. Build frontline workers 'capacity for fostering inclusion

The success of inclusion lies with preschool and school teachers, who must *plan* for the success of diverse learners. Given the importance of early years, it is crucial that families and young children have access to quality early intervention services. To meet the challenge of inclusion, teachers have to build a wider teaching repertoire that addresses and interrogates the pressures of exclusion that exist within the cultures of schools, by working on the key aspects of the context, the content of learning, and pedagogy (Singh 2009).

Policy recommendation:

Focus on building capacities of officials in *Rashtriya Bal Suraksha Yojana* (RBSY) as well as ICDS such as *Anganwadi* workers is urgently required, so that early identification of developmental delays can be undertaken effectively and early intervention services provided. The National Council for Teacher Education could consider revamping the content of pre-service teacher education programmes, to enable teachers to make appropriate accommodations and adaptations. Modular in-service courses need to be developed on inclusive education using a hybrid model and teachers undertaking such courses granted accredited certificates to acknowledge their efforts.

7. Focus on skill development

For persons with disabilities to realise their full potential it is important to remove the barriers they face in accessing employment opportunities and skill training. The Skill Council for Persons with Disability, which was established to offer meaningful, industry relevant, skill-based training, must aim to reach persons with disabilities in rural and remote locations and provide them with meaningful vocational opportunities.

Policy recommendation:

The government must allocate funds and run campaigns to ensure greater awareness of skills development schemes such as *Divangjan Svavalamban Yojana* (which provides concessional loans to young entrepreneurs with disabilities) and the ADIP Scheme (which provides aids and appliances).

8. Support smooth transitions to the job market

It is important to mainstream the practice of preparing comprehensive individual employment plans to facilitate smooth transition of persons with disabilities to the job markets. Career guidance and counselling, training on work ethics and soft skills, accessibility audits of the workplace, as well as sensitisation of employers should be an integral part of these plans. Furthermore, guidance and standards for making reasonable accommodations within workplaces need to be given priority.

Policy recommendations:

National Career Service Centre for Disabled under the National Career Service Project and the Skill Council for Persons with Disability under the National Skill Development Corporation need to be strengthened and work with DDRCs to provide career guidance services and employment opportunities to young persons with disabilities. Networks must also be established between schools/vocational training institutes and industries to facilitate entry of persons with disabilities into the job market.

9. Provide support for caregivers and people with high support needs

The anxiety of caregivers around the future of their wards as to who would look after them cannot to be ignored. National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation (now intellectual disabilities), and Multiple Disabilities Act (1999) was enacted to provide guardianship support to those who are dependent due to their impairment. Implementation of the Act needs to be improved to reach all those who need the support has to be enhanced. The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities has introduced the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Amendment) Rules, 2019. The amended rules entitle persons with benchmark disabilities to apply to the authorities for high-support services.

Policy recommendations:

State governments and Union Territory administrations need to notify the authority about persons with high support requirements. Adequate resource allocation is also needed to effectively implement this legislation.

A new scheme should be considered to provide specialised services to persons with high support needs, which could include professional training/certification courses to prepare a cadre of trained caregivers to support such people.

Parent support groups could also be established at the sub-district level to support parents and share information about available services and best practices.

10. Create a database of persons with disabilities

The process of obtaining a Unique Disability ID certificate needs to be improved so that persons with disabilities can receive their entitlements.

Policy recommendation:

National and state governments should consider creating a comprehensive database that allows for year-on-year tracking of persons with disabilities with the data made accessible to practitioners so they can utilise it for effective planning, including through developing individual rehabilitation plans.

11. Expand research on the experiences of persons with disabilities

Given the socio-cultural variations within India, it would be useful to conduct similar qualitative studies in other parts of the country in order to get a broader picture of lived realities

of persons with disabilities. It is imperative that the voices of persons with disability remain at the centre stage and that their experiences guide the development of government policies and programmes so as to ensure laws and policies address their needs, and their rights are realised.

Policy recommendation:

Funds should be specifically allocated to undertake research on the lived experiences of persons with disabilities to inform and educate policymakers of their experiences in different contexts, so as to ensure that policy gaps are identified and addressed.

Conclusion

While the Government of India and state governments have made a number of efforts to improve the lives and life chances of persons with disabilities through the introduction of legislation and specific schemes, there is a need to ensure that persons with disabilities and their families are provided relevant information and that services reach those in rural and low resource settings in particular. It is important to recognise the heterogeneity of persons with disabilities and ensure that services are needs-based rather than one-size-fits-all. Ensuring equitable access to educational and occupational opportunities by removing existing barriers is important to realise the rights of persons with disabilities.

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