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REAL

**Review of Education,
Administration and Law**

Journal homepage: <http://real.spcrd.org> ISSN (Print): 2708-1788 ISSN (Online): 2708-3667

Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities into Mainstream Society: Using the Community Care Context

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p>History: Accepted 06 August 2022 Available Online November 2022</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: Community care, Social Inclusion, Persons with Disabilities.</p> <hr/> <p>DOI: 10.47067/real.v5i4.287</p>	<p><i>Social Inclusion is an important and extremely desirable phenomenon for persons with disabilities (PWDs). It is the gateway to creating the sense and opportunities for PWDs by recognizing being as integral and potential human resources and a responsible segment of society. In addition to the lack of research and policies that have been formulated from time to time to promote the social Inclusion of PWDs', the traditional response of the community towards PWDs has deterred social inclusion of PWDs. The basic theme of this research study was to explore the efforts made by community members for the social inclusion of PWDs in the Community Care context. A qualitative research method was used to conduct the study. At first, the document -analysis of previous research studies was made to explore the efforts made by the Government and policymakers for the social inclusion of PWDs. Afterward, the open-ended interviews were conducted with the 20 professionals related to special education and social welfare fields to explore the efforts made by the community stakeholders as an element of community care to deal with social restrictions for PWDs and foster their social inclusion. The content -analysis reflected weak community support programs for the social inclusion of PWDs. Finally, the study suggested two Social Inclusion models; 1) Personal Social Services Model (PSSM) and 2) the Social-Ecological Model (SEM) of Social Inclusion which deals with the Individual, Interpersonal, Organizational, Community, and Socio-Political Factors of Society.</i></p>

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1. Introduction

Disability can be defined as “it is the loss or limitation of the opportunities to take part in society on an equal level with others due to social and environmental barriers”. It can also be defined as “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry

out normal day-to-day activities". Around 3.7 million people in Pakistan suffer from various types of disabilities (Government Survey Report, 2021).

The PWDs are more vulnerable to negative socioeconomic consequences such as less education, malnutrition, health issues, lower income or employment opportunities, and higher poverty rates (Hassan, Munir & Ibrar, 2020). Inaccessible physical environments and incompatible transportation systems, unavailability of assistive devices/technologies, non-supportive modes of social communication, gaps in required service delivery, and discriminatory or inequitable prejudice treatment and stigma in society all these factors needed to be overcome to contribute to the social and economic inclusion of PWDs (Hafeez, 2020). People with physical disabilities often face discrimination and social exclusion. They require specialized care and attention and often find it difficult to access mainstream services. This is why community care is so important for PWDs as it helps them to stay connected with their community and access the support they need. Community care can provide PWDs with essential support for accessing opportunities to live an independent and quality life. Around 3.7 million people in Pakistan suffer from various types of disabilities (Government Survey Report, 2021). In addition, community care can help to create a sense of community for PWDs, which can help to reduce their isolation and foster social inclusion (Rathore & Mansoor, 2019). Disability Inclusion means integrating people with disabilities into our daily lives and society. Its goal is to make people with disabilities more accessible in areas such as employment, communication, business, housing, products, and services. It is to give them the same opportunities as everyone else in society in all aspects of life (Hassan, 2020).

Inclusion and equity are critical in the reduction of poverty and appraise economic, financial, and social mobilization across the social welfare system. It is desirable to encourage the equitable distribution of economic resources and benefits to elevate the living conditions of PWD, and other marginalized segments of society without any discrimination (Mackelprang, 2010).

The international federation for social welfares has also played an exceptional role in terms of highlighting the importance of social inclusion and the urge for community care for PWDs under its slogan "*To Build a new eco-social World, Leaving no one left behind*"

According to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, "all humans have equal rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of gender, religion, or ethnicity. As a matter of humanity, the declaration required member countries to guarantee all natural rights to their citizens. Among these are civil and political rights, the right to life, the right to liberty and security, the right to be free from dehumanization and discrimination, and the right to economic and socio-cultural opportunities. However, the implementation of these rights is uneven, and the marginalized segment of society, including PWDs, is overlooked in the realization of these fundamental rights, and thus excluded from mainstream society" (The United Nations CRDP, 2006: Danquah, 2015).

The road map to achieving these goals for people with impairments is nevertheless paved with difficulties. Barriers to participation that are physical, social, economic, and or environmental for people with disabilities can result in hunger and poverty. For instance, discrimination and a lack of accessibility in the built environment may impede the abilities and knowledge of people with impairments, preventing them from enrolling in the educational system. the potential for employment and generating economic value (Milner & Kelly, 2009). Even though social protection programs can assist reduce poverty, people with disabilities face numerous obstacles when trying to enroll in social protection programs. These obstacles include not creating accessto information about social protection

programs available for persons with disabilities, discrimination, and bases of stakeholders of community protection programs, particularly against people with neurological and intellectual disabilities, and a lack of clarity in the process of assessing disability (Disability and Development Report; United Nations,2018).

Hence, this research is based on the concept of social inclusion through the identification of factors that are needed to be adopted to overcome the disparity in society regarding PWDs by suggesting remedial measures to enhance the sense of Community Care and well-being in Pakistan and particularly in Panjab for persons with disabilities.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Ecological Systems Theory

The interaction and interconnectedness of people and their surrounding systems are fundamental themes in the notion of ecological systems. Analyzing how people impact and are affected by such physical, social, political, and cultural systems, enables academics to adopt a holistic perspective. The modern application of the ecological systems theory is based on five presumptions that look at how systems interact and are interdependent, and how one system cannot be evaluated in isolation but rather must take into account how other systems impact and are affected by it. Ecological systems theory is helpful in the assessment since it can provide a framework for evaluating a person holistically, particularly when using ecomaps. Ecological systems theory can help direct the social worker to the best system in which to intervene based on their assessment. This theoretical framework is useful for the inclusion of PWDs in the community. By the usage of this theoretical framework desired outcomes will gain.

This model can be used for better social inclusion of PWDs by bringing changes in ecology as well as in our system because both are deeply interconnected with each other as we know a person is greatly affected by social and environmental influences like family, school, community, culture, and belief systems. To bring change in all of these factors that contributes hugely to the personality development of an individual is necessary for better inclusion in society this theory must be implemented so we can bring desired changes in ecology and system. For gaining better results the PSSM model plays an important role in better provision of existing services to enhance the capacity of the community for better social functioning for the attainment of this goal public and private sector coordination must be built. Another goal for the improvement of services which are existing coordination and collaboration among stakeholders must build. As previously indicated, the social ecology model is a powerful tool for promoting the social inclusion of PWDs. According to this approach, if we bring about change following the demands of PWDs, each of the five factors individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and interpersonal contributes significantly. For PWDs to integrate effectively into society, an empowerment model is now desperately needed. The problem with emerging nations is that they didn't value services for people with disabilities as highly as they did for other people.

Ecological systems theory examines the constantly shifting interactions between the various components of our society and how crucial a part each one plays in preserving the stability and health of the whole. Better results can be obtained by using this theory.

3. Objectives of Research

The objectives of the study were to

- Get insight into the community's support towards the needs and problems of persons with

disabilities.

- Explore the barriers and actions required for better social inclusion of PWDs in mainstream society.
- Suggesting suitable models ensures the social inclusion of PWDs in the local mainstream society.

4. Methodology

The methodology of this research paper is based on the qualitative approach. In-depth interviews were conducted to collect the data. The Population of the study comprised persons belonging to the social welfare and special education professionals working in Punjab.

4.1. Sampling Design

Convenient sampling methodology was used to choose a representative sample i.e professionals who are working with PWDs and who have experience working with PWDs and social welfare officers. The total sample of the study area is 20 key persons related to the field of special education and social welfare. All of the participants were in-services and were in their fields for the last 10 years.

4.2. Tool of Data Collection

The interview guide is used as a tool for data collection. The guide was developed based on a literature review and conceptual framework. The tool got validated after pilot testing and an extensive literature review.

5. In-Depth Interviews Findings

A comprehensive scheduled interview session has been conducted with Community Members, Social Workers, and Rehabilitation Institutes for PWDs and Professionals.

5.1. Community Awareness, Sensitization and Mobilization Programmes

People with disabilities in the 21st century are finding their voice in determining what words define us. How people interact with us & how we are included in our community. Another thing is this we should educate our community not to use general terms like the guy in the wheelchair or disabled. Our community is not developed & most of the people are not much educated. So most people in our community used the term disabled for special persons. Because all people are unique and should not be defined by their disability. One of the respondents said

“Etiquette is a code of positive behavior” views a person’s equipment as an extension of their body. A person does not automatically require assistance just because they are disabled. If the person seems to be struggling, you might want to help. Likewise, show respect if the other person says no to your offer and wishes to be on their own. The best judges of what they can and cannot achieve are people with impairments. Respectful language & positive interactions are the foundation of good relationships with anyone.

As a renowned scholar Kate Bornstein said

“let’s celebrate difference because in this world it takes a lot of guts to be different”

The largest issue that Pakistani citizens with disabilities face is the country's generally unfavorable social climate and cultural norms. The way society views people with impairments often aggravates them. People's inclination to look down on folks with minor impairments and disabilities and treatment of those impairments and disabilities as a sign of their identification and the prominent characteristic of their personalities spoils the lives of many people and destroys their potential for good.

A person must be referred to as Langra if they have a limp, and kana if they have lost an eye. The government and civil society must participate and coordinate their efforts to curb and modify through community sensitization and awareness programs to the general public to change their unhealthy attitude towards PWDs (Iftikhar et al, 2019).

The best way for us to understand and respect PWDs is by recognizing that they are first and foremost humans, deserving of the same respect and dignity with which we were born. Instead of focusing on their impairment, they must be evaluated and treated according to their abilities.

According to one of the respondent

Our society needs to become more aware of how to act normally and treat these people as they would treat other normal people because these people are blessed with many abilities that nicely concealed their impairment.

5.2. Poverty Alleviation and Education Facilities

Poverty elevation is the most important factor in gaining social inclusion for disabled persons. Because when we want someone to get prosper and lead a healthy life the first thing to overcome is to get rid of poverty when someone has resources he only has to work for his betterment. The lack of economic resources for disabled persons is a major factor in poverty. PWDs spend their life in poorer conditions as compared to normal citizens.

According to British Council research, 72% of people with disabilities said that access to education, training, and work was significantly hampered by inaccessibility. Quality educational facilities are mostly provided to the disabled population of urban communities as compared to the rural population of disabled persons.

One of the respondents narrated the condition in the following words:

The vertical special education strategy does not take into account the PWDs and special needs children likely need. More than 1.5 million of the estimated 4.5 million PWDs are children between the ages of 0 and 15. This suggests that these kids will soon need education, which the current system of normal schools will be able to meet. The enrollment situation at special education schools and institutes showed a significant mismatch between the facilities that are needed and those that are already available.

The fact that only 1.6% of all exceptional children are served by special education schools and institutions dispersed across the nation suggests that creating a separate infrastructure for children with disabilities not only disseminates their social marginalization but also demonstrates to be expensive. Therefore this theme suggested inclusive education to have a good ratio of literacy among them (Hammad, 2021).

5.3. Transportation, Infrastructure, and Assistive Devices / Technology

When we think about community. The community should be designed or be oriented for anybody who lives there. Another thing is this when we talk about accommodations for people to access their community uses the term "Accessible" rather than "Disabled" or "Handicapped" (Kim & Sellmaier, 2020).

One of the respondents expressed her thoughts in the following words

We are social beings! Everyone wants to feel connected & people with disabilities are no

exception. Inclusion involves the universal design, reasonable accommodation and eliminating stigmas and stereotypes. The first thing is that the community must be safe for the parking of disabled persons and the other thing is an accessible entry into the buildings.

In community must introduce audible traffic signals for people having visual impairment. Structure for PWDs in Government & public sector buildings requires that these buildings should be constructed following the requirements to facilitate the PWDs (Johnson et al, 2009).

Roads sides must be allocated and designed for all kinds of disabled persons. Public and Private transport must have provision and space to carry the PWDs along with their assistive devices like wheelchairs etc.

5.4. Health Facilities for PWDs

The occurrence of disability is massive and unpredictable. While in certain cases the health issues linked to disabilities cause ill health and significant medical needs, in others do not. Moreover, all individuals with disabilities are having the same fundamental rights to healthcare and requirements as healthy individuals (Iftikhar, 2011). It is the constitutional and social responsibility of the state to look after people with disabilities by guaranteeing them standard health services, which should be free from discrimination.

According to a social welfare officer

While it is a continuous process to provide health care services to the PWDs due to their vulnerable disabilities and the nature of physical defects and it's the core responsibility of the government to ensure medical facilities to the PWDs in all kinds of circumstances without any negligence or delay. The truth is hardly digestible that most nations are offering high-quality medical assistance to their PWD community.

The most of PWD fraternity has also reported not being able to afford the expenditures of traveling to a hospital for medical treatment, due to the high cost of medicines they can't buy medicine. The health-related services are mostly located at a far distance and the majority of PWDs who resides in far-flung areas face difficulties to acquire medical health facilities in their daily routine, the government has to establish and initiate to provide them medical and rehabilitation facilities in their respective districts by providing special health unit for the rehabilitation and treatment of PWD's in all DHQ Hospitals with the uniform standard health facilities to the PWDs (Javed et al, 2020).

5.5. Recreation, Participation, Employment Opportunities and Empowerment of the PWDs

Recreational activities should be provided to disabled persons because it is essential to provide them with productive human beings for their better physical as well as psychological health. There is a need to initiate different programs for recreational activities which are good for their motor and cognitive skills. The lack of precise and trustworthy information regarding the scope or prevalence of disability in the nation is the fundamental issue mentioned in all important reports. Making sound plans and policies is not made any easier by this (Husnain et al, 2020).

In our country employment opportunities are not as much available as they should be for disabled persons. The PWDs should have access to microcredit facilities to encourage opportunities for self-employment that would result in their socioeconomic empowerment. For the country's development rehabilitation and social inclusion of disabled persons are important because they are constituting a major portion of our country if these resources kept untapped development of the

country is not possible (Idrees & Ilyas, 2012).

5.6. Legislation and Policies

Pakistan promulgated the “Disabled Person’s (Rehabilitation and Employment) Ordinance” as the first law for disabled persons in Pakistan in 1981. After this Government of Pakistan also formulated and endorsed its first national policy regulations in 2002 as “National policy on the issue of Disability” (Mumtaz & Saqulain, 2022).

The policy had a multi-sectoral and multidimensional approach and was used for further expansion and provision of good quality services. As per this policy’s objective conducive environment for PWD was never achieved. For the operationalization of national policy on the issues of PWD “The National Plan of Action 2006” was introduced. The “*Special Citizen Act, 2008*”, emphasized that accessibility should be provided to PWDs in all public places, facilities on the footpath for wheelchairs, and allocation of seats in public transport.

According to one of the respondents

The government should develop comprehensive policies and legislation that are required in the neglected areas of the life of persons with diabetes to facilitate their inclusion in mainstream societies. Furthermore the implementation of existing policy initiatives should also be ensured by the state.

6. Community Care Models for Social Inclusion

To develop & achieve the optimal sense of Community Care in society for PWDs, it is desired to adopt the Personal Social Services Model (PSSM) and Social-Ecological Model (SEM) to build and enhance the concept of Welfare and Community Care that enables Social Inclusion of PWD’s by utilizing their potential, include them in the mainstream of society as productive and responsible citizens.

6.1. The Personal Social Services Model

The Personal Social Services Model (PSSM) of social development practice pursues to extend the basic social services that are needed to restore or enhance the capacity of the community for social functioning. This model emphasizes the welfare of the community as a whole rather than just one specialized area of treatment, enabling them to assimilate into or at the very least come to terms with society. The main objectives of the model are:

- To provide rehabilitation and preventive services to individuals, families, and groups to achieve optimal social functioning which has been temporarily impaired or disrupted.
- To provide social protection to the community at risk of exploitation or degradation. The PSSM also aims to increase human well-being and welfare service providers, volunteers, and activists, enhancing sensitivity and responsiveness to the special service needs of culturally diverse population groups.

6.2. The Social-Ecological Model

The Social-Ecological Model of social inclusion fits with broader trends in physical disabilities that understand disability as itself a product of individual, environmental, and social factors (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2004). The Social-Ecological Model’s conditions and outcomes are suggestive of the social inclusion of PWDs.

The Community's Attitude, Culture, Geography, and Discourse are also examples of Community Conditions. Contact with PWDs, on the other hand, can predict more positive attitudes (Duggan &

Linehan, 2013). Individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and socio-political are the five major components of the Social-Ecological Model, which are illustrated below for clarity.

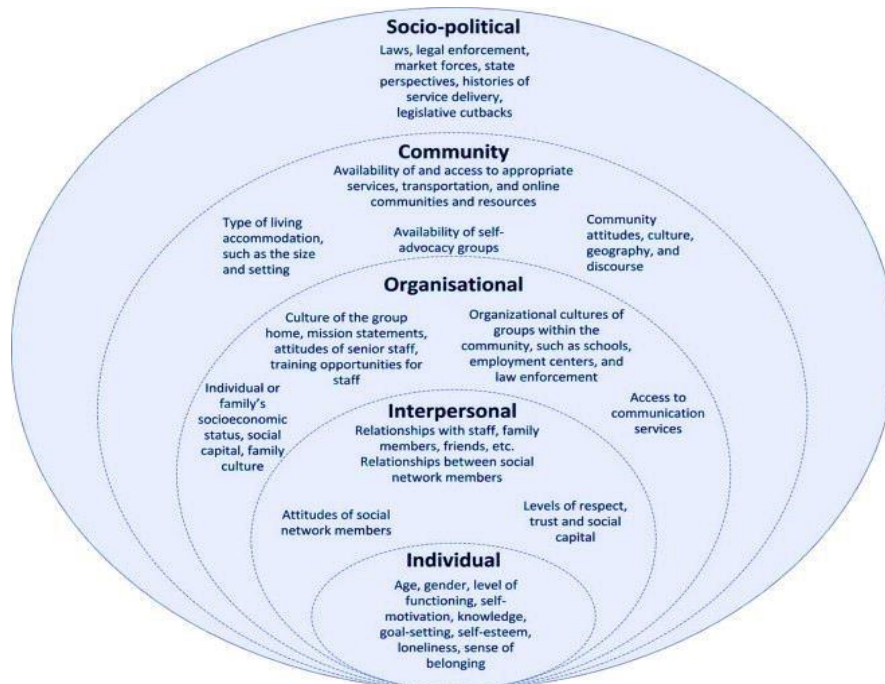


Figure 1: Social-Ecological Model and Structure of Social Inclusion

In most developing countries, PSSM and Social-Ecological Models have been adopted to effectively deal with the myth of Social Inclusion and they have succeeded to enhance the living standards of PWDs by providing them with standard education facilities by designing education programs following their disability nature, improving health and malnutrition mechanism, poverty elevation programs launched on a community basis. (Hall & Wilton, 2011). To create an ideal and conducive environment for PWD every segment of society whether individual, interpersonal, family, organization, community, or socio-political factors, all contributed a vital role by protecting the rights and empowering PWD, particularly in developing and developed nations in general, where social inclusion and community care of PWD's is a complementary subject of governance to deal with and provide social security (Razzaq & Rathore, 2020).

7. Conclusion

It is the dilemma of our society being a third-world country that disabled persons are treated as secondary citizens due to many social barriers. We have gone through various research and studies to identify existing gaps that are creating hindrances in the social inclusion of disabled persons. Being an Islamic country that came into being on the basic fundamental principles of a welfare state, it is unfortunate that people with disabilities are still fighting for their rights and are treated as a marginalized section of our society. There are very few laws for disabled persons in the country that are not properly implemented and does not have an effective mechanism. Moreover, the policies and plans are needed to be redefined and enforcement mechanisms should be strengthened to deal with PWD's unresolved issues. Despite a lot of work that has been made in the educational sector for PWDs, still, there more than 70% of the disabled population is illiterate. So far it reflects that more work is required in the educational sector for better inclusion of the disabled population.

There is no proper way out available for the social inclusion of PWDs in our society through community care, it is a must to sensitize our society by modifying their attitudes and behaviors towards PWDs. We are lacking behind in infrastructure and transportation for disabled persons without these

provisions social inclusion of disabled persons can never be achieved, roadsides, public areas, markets, business hubs, educational institutes, hospitals, and offices buildings should be built in such structures that easily accommodate PWD's without any difficulty. To achieve sustainable development targets, there are two ways as recommended explicitly for disabled persons to integrate into society as a productive segments to adopt a socio-ecological model and personal social services model to implement in our society for desirable outcomes and the government should participate actively in the implementation of programs and policies which are formulated for PWD's.

The crux of this research paper is that the government should play its role and actively participate in policy making and implementation which should be according to the changing needs of PWD and a separate ministry or division in the existing ministry must be established for strict implementation and evaluation of policies and laws. At the community level, various programs should be initiated for education and sensitization of society that how to treat PWDs and to launch various vocational training and poverty elevation programs, to provide improved nutrition medication, and academic, financial, and recreational opportunities to eliminate their exclusion from every aspect of life.

So, it is concluded based on the valuable reading review, synopsis of the literature, and interviews of relevant fraternity that achieving the milestone of Social Inclusion and Community care can only be possible when Government and society both collectively participate and adhere to their responsibilities by effective and efficient manners to bring PWD's in the mainstream of the society through the concept of social inclusion and community care and transform their potential into a productive and responsible citizen. As we are struggling to highlight the issues of PWDs which are not been resolved in the last 72 years of our Nation's history that came into being on the basic Islamic principle and concept of Welfare.

8. Recommendations

- In some respects, institutional care seems to exclude PWDs from the community. Therefore, all stakeholders should work together to create an inclusive society so that PWD rehabilitation can take place.
- Communities must be built to cater to the needs of PWDs, which enables them to live there without difficulty.
- The Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal, Zakat funds, local and international donors, and NGOs are the key financiers for social welfare and well-being activities, and also play an important role to elevate deprived communities. These sources must be utilized by comprehensive planning and organized way on prioritized development and rehabilitation programs for PWDs.
- Sustainable community growth and development can only be possible through the assessment of need-oriented services for the PWDs by encouraging voluntary work, mobilization of local human and financial resources, and effective participation of all community stockholders.

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