

Disability and Covid-19: An Exploration of challenges and Requisite Resolutions

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Abstract- The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented exceptional hurdles for person with disabilities, amplifying existing barriers and introducing new obstacles in their lives. It may affect their health, education, person, social and over all well-being. Thus, the present research try to examine the impact of COVID-19 on individuals with various disabilities, encompassing physical, sensory, cognitive, and mental health impairments. It also investigates how the pandemic has disrupted access to essential services, healthcare facilities, education and employment opportunities. To address these challenges the research proposes a range of requisite resolutions encompassing policy changes, improved healthcare provisions, accessible communication strategies, and inclusive learning opportunities. Additionally, the study highlights the crucial role of assistive technologies in enhancing independence and accessibility for individuals with disabilities during the pandemic and beyond.

Key words: COVID-19; person with disabilities; challenges; solutions.

Introduction

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a profound and tragic loss of human life on a global scale, posing an unparalleled challenge to public health, food systems, and the workforce (WHO, 2020). The repercussions of this pandemic extend far beyond its health implications, with far-reaching economic and social disruptions causing devastation in its wake. Countless individuals are now facing the grim prospect of falling into extreme poverty, with tens of millions at risk due to the pandemic's far-reaching impact on livelihoods and economies. Moreover, the already alarming number of undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, faces the distressing possibility of further escalation by up to 132 million by the end of the year. The interplay of these devastating effects presents a complex crisis that demands urgent and comprehensive action to safeguard lives and livelihoods across the globe (Sharma, 2022). It is a well-known fact that disabled people have been both oppressed and repressed for centuries (Davis, 2006). Humans have a proclivity to categorise themselves as either normal or deficient. The desperate need for homogeneity is rooted in society's concept of normalcy, as people want to belong (Iyengar, 2020). Disability is a conundrum that we all face at some point in our lives but do not always comprehend. While some people are born disabled, others experience disability when they are young, but the majority of us become acquainted with it (Albrecht, Seelman, and Bury, 2001). During pandemic person with disabilities typically needed greater healthcare requirements than those without disabilities, encompassing both general health needs and specific needs related to their impairments. As a result, they are more susceptible to the consequences of inadequate or inaccessible healthcare services. Compared to individuals without disabilities, people with disabilities are more prone to experiencing poorer health outcomes (COVID-19 Outbreak and Persons with Disabilities | United Nations, 2020).

How the Covid - 19 crises has affected person with disabilities in India

Who counts depends on who is counted. The disability data gap is more than just a surveillance oversight; social injustices exist that cannot be separated from this lack of information. The lack of data perpetuates the exclusion of disabled people from discussions about health equity and data-driven policies. The profound global impact of COVID-19 presents an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to usher in a new normal. Disability must finally be considered as we progress toward a more equitable and healthier society. People with disabilities must be counted (Reed et al., 2020). While the COVID-19 pandemic affects all members of society, people with disabilities are disproportionately affected due to behavioural, environmental, and institutional barriers that are replicated in the COVID-19 response. While all children experienced difficulties during the pandemic, people with disabilities were the worst affected (PWDs). There were many people with disabilities who suffered the most academically during the pandemic. For instance, during Covid-19, many children with disabilities faced significant educational challenges. Due to the less access to digital learning they faced a greater challenges during the pandemic because they did not have access to the necessary software and additional resources/ or proper setup of teaching learning at their homes.

While the COVID-19 pandemic affects all members of society, people with disabilities are disproportionately affected due to behavioural, environmental, and institutional barriers that are replicated in the COVID-19 response. The vast majority of people with disabilities have been affected by these factors during pandemic:

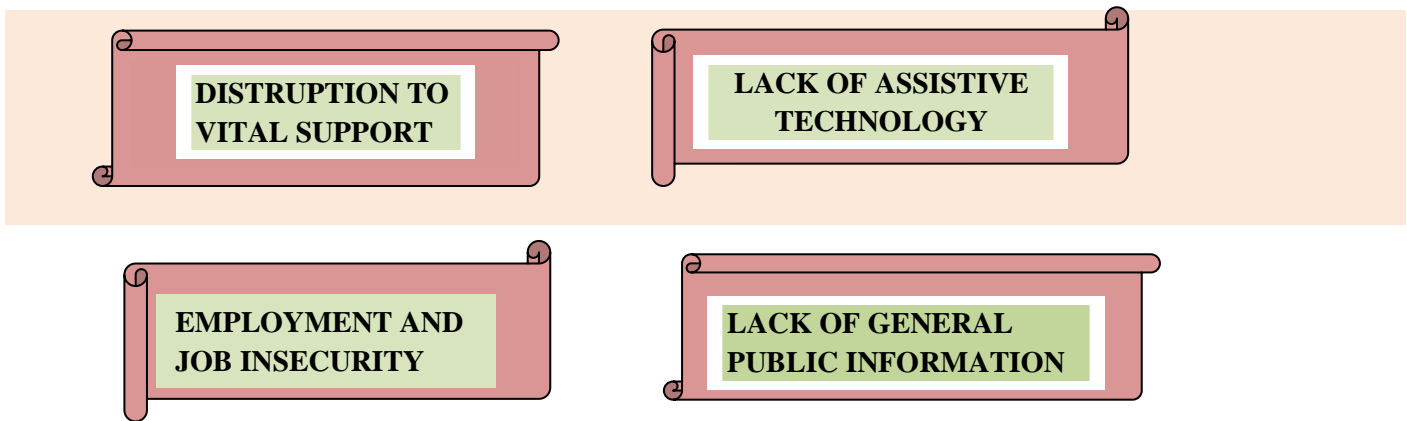


FIG 1.1 Factors affecting the Person with Disabilities during Pandemic

- ❖ During pandemic there was a general lack of readily available information about COVID-19. The majority of people have been unable to contact helplines. Furthermore, there is no dedicated helpline for people with disabilities, making it more difficult for them, particularly those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- ❖ Access to food and groceries has become especially difficult for people who have mobility issues. When communication barriers make a difficult situation worse, it exacerbates the problem. According to the NCPEDP survey, 67% of people with disabilities do not have access to government-provided essentials at their doorstep. Only 22% have access to essentials delivery. (NCPEDP, 2020)
- ❖ People who are on prescription pain relievers have difficulty accessing essential medications. Person with severe disabilities who require diapers, catheters, urine bags, etc. Disposable sheets, bandages, cotton, antibiotic medicines, and so on are unavailable. The nearly 50% decrease in blood supply in blood banks has made blood transfusion a major challenge. People with thalassemia are particularly vulnerable as a result of this. People suffering from spinal cord injuries and there were a severe shortage of medical supplies
- ❖ Because of the near-total lockdown, caregivers were unable to spend the night with the people with disabilities who rely on them. Even when the caregiver was willing to attend, duties (despite their own risk of infection), the lack of transportation options made it difficult and impossible.
- ❖ The lockdown, along with the resulting restrictions on services and purchases, has put some people with disabilities in danger. People with disabilities who rely on social and peer support groups and systems, reading rooms, listening circles, cafes, and friendship groups have found themselves suddenly isolated and alone, without lifesaving social contacts.
- ❖ Pensions for PWDs have not been released in many states during pandemic. Payment had been delayed by five months and it being released slowly. Many people have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. Many of them do not officially fall under the BPL category, so they do not receive financial assistance or free rations despite being in financial distress.
- ❖ Abuse and attacks on people with disabilities tend to increase during times of great stress because they are often unable to adequately defend themselves. Abandonment of disabled family members is also a serious issue. Increased household size, sharing and decision making during times of scarcity, poverty, and a lack of purposeful activities complicate relationships in households, resulting in more conflict and negligence.
- ❖ Women with disabilities face additional challenges due to intersectional discrimination. They face multiple layers of prejudice due to gender, poverty, a lack of education, and social prejudice. They are more vulnerable to sexual assault and violence because they are frequently denied sexual and reproductive rights. Domestic violence appears to be on the rise in the country during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- ❖ Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. Because of their near total reliance on parents or other caregivers, many people find themselves on the receiving end of any distress experienced by these guardians. Because of the lockdown, they are at an unfair disadvantage in mainstream education. Children with disabilities are particularly difficult to serve through distance programmes. They are among those most reliant on face-to-face services, such as health care, education, and security, which have been suspended as part of physical separation and lockdown measures. Distance learning solutions are unlikely to benefit them.

Objective of the study

- Exploring the issues and challenges encountered by Person With Disabilities during Covid -19

Methodology

- The methodology involved an extensive literature review to collect existing knowledge and research on persons with disabilities during the pandemic.
- Relevant academic journals, books, reports, and online resources were identified and used as sources of information for the study.

Requisite Resolutions for Addressing Challenges of Persons with Disabilities during COVID-19

COVID-19 and Its Impact on Persons With Disabilities - the ICRC in New Delhi, 2021 by implementing these requisite resolutions, society can work towards mitigating the adverse effects of COVID-19 on individuals with disabilities. These measures will not only address the immediate challenges posed by the pandemic but also contribute to building a more inclusive and resilient society that values and supports the diverse needs of all individuals, irrespective of ability.

Inclusive Policy Reforms: Governments and relevant authorities should enact and enforce disability-inclusive policies that address the specific needs of individuals with disabilities during the pandemic. These policies should cover healthcare access, education, employment, social support, and emergency response planning.

Enhanced Healthcare Provisions: Healthcare facilities should be equipped to cater to the unique healthcare requirements of individuals with disabilities during COVID-19. This includes ensuring accessibility in testing centres, treatment facilities, and vaccination sites, as well as providing accessible health information and telemedicine options.

Accessible Communication Strategies: Accurate and up-to-date COVID-19 information should be provided in accessible formats, such as braille, sign language, easy-to-read materials, and audio descriptions. Communication channels should be made inclusive to reach individuals with different disabilities effectively.

Inclusive Remote Learning: Educational institutions should adopt inclusive remote learning practices to cater to students with disabilities. This may involve providing assistive technologies, adapted learning materials, and individualized support to ensure their continued education during school closures.

Workplace Accommodations: Employers should make reasonable accommodations to facilitate remote work arrangements for employees with disabilities during the pandemic. This includes providing necessary assistive technologies and ensuring that virtual work environments are accessible and inclusive.

Mental Health Support: Mental health services should be made accessible and inclusive, addressing the unique mental health challenges faced by individuals with disabilities during the pandemic. Online counselling platforms and mental health apps can play a vital role in providing remote support.

Ensure Social Inclusion: Efforts should be made to reduce social isolation for individuals with disabilities. Virtual social gatherings, online support groups, and inclusive community engagement initiatives can promote social interaction and emotional well-being.

Assistive Technology Provision: Access to assistive technologies should be ensured for individuals with disabilities, both for healthcare needs and daily living requirements. Efforts should be made to provide, maintain, and train users on the effective use of these technologies

Advocacy and Collaboration: Disability advocacy groups, organizations, and relevant stakeholders should collaborate to amplify the voices of individuals with disabilities and advocate for their rights and needs during the pandemic. Their input is vital in shaping inclusive policies and programs.

Role of assistive technologies in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on PWDs

Assistive technologies play a crucial role in minimizing the pandemic's impact on individuals with disabilities, empowering them to maintain independence, improve accessibility, and actively engage in various aspects of life, both during and after the pandemic (De Witte et al., 2018). These technologies offer essential support and innovative solutions that enhance their overall well-being and participation in society, promoting a more inclusive and empowered experience for persons with disabilities.

Some key roles of assistive technologies during COVID-19 include:

- ✚ **Remote Healthcare and Telemedicine:** Assistive technologies have facilitated remote consultations with healthcare professionals, allowing individuals with disabilities to receive medical advice, prescription refills, and psychological support without the need to visit healthcare facilities physically. This has been especially important for people with mobility or sensory impairments, who may face additional risks during the pandemic.
- ✚ **Access to Information and Communication:** Assistive technologies have enabled persons with disabilities to stay informed and connected during periods of isolation. Screen readers, text-to-speech software, and captioning services have improved access to online information, including updates on COVID-19, preventive measures, and essential services.
- ✚ **Remote Education and Learning:** With the closure of schools and educational institutions, assistive technologies have facilitated inclusive remote learning for students with disabilities. Specialized software, adaptive devices, and captioning services have helped ensure that educational materials are accessible to all learners, regardless of their abilities.
- ✚ **Virtual Social Interaction:** For many individuals with disabilities, social isolation during the pandemic has been particularly challenging. Assistive technologies have enabled virtual social gatherings, video calls, and online support groups, providing opportunities for socialization and reducing feelings of loneliness and anxiety.
- ✚ **Accessibility in Remote Work:** As more businesses shifted to remote work arrangements, assistive technologies have been crucial in ensuring that employees with disabilities can effectively perform their jobs. Screen magnifiers, speech recognition software, and ergonomic devices have improved productivity and accessibility in virtual work environments.
- ✚ **Mental Health Support:** Assistive technologies, including mental health apps and online counselling platforms, have offered essential mental health support for individuals with disabilities facing increased stress and anxiety during the pandemic.

- ✚ Home Automation and Independence: Smart home technologies and assistive devices have empowered individuals with disabilities to control their living environments independently. Voice-activated assistants and home automation systems have facilitated tasks such as turning on lights, adjusting temperature, and opening doors, reducing the need for physical assistance.
- ✚ Accessible Entertainment and Leisure: Assistive technologies have enabled individuals with disabilities to access and enjoy a wide range of entertainment options, such as accessible e-books, audio descriptions in movies and TV shows, and adaptive gaming devices.

The role of assistive technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic has been instrumental in supporting individuals with disabilities, enhancing their independence, and mitigating the challenges posed by the public health crisis (Mont et al., 2021). These technologies have played a crucial role in various aspects of daily life, healthcare, education, and social inclusion for persons with disabilities. Overall, assistive technologies have played a transformative role in ensuring that individuals with disabilities can navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic with greater independence, access to information, and social inclusion. As we move forward, it is essential to continue investing in and advancing these technologies to build a more inclusive and resilient society that accommodates the diverse needs of all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly posed significant and unique challenges for individuals with disabilities, further amplifying pre-existing barriers and introducing new obstacles that impact their health, education, personal well-being, and social inclusion. Hence, by adopting the proposed requisite resolutions and leveraging the potential of assistive technologies, we can build a more equitable and inclusive society, ensuring that no one is left behind in times of crisis. As we continue to grapple with the aftermath of the pandemic, it is imperative that we work collectively to create a more resilient and supportive world for all, irrespective of ability, as we chart a course towards a brighter and more inclusive future.

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1. **Literature Review** A comprehensive review of existing literature will be conducted to understand the historical context of disability inclusion, the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities during previous pandemics or emergencies, and the lessons learned from those experiences.
2. **Methodology** This section outlines the research's approach, including data collection methods, participant selection criteria, and the utilization of qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques.
3. **Impact of COVID-19 on Individuals with Disabilities** This section presents the findings of the research, detailing the specific challenges faced by individuals with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will discuss the effects on their personal well-being, social relationships, and overall quality of life.
4. **Disruptions to Essential Services, Healthcare, Education, and Employment** This section focuses on how the pandemic has disrupted access to essential services, healthcare facilities, education, and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. It highlights the disproportionate effects on different disability subgroups and the intersectionality of disability with other factors.
5. **Requisite Resolutions for Addressing Challenges** In response to the identified challenges, this section proposes a range of requisite resolutions. It will explore policy changes to enhance disability-inclusive practices, improvements in healthcare services, the implementation of accessible communication strategies, and the promotion of inclusive learning opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
6. **Role of Assistive Technologies** This section highlights the crucial role of assistive technologies in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on individuals with disabilities. It explores how technology can enhance independence, accessibility, and participation in various aspects of life during and after the pandemic.
7. **Case Studies and Success Stories** This section presents case studies and success stories of disability-inclusive approaches implemented during the pandemic. These examples will highlight best practices and provide practical insights for policymakers and stakeholders.
8. **Conclusion** The research concludes by summarizing the findings and emphasizing the urgency of adopting comprehensive measures to support individuals with disabilities during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights the importance of creating a more inclusive and resilient society for all, irrespective of ability.
9. **Recommendations** The final section offers concrete recommendations for policymakers, healthcare providers, educators, and other stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the proposed resolutions and technology-based solutions. By shedding light on the impact of COVID-19 on individuals with disabilities and providing actionable solutions, this research seeks to contribute to building a more equitable and inclusive world in the face of global health crises. The educational field of the world has also suffered and is still suffering due to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic that has affected the teaching-learning process around the globe. Students with disabilities faced major challenges in their education during Covid-19. Due to the less access to digital learning they faced a greater challenges during the pandemic because they did not have access to the necessary software and additional resources/ or proper setup of teaching learning at their homes.