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# **An Analysis of Activity Status of Disabled Persons under Poverty Line in India**

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## **Abstract**

*Disabled persons living below poverty line are victims of dual disadvantages of disability and poverty which influence each other. Disability along with poverty has its negative effects on employment, health and livelihood earnings. The activity status of the disabled persons is broadly classified into non-economic status and economic status. The first category does not belong to labour force (out of labour force) whereas the second category belongs to labour force (both employed and unemployed). This study has found that in India the number of disabled people in rural area is higher than that in urban area and the number of disabled males is higher than the number of disabled females both in rural area and urban area. It appears that the prevalence of disability varies with age, and there is significant difference between the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) of disabled males and females both in rural and urban area.*

**Key words:** Disability, self-employment, usual status, multiple disabilities, poverty line, labour force participation rate, Worker Population Ratio, and unemployment rate.

## **Introduction**

Disability is a major public health and social issue in a country like India. Inability of a person to do an activity according to some normal standard set by the society can be termed as a situation of disability. The activity status of the disabled persons is broadly classified into non-economic status and economic status. The first category is not belonging to labour force (out of labour force). They include students, persons doing household duties, dependents, pensioners, rentiers, beggars and vagrants and others. The second category is belonging to labour force and they may be employed or unemployed.

The disabled persons living below poverty line are experiencing twin disadvantages viz, disability and poverty. There exists a two-way relationship between disability and poverty in the sense that disability causes poverty and poverty also causes disability. “The relation between poverty and disability is commonly accepted as a vicious circle and it is widely hypothesized that it is a two-way relationship i.e., disability increases the risk of poverty and conditions of poverty increase the risk of disability” (Pandey, 2009; P.17). In this context, the observation by Thangamayan and Murugesan is absolutely right. “The few services that are available to people with disabilities are often underfunded, poorly managed and capacity constrained” (Thangamayan and Murugesan, 2015; P. 129). Everyone tries to pursue some kind of livelihood activity in order to stand on his own legs and thereby to lead to a life of dignity and respect. Livelihood issues are crucial in the case of disabled persons because of the sidelining of such persons from the main stream of the society and the lack of adequate infrastructure and service provisions for equipping them to overcome their constraints. It is necessary for the disabled persons with poverty to find out some economic activity for their survival and for supporting their families. As they are not able to participate in all kinds of economic activities especially those requiring physical effort, they often choose self-employment activities for their livelihood.

The disabled persons with poverty have limited access to health and livelihood opportunities. “People with disabilities and their families are more likely to experience the economic and social disadvantage than non-disabled people and families. The multi-dimensional impact of disability is adversely affecting and worsening the social and economic wellbeing of disabled people. Poverty through multitude of channels have an adverse impact on education, employment, social participation, access to health care, livelihood, earnings and also increases the expenditures related to poverty and disability”. (P. 983 Vijayan.K , . Shanimon , and Indurajani , 2020). “Persons with disabilities bear costs associated with health care, transportation, personal assistance or assistive products, and modified residences, among others. The result is that two households with the same level of consumption (or income) – one with a member with a disability and one without – are not enjoying the same standard of living due to the extra costs incurred by persons with disabilities” (UN Disability and Development Report, 2018, p.37). “Despite years of rights-based activism, including around the right to work and inclusive workplaces, a significant

employment gap remains between people with and without disabilities” (Stienstra and Ling Lee; 2019, P. 10).

“In India, a majority of the disabled resides in rural areas where accessibility, availability, and utilization of rehabilitation services and its cost-effectiveness are the major issues to be considered” (Kumar, Roy, and Sekhar Kar, 2012; P. 69). The study report is exclusively based on the secondary data analysis of disability in India.

### **Objective of the study**

The objective of the study is to analyse the activity status of the disabled persons under poverty line in India based on secondary data analysis. The present study is an attempt to ascertain how disability affects the activity status of disabled persons in multitude ways.

### **Data base and methodology of the study**

The study makes use of secondary data available from various sources, mainly various Census Reports; NSS reports on Disability (36<sup>th</sup> round, 47<sup>th</sup> round, 58<sup>th</sup> round and 76<sup>th</sup> round).

The activity status of the disabled persons is broadly classified into non-economic status and economic status. The first category is not belonging to labour force (out of labour force). They include students, persons doing household duties, dependents, pensioners, rentiers, beggars and vagrants and others. The second category is belonging to labour force and they may be employed or unemployed.

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

*Person with Disability:* “Person with disability means a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others” (NSS 76th round, 2018).

*Broad type of disabilities:* Broad type of disabilities include locomotor disability, visual disability (blindness/low vision), hearing disability, speech and language disability, mental retardation/intellectual disability, mental illness, other type of disability.

*Activity status:* It shows the participation of a person in economic and /or non-economic activities during the reference period. The activity status of persons are classified into employed (worker), unemployed and ‘not in labour force’.

*Self-employed:* “Persons who operated their own farm or non-farm enterprises or were engaged independently in a profession or trade on own-account or with one or a few partners were deemed to be self-employed in household enterprises. The essential feature of the selfemployed is that they have *autonomy* (decide how, where and when to produce) and *economic independence* (in respect of choice of market, scale of operation and finance) for carrying out their operation. The remuneration of the self-employed consists of a non-separable combination of two parts: a reward for their labour and profit of their enterprise” (NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India P. 31).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Rate of Disability in India**

The total number of disabled people in India according to 2001 census was 2.19 crore and it rose to 2.68 crore as per the census 2011. The percentage decadal growth during the period was 22.4 per cent (Table 1). From the comparison of census figures in 2001 and 2011, it is found that the number of disabled people in rural area is higher than that in urban area and the number of disabled males is higher than the number of disabled females both in rural area and urban area. However, the disabled women are more marginalized compared to their male counterparts. National Sampling Survey (NSS) reports also provide us a clear picture on disability in India. NSS conducted four rounds of comprehensive surveys on disability in India (36<sup>th</sup> round in 1981, 47<sup>th</sup> round in 1991, 58<sup>th</sup> round in 2002 and 76<sup>th</sup> round in 2018). The uniqueness of 58<sup>th</sup> round was inclusion of mental disability and removal of age restrictions for the hearing and speech disability. Therefore, the major limitation is the results of various NSS rounds are not comparable for analyzing the trends in disability over a period. However, the percentage of disability both in rural and urban area and the disability among males and females increased from 36<sup>th</sup> round in 1981 to 76<sup>th</sup> round in 2018.

The Central and State governments in India enacted many Acts for improving the conditions of disabled people in India. Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, provided recognition to the rights and needs of the disabled in the country and reservation in government jobs. In 2016, a new act was passed known as The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 which provided reservation for doing higher education for the disabled. The Mental Health Care Act, 2017 was passed for protecting the rights of persons having psychosocial disabilities. For promoting research in rehabilitation and special education to the disabled people, Government of India created the Rehabilitation Council of India as per the Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992. In 1999, National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act was passed. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is keenly interested in promoting the welfare of disabled persons in India. In 2015, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) launched ‘Accessible India Campaign’ (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) for achieving universal accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).

**Table 1: Total Disabled persons in India in crore**

Census	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
2001	1.64	0.94	0.70	0.55	0.32	0.23	2.19	1.26	0.93
2011	1.86	1.04	0.82	0.82	0.46	0.36	2.68	1.5	1.18
% Decadal growth	13.7	10.6	17.8	48.2	43.3	55.0	22.4	18.9	27.1

Source: Census 2001 and 2011

**Table 2: Percentage of persons with disability**

Sex	36 <sup>th</sup> Round, 1981	47 <sup>th</sup> Round, 1991	58 <sup>th</sup> Round, 2002	76 <sup>th</sup> Round, 2018

Rural				
Male	2.0	2.3	2.1	2.6
Female	1.6	1.7	1.6	2.0
Persons	1.8	2.0	1.8	2.3
Urban				
Male	1.5	1.8	1.7	2.1
Female	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.8
Persons	1.4	1.6	1.5	2.0

*NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India*

The proportion of disabled population by social groups in India is shown in the Table 3. The proportion of disabled population is relatively higher in the case of Scheduled Casts and the share of disabled population in the case of that social group is 2.45 percent. In each social group, the share of disabled men is higher than that of disabled women.

**Table 3: Proportion of disabled population by Social Groups in India -Census, 2011**

<b>Social Group</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Total	2.21	2.41	2.01
SC	2.45	2.68	2.2
ST	2.05	2.18	1.92
Other than SC/ ST	2.18	2.37	1.98

Source: Disabled Persons in India, A Statistical Profile 2016, Social Statistics Division, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

## **2. Types of Disability**

The percentage of persons with only one broad type of disability and Percentage of persons with broad type of disabilities are presented in Table 4 and Table 5 respectively. NSS classified the broad type of disabilities as locomotor disability, visual disability (blindness/low vision, hearing disability, speech and language disability, mental retardation/ intellectual disability,

mental illness, and other type of disability. ‘Other type of disability’ includes chronic neurological conditions: multiple sclerosis, parkinson's disease, other chronic neurological conditions; blood disorder: haemophilia, thalassemia, sickle cell disease (NSS 76<sup>th</sup> round report, 2018). Persons having more than one type of disability are suffering from multiple disability.

**Table 4: Percentage of persons with only one broad type of disability-All India**

Indicator	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
only locomotor disability	1.5	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.1	1.2
only visual disability	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
only hearing disability	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
only speech and language disability	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
only mental retardation/ intellectual disability	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
only mental illness	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
only other type of disability	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
multiple disability	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
any disability	2.6	2.0	2.3	2.1	1.8	2.0	2.4	1.9	2.2



Source: NSO 2018 report, *NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India*

**Table 5: Percentage of persons with broad type of disabilities- All India**

Indicator	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
locomotor disability	1.6	1.2	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.2	1.4
visual disability	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
hearing disability	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3
speech and language disability	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
mental retardation/ intellectual disability	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2
mental illness	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
other type of disability	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1
any disability	2.6	2.0	2.3	2.1	1.8	2.0	2.4	1.9	2.2

Source: NSO 2018 report, *NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India*

The prevalence of disability varies with age and usually the burden of disability is found to be higher among the geriatric (60 years and above) population. Disability increases among the aged people because of the decline in physical and cognitive functioning with the advancement of age. The proportion of disabled population in different age groups is shown in the Table 6. From the table, it is clear that as age advances, disability rate also increases. Thus, a positive association exists between age and disability.

**Table 6: Proportion of Disabled Population in the Respective Age Groups in India: 2011**

Age Group	Persons	Males	Females
All Ages	2.21	2.41	2.01
0-4	1.14	1.18	1.11
5-9	1.54	1.63	1.44
10-19	1.82	1.96	1.67
20-29	1.97	2.22	1.70
30-39	2.09	2.41	1.77
40-49	2.31	2.66	1.94
50-59	2.83	3.16	2.47
60-69	4.15	4.41	3.89
70-79	6.22	6.26	6.19
80-89	8.41	8.33	8.48
90+	8.40	7.88	8.85
Age Not Stated	3.07	3.21	2.91

Source: NSO 2018 report, *NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India*

### **3. Activity Status of the Disabled**

The activity status of the disabled persons during the reference period may be economic activities or non-economic activities. The person participating in an economic activity (worker) or seeking an economic activity (unemployed) are belonging to the labour force. The persons, who are not engaged in an economic activity and are not seeking opportunities for economic activities, are not belonging to labour force, but who are doing some non-economic activities. Thus, the activity status of the disabled may be ‘employed’, ‘unemployed’, or ‘not in labour force’. The disabled persons having non-economic status may be students, pensioners, rentiers, dependents, persons doing household duties etc. The percentage of disabled non-workers having different non-economic activities is shown in the Table 7.

**Table 7: Disabled Non-Workers by type of Major Non-Economic Activities, India: 2011**

Type of Disability	Major Non-Economic Activity (%)						
	Student	Household duties	Dependent	Pensioner	Rentier	Beggar, Vagrants, etc	Others
Total disabled non-worker	27.2	15.3	45.7	5.5	0.2	0.4	5.6
In seeing	28.0	17.3	42.7	6.7	0.2	0.4	4.7
In hearing	32.5	18.9	38.7	4.9	0.2	0.2	4.6
In speech	37.2	20.0	33.5	3.4	0.2	0.2	5.4
In movement	19.7	13.4	49.8	8.8	0.3	0.6	7.4
Mental Retardation	24.5	9.6	57.7	2.1	0.2	0.5	5.4
Mental Illness	9.3	11.9	66.6	2.8	0.2	1.0	8.2
Any other	37.4	17.7	35.4	3.2	0.2	0.3	5.8
Multiple disability	15.0	7.3	65.9	6.8	0.2	0.6	4.3

Source: Measurement of Disability through Census National Experiences, Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, Website: <http://www.censusindia.gov.in>

For examining the economic status of disabled persons, three important indicators are firstly used and they are labour force participation rate (LFPR), worker population ratio (WPR), and unemployment rate. There is significant difference between the LFPR of disabled males and females both in rural and urban area. Female LFPR is significantly lower in both rural and urban area. Similar trend is holding right in the case of WPR. Regarding unemployment rate, female unemployment rate is lower in rural area and higher in urban area compared to male unemployment rate. The LFPR, WPR and unemployment rate of disabled persons are shown in the Table 8. The disabled persons generally have lower employment rates (or higher unemployment rates)

compared to persons without disabilities. The hindrance for the disabled to participate in labour market is responsible for the higher rate poverty existing among them.

**Table 8: Indicators of Employment and unemployment among persons of age 15 years and above with disability in usual status (ps + ss) in percentage- All India**

Indicator	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)	36.8	8.0	24.5	33.9	7.2	21.9	36.0	7.7	23.8
Worker Population Ratio (WPR)	35.5	7.8	23.7	31.7	6.6	20.4	34.5	7.4	22.8
Unemployment Rate (UR)	3.5	2.5	3.3	6.5	7.9	6.7	4.2	3.9	4.2

Source: NSO 2018 report, *NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India*

The broad distribution of employment of disabled persons as self-employed, regular wage/salaried employees, and casual labour is shown in Table 9. If right environment and support are extended, the disabled persons can perform almost all jobs in a very productive manner. However, on the demand side of labour market there exists a misconception on the part of some employers that people with disabilities are less qualified and unproductive. On the supply side of the labour market, disabled persons have some disadvantages in the form of extra cost of working. Disabled persons also have some other labour market disadvantages on account of their relative inaccessibility to education and training. For starting some kind of self-employment activities, most of the disabled persons have constraints to obtain loans due to lack of assets for pledging. Microfinance programmes are often considered as an effective means to overcome the constraint. From the Table 9, it is clear that the percentage of self-employed is higher for disabled persons compared to other categories of jobs.

**Table 9: Percentage distribution of workers in usual status (ps + ss) with disability of**

Indicator	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person
self-employed	65.7	57.8	64.6	46.8	34.3	45.0	61.0	51.8	59.7
regular wage/salaried employees	8.6	10.8	8.9	32.4	38.8	33.3	14.5	17.9	15.0
casual labour	25.7	31.5	26.5	20.8	26.9	21.7	24.5	30.3	25.3
all	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

**age 15 years and above by broad status in employment.**

Source: NSO 2018 report, *NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India*

Distribution of disabled workers in broad industries -*agriculture sector, secondary sector and tertiary sector*- is shown in Table 10. Unlike the employment distribution of general workers who are mostly finding employment in tertiary sector, disabled workers are largely concentrated in agriculture sector. While 48.4 per cent of disabled workers are working in agriculture, only 31.6 per cent are working in tertiary sector. However, there is clear difference between rural and urban area with respect to employment. While in rural area, agriculture is the main livelihood activity of disabled males and females, in urban area, tertiary sector is the main livelihood sector. The employment of the disabled persons in informal non-agriculture sector is shown in the Table 11. Employment of male disabled persons is higher in both rural and urban area in informal sector compared to that of females.

**Table 10: Percentage distribution of workers in usual status (ps + ss) with disability of age 15 years and above by broad industry of work**

Indicator	Rural			Urban			Rural + Urban		
	Male	Femal e	Perso n	Mal e	Femal e	Perso n	Mal e	Femal e	Perso n
agriculture sector	61.1	69.5	62.2	6.6	7.1	6.7	47.6	53.6	48.4
secondary sector	16.3	13.6	15.9	31.8	34.9	32.2	20.1	19.1	20.0
tertiary sector	22.7	16.8	21.8	61.6	58.0	61.1	32.3	27.3	31.6
all	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NSO 2018 report, *NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India*

**Table 11: Percentage distribution of workers in usual status (ps + ss) with disability of age 15 years and above in non-agriculture sector who were working in informal sector**

Indicator	Male	Female	Person
Rural	31.4	13.8	28.4
Urban	32.2	17.3	29.8
Rural + Urban	31.8	15.9	29.2

Source: NSO 2018 report, *NSS Report No. 583: Persons with Disabilities in India*

Note: Informal sector – Proprietary and partnership are considered here as informal sector

### Summary and Conclusion

Bringing people with disabilities into the mainstream of the society is one of the major issues in every country of the world today. The conditions of disabled persons are even more pathetic in a country like India where poverty and unemployment are major issues. The disabled persons living below poverty line are experiencing twin disadvantages of disability and poverty. Even in the disabled category there are disparities between male and female. The female disabled persons are facing more distresses than their male counterpart. Since there is high degree of association between disability and poverty, general poverty eradication programmes are ineffective and hence the development programmes of the government should be ‘disability-inclusive’. A well assured

social security safety net and health care facility are essential to improve the economic and health status of the disabled people. Strengthening of microfinance programmes can create a marked difference in the employment and life status of the disabled persons and to mitigate the severity of poverty experienced by them.

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