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CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The review paper explores the difficulties that women with disabilities facing accessing higher education in India. There is an urgent need to identify and overcome the significant barriers faced by women with disabilities in accessing higher education. According to this research women with disabilities are less likely to be complete to their university degrees, and there are fewer women with disabilities in higher education. This article identifies the causes of the low participation rate female student with disabilities in higher education due to their impairment, women with disabilities frequently face tremendous challenges of injustice and prejudice. Women with disabilities experience overlapping forms of exclusion due to the intersection of gender and disability, compounded by socioeconomic status, geography, ethnicity, age. stigmatizing attitudes and norms, accessibility deficits across built, transport, and digital environments, education barriers and learning exclusion, labour market segmentation, wage penalties and unpaid care, health and sexual-reproductive rights gaps, heightened exposure to violence, policy-implementation failures and data invisibility, poverty traps, and social protection shortfalls

Keywords: Women with Disabilities, Challenges, Problems, Accessibility, Education, Employment, Social Protection.

Introduction

Education is the most important deciding factor for an individual's social mobility and status. And higher education is a gateway to a better future as it opens a new set of experiences, avenues, and career prospects. When persons with disabilities enter higher education, they gain more opportunity to demonstrate growth in academic skills, self-confidence, and independence. Their experience for empowerment is also augmented (Hurst, 1996) and Challenges Faced by Women with Disability arising from both their gender and disability, often referred to as a double burden. While all disabled individuals encounter struggles, women face greater discrimination in areas like education, employment, and family life.

Key Data of Women with Disabilities"

According to the Census of India, 2011, 2.01% of the population (21 million) in India is disabled, and 44.1% of them are women. Despite this significant proportion, they are often neglected, excluded from developmental processes, and remain invisible in society, making them one of the most vulnerable groups facing **Challenges Faced by Women with Disabilities**. Beyond physical barriers, women with disabilities frequently face emotional, sexual, and physical abuse. Many disabled girls feel excluded in **schools**, leading to sadness and isolation. **Factors** like **race, age, religion, and language** further limit their access to opportunities and growth. The **Census data** on the decadal change in the disabled population from **2001 to 2011** shows that women outnumber men in terms of disability in both rural and urban areas. The data also highlights a steep increase in the percentage of women with disabilities:

- In rural areas, it rose from 1.93% in 2001 to 2.03% in 2011.
- In urban areas, it increased from 1.71% in 2001 to 1.98% in 2011.



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Challenges Faced by Women with Disabilities

1. Academic challenges

Access to literacy and education remains a major challenge for disabled women. Compared to men with disabilities, women are generally less educated, with only a few reaching higher education. Gender plays a significant negative role in addressing the educational needs of disabled girls, leading to very few girls being admitted to special schools. This article will highlight the difficulties disabled women face in accessing education and the need for inclusive and gender-sensitive educational opportunities to help them overcome these challenges

2. Social Barriers

Women with disabilities face double discrimination due to their gender and disability, making them more vulnerable to unfair treatment. From birth, many disabled girls experience neglect, with some even left to die. Those who survive face bias in families, lack of education, employment opportunities, and limited access to rehabilitation services. They also face triple discrimination due to their poverty, which forces them into marginalization and isolation. Living as the poorest of the poor, they often have little hope for a better future. This article will discuss these social barriers and how society can help support women with disabilities.

3. Health Challenges

Women with disabilities, particularly those with physical or mental disabilities, often face inadequate healthcare. Their health needs are frequently neglected, which worsens their condition and can lead to additional disabilities. If their health issues were addressed at the right time, many could lead more fulfilling lives and function better in daily activities. Many women with disabilities also experience depression and other psychological conditions, which further impact their overall well-being and daily functioning.

4. Financial Challenges

Disabled girls, especially in poor families, often face the harshest challenges in society. They are often neglected, and their needs are not given the attention they deserve. As a result, they struggle to grow both physically and mentally. These girls face difficulties throughout their lives, such as poor health, malnutrition, and a low quality of life. Their situation can be even harder due to the lack of proper care and resources.

5. Vocational Training Challenges

Vocational training is already difficult for many people, and for women with disabilities, it becomes even harder. There is a common belief that only men are suited for technical skills, while women should focus on domestic chores. Organizational and physical barriers make it tough for women with disabilities to access vocational centres, especially in rural areas. Even after training, the job placement services for disabled women are very poor, leaving many without work opportunities.

6. Infrastructural Barriers

Women with disabilities face major physical barriers in accessing basic services and resources. Many buildings and public places are designed without considering the needs of people with disabilities, making it hard for them to go to schools, workplaces, and healthcare centres. They also struggle with lack of **mobility aids, like ramps or elevators, which makes daily tasks difficult**. In rural areas, the situation is even worse. Unpaved roads, distant schools, and poor infrastructure such



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as toilets and libraries make it nearly impossible for disabled women to access education and healthcare. These barriers contribute to their **isolation, unemployment, and early death** due to lack of medical care.

7. Traveling challenges

Traveling is one of the best ways to refresh your mood but is one of the problems faced by women with disability. The traveling infrastructure of India is not that much good or friendly for women with disability. Getting in and out from buses, taxis, autos, and commuting from one place to another is quite tough for them, due to which they can not have the fun of traveling.

8. Public Toilets

Women with disabilities face significant challenges when using public toilets. Many facilities lack essential accessibility features like ramps, wide doors, and grab bars, making them difficult to use for those with mobility issues. Inadequate space, lack of privacy, and unclear signage also add to the difficulties. These barriers reduce independence and dignity, emphasizing the need for better, more accessible restrooms.

9. Market Issues

Women with disabilities face challenges in the market due to a lack of accessible products and services. Clothing, footwear, and assistive devices are often not designed for their needs. Additionally, job opportunities are limited because of biases and workplace accessibility issues. More inclusive products and job opportunities are needed to support these women.

10. Finding a Life Partner

Finding a life partner can be hard for women with disabilities because people often think they are not suitable for marriage or being a mother. Many faces loneliness and may not marry until later, or not at all. Barriers like lack of social opportunities, money problems, and inaccessible places make it even harder for them to meet potential partners. Some might even end up in abusive or exploitative relationships. More support and understanding are needed to help women with disabilities find love and happiness.

How Women with Disability Can Fight for Their Rights

Work and Employment Rights

Women with disabilities should have equal access to employment with opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship. They are entitled to equal pay and humane working conditions. This treaty aims to ensure that women with disabilities are fully integrated into society with the rights and opportunities they deserve.

A Global Commitment to Equal Rights

Empowering Women with Disabilities: Women with disabilities face unequal access to education, healthcare, and employment, limiting their social inclusion. They often experience violence and injustice. To address this, the United Nations adopted the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** in 2006, ensuring that countries protect and promote the rights of disabled women.



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Core Provisions of the CRPD

- The CRPD guarantees social, political, economic, and cultural rights for all, with specific rights for disabled individuals.

Key Rights:

- Accessibility:** Right to accessible roads, buildings, and public places.
- Mobility:** Rights for independent living and movement.
- Participation:** Right to engage in political, social, and cultural life.
- Recreation:** Right to participate in sports and other recreational activities.

Raising Awareness and Fighting Bias

The CRPD promotes awareness to combat stereotypes and biases related to disability and gender. It encourages inclusive campaigns to highlight the skills and abilities of disabled women in the labour market and workplace.

Equality and Support

- Equality before law:** The CRPD affirms that women with disabilities must be treated equally.
- Education:** Ensures inclusive education, with provisions for special education for different types of disabilities, like Braille for the visually impaired and sign language for the hearing impaired.

Habitation and Rehabilitation

The Convention ensures that disabled women have the opportunity for independence and social participation through habitation and rehabilitation. States must provide opportunities in education, employment, and healthcare.

Conclusion

Women with disabilities face layered, mutually reinforcing barriers that cannot be solved by single-sector interventions. Transformative inclusion requires binding accessibility rules and financing, inclusive service delivery, responsive social protection, safe and dignified pathways to education and employment, and institutional accountability anchored in the UNCRPD. Thoughtful design that centre the voices of women with disabilities can convert legal commitments Disabilities affected women face a complex array of barriers to accessing and participating in higher education. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing targeted policies and interventions to promote greater access and inclusion for women with disabilities.

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