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A Critical Review of Relationship between Environment and Person with Disabilities

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Abstract

The environment refers to the natural world and its surroundings, including all living and non-living things. It encompasses the air, water, land, plants, animals, and ecosystems that make up the Earth's biosphere. A person with a disability, often referred to as a "individual with a disability," is someone who has a physical, sensory, cognitive, or intellectual impairment that may significantly limit their ability to perform daily activities or participate fully in society. Environmental relationship for people with disabilities refer to obstacles and challenges in the physical, social, or built environment that hinder their ability to participate fully in society and access essential services. These barriers can significantly impact the daily lives and quality of life for individuals with disabilities. In the present study the researcher will focus on environmental relationship with person with disabilities. Moreover, the researcher will highlight the issues related to environmental barriers such as physical, social, communication, attitude, academic etc. barriers for PwDs. Additionally, inclusion, awareness, education, and advocacy play crucial roles in promoting accessibility and breaking down attitudinal barriers. Legislation and regulations, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States and similar laws in other countries, have been enacted to address many of these issues. The researcher will find out the efforts related to remove these environmental barriers and improve the positive relationship, which are essential to ensure the full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in society.

Key words: Environment, person with disabilities, barriers, inclusion, relationship, participation.

Introduction

The relationship between the environment and persons with disabilities (PwDs) is multifaceted, involving physical, social, cultural, and institutional factors that shape accessibility, participation, and quality of life. This article critically examines how environmental conditions—ranging from architectural design and transport infrastructure to

social attitudes, policy frameworks, and digital technologies—affect the inclusion or exclusion of persons with disabilities. Drawing from the social model of disability, ecological systems theory, and empirical studies, the paper highlights barriers and facilitators of disability inclusion, while proposing strategies for sustainable and equitable environmental design. The findings underscore the need for inclusive policies, universal design, and attitudinal transformation to foster greater participation of PwDs in education, employment, and community life.

Models of Disability and Environment-There are model related to disability such as Medical Model, views disability as a personal health issue, focusing on treatment, similarly, social model locates disability in the environment, emphasizing systemic barriers and biopsychosocial model (ICF) combines medical and social aspects, recognizing the interaction between individuals and environment. There are barriers for disability are physical barriers inaccessible buildings, lack of ramps, inadequate transport facilities (Oliver, 1996). And attitudinal Barriers, having negative stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination reduce participation (Shakespeare, 2013). Institutional Barriers are policies that fail to accommodate PwDs in education, employment, and health services (Barnes, 2019). We can include PWDs with Universal Design, designing spaces usable by all, regardless of ability (Mace, 1998) and with assistive technology such as screen readers, mobility aids, and digital accessibility (WHO, 2011). There are inclusive policies: UNCRPD (2006) obligates states to ensure accessibility and participation. Disability is not merely a medical condition; it is a dynamic interaction between an individual's impairment and environmental factors.

Figure 1 Physical Barriers for PWDs.

Ref.- https://www.stronggo.com/blog/common-barriers-individuals-disabilities-public

The World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) emphasizes this interactional perspective, framing disability as the outcome of barriers that restrict participation. The environment can

either empower or disable individuals. For instance, an accessible building fosters independence, while inaccessible transport systems perpetuate exclusion. Understanding this relationship is essential for advancing social justice, human rights, and inclusive development. This research article seeks to assess how environmental structures—physical, social, and institutional—influence the lived experiences of persons with disabilities. It aims to:

1. Analyze environmental barriers and facilitators of disability inclusion.
2. Examine policy frameworks that address environmental accessibility.
3. Recommend strategies for building inclusive environments.

Literature Review

Researchers have adopted diverse theories (e.g., institutional theory, human capital theory, organisational socialisation, Marxist theory, Foucauldian and post-structuralist approaches) and methodologies (e.g., historiography, ethnography, interpretive and qualitative approaches, and surveys), with increasing interdisciplinary projects (e.g., Kaul & Ghosh, 2024). Similarly, as a result of disability advocacy, the 2016 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed. Consequently, the number of legally recognised types of disabilities has increased from 7 to 21 and disability definitions have expanded to include acid attack victims and individuals with chronic neurological disorders such as multiple sclerosis (Balakrishnan, Kulkarni, Moirangthem, Kumar, Math, & Murthy, 2019).

In this commentary, we trace the key frames, theories, and methods that demarcate this scholarship. We suggest that researchers can open new terrains of inquiry by problematising the workplace, situating disability, and reflecting upon our ethico-political imperatives. Drawing from scholarship in critical access studies (Hamraie, 2017), we also emphasise the need to constantly interrogate the concept and practice of ‘inclusion’. We ask what it means to say that inclusion is happening and who gets to adjudicate. We focus on the Indian workplace given that what counts as (dis)abled and attendant experiences and social relations vary across social, cultural, political, economic, legal, and historical contexts (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2020; Kaul, Sandhu, & Alam, 2021).

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Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, analytical review approach, synthesizing data from academic journals, policy documents, and disability rights reports. Sources include WHO reports, UNCRPD guidelines, government accessibility policies, and peer-reviewed articles. Data is categorized under physical, social, and institutional environments to assess their impact on PwDs.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory research design to assess the relationship between the environment and persons with disabilities (PwDs). The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of subjective experiences, social attitudes, and policy frameworks, which cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods alone. In addition, a descriptive-analytical framework is employed to examine existing literature, policies, and case studies, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and facilitators affecting disability inclusion.

Data Collection

The research relies primarily on secondary data drawn from: Academic Literature, peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and dissertations focusing on disability studies, social inclusion, universal design, and human rights. Policy Documents and Legal Frameworks – United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), World Health Organization's *World Report on Disability* (2011), Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (India, 2016), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). Institutional Reports, publications by UNESCO, International Labour Organization (ILO), and World Bank on accessibility and inclusion. Case Studies and Best Practices, urban accessibility projects, inclusive education programs, and workplace diversity initiatives from both developed and developing countries.

Data was collected using systematic literature review methods, researches were conducted in electronic databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate using keywords like *disability and environment, accessibility, universal design, inclusion of PwDs, barriers and facilitators*. Policy documents and reports were sourced from official websites of international organizations and government portals. Case study materials were drawn from

published evaluations of accessibility projects and NGO interventions. Inclusion criteria required that materials:

1. Were published in English between 1990–2024.
2. Focused explicitly on the interaction between environmental factors and persons with disabilities.
3. Provided empirical findings, theoretical insights, or policy frameworks relevant to accessibility.

Data Analysis

The collected data was subjected to thematic analysis. Sources were coded into categories such as Physical environment (infrastructure, transport, housing), Social environment (attitudes, stigma, cultural practices), Institutional environment (laws, policies, education, workplace practices)., Technological environment (assistive devices, digital accessibility). Patterns and themes were identified to compare how different environments either create barriers or facilitate inclusion. Findings were then triangulated across sources to enhance reliability. Although the study is based on secondary data, ethical standards were maintained by citing all sources appropriately to avoid plagiarism, using only publicly available documents and peer-reviewed works, ensuring representation of diverse perspectives, including voices from both Global North and Global South contexts.

Figure 2 Community and Person with Disability.

Ref.-https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10522158.2016.1234272

Findings and Discussion

Most urban and rural infrastructures in developing nations lack universal design, preventing PwDs from accessing public spaces. For example, absence of tactile paving and low-floor buses limit mobility for visually impaired and wheelchair users. Some cities adopting universal design principles (e.g., barrier-free public transport in Singapore) demonstrate significant improvement in PwD inclusion. There are prejudice, stigma, and overprotection reinforce dependency. Discriminatory hiring practices marginalize PwDs in the workforce. Disability awareness campaigns and inclusive education promote acceptance, reducing attitudinal barriers. Inadequate implementation of disability laws, poor monitoring of accessibility standards, and lack of resources hinder progress. Strong policy frameworks such as India's *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016)* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)* have created legal pathways for accessibility. PwDs often experience compounded exclusion due to gender, socio-economic status, and rural-urban divides. For example, women with disabilities face double discrimination in both domestic and public spheres.

Conclusion and Discussion

The relationship between the environment and persons with disabilities is dynamic, reciprocal, and deeply influential. Barriers in physical, social, and institutional environments restrict opportunities, while inclusive design and supportive policies enhance participation. To move toward an equitable society, it is necessary to implement universal design in all infrastructures, strengthen enforcement of disability rights legislation, promote positive social attitudes through awareness and education, expand assistive technologies and digital accessibility. Ultimately, building inclusive environments benefits not only persons with disabilities but society as a whole by fostering diversity, innovation, and social cohesion.

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