



Research Paper

The Triumphs and Trials of women with disabilities in the work place

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Abstract

This paper explores the multifaceted experiences of working disabled women, focusing on the challenges they face at work in India, comparing their experiences in government jobs. Despite laws to protect their rights, disabled women still struggle with many issues. It is often stated that these women face a triple handicap and discrimination due to their disability, gender and developing world status. Women with disabilities sometimes face discrimination in recruitment, promotion, and other related matters arising in the course of or through the length of employment, in any establishment. In Indian context, gender equity is an issue for a large majority of women, given the socio-cultural practices and traditional attitudes of society. Therefore, many of the issues that are faced by women in general in a male dominated society also have an impact on women with disabilities. This paper discusses status, challenges and problems of disabled working women in both private and public sectors and recommends creating programs to help disabled women learn job skills and advance in their careers.

Keywords: Disabled Women, Workplace Challenges, India, Government Jobs, Private Sector

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I. INTRODUCTION

In India, many people face challenges at work, but for women with disabilities, these challenges are often bigger and more complex. About 2.2% of India's population has a disability (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2023). That's more than 26 million people, and almost half of them are women. Disabled women often have trouble finding and keeping jobs. Even when they do have jobs, they might not be treated fairly or given chances to grow in their careers.

To understand the challenges faced by disabled women in Indian workplaces need to look at the bigger picture. The workforce participation rate for persons with disabilities in India stands at around 36%, compared to approximately 60% for those without disabilities. The disparity is even starker when examining gender, while 47% of men with disabilities are employed, only 23% of women with disabilities have jobs. These figures point to systemic barriers ranging from attitudinal biases and inaccessible infrastructure to educational inequities and limited inclusive hiring practices (UNDP 2024). India has made efforts to protect the rights of disabled people, including in the workplace. The most important law for this is the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). This law says that disabled people should have equal chances at work and that workplaces should be made accessible for them. However, the reality for many disabled women is often quite different from what the law intends. Disabled women in India face a unique set of challenges. These challenges come from both their gender and their disability. In Indian society, women often face discrimination in education and employment. When a woman also has a disability, these problems can become even harder to overcome. Many disabled women don't get the same chances to go to school or learn job skills. This makes it difficult for them to find good jobs later in life. There are several key issues that disabled women often face in the workplace. First, there are physical barriers (Bhambhani, M. 2021). Many buildings and offices in India are not easy for disabled people to use. They might not have ramps, elevators, or accessible bathrooms. This can make it hard or even impossible for some disabled women to work in these places. Second, there's the problem of discrimination. Some employers don't want to hire disabled women

because they wrongly believe they can't do the job well. Even when disabled women do get jobs, they might be treated unfairly by their coworkers or bosses (Mehrotra, N. 2023). Another big issue is the lack of proper support and accommodations. Disabled women might need special tools or changes to their work environment to do their jobs well. For example, a woman with vision problems might need a computer with special software (Kumar, S. G., Roy, G., & Kar, S. S. 2023). But many workplaces don't provide these things, either because they don't want to spend the money or because they don't understand what's needed. Social attitudes also play a big role. In India, there are still many negative beliefs about disability. Some people think that disabled women can't work as well as others, or that their disability is somehow their fault. These attitudes can make it hard for disabled women to be accepted and respected at work (Singal, N., & Jain, A. 2022). Despite these challenges, there have been some positive changes in recent years. More companies are starting to understand the importance of inclusive workplaces. The government has also taken steps to enforce laws protecting disabled workers. However, there's still a long way to go before disabled women have truly equal opportunities in the Indian workplace.

II. METHODOLOGY:

This study used a secondary data analysis approach. This paper began by identifying key sources of information about disabled women in the Indian workplace. These included government reports, academic studies, publications from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international agency reports. However, by using a wide range of sources aimed to get as complete a picture as possible. Through this comprehensive analysis of secondary data, This paper were able to identify key challenges, compare different workplace settings, and develop informed recommendations for improving the situation of disabled women in Indian workplaces.

FINDINGS: This paper's research uncovered important insights about the experiences of disabled women in both public (government) and private sector workplaces in India. The key findings are following –

1. Most of the women with disability belonging to economically weaken strata of the social cause of which their education level and skill sets are not efficient enough to provide them with opportunities in the corporate sector
2. Ill-Equipped Workplace: Most of the workplace, both in the private and Government sector, are not disabled-friendly, thereby making it quite difficult for them to access it, may it be infrastructure, working equipment, mobility etc.
3. Lack of Sensitisation: Coming to the workplace environment, the majorities of the co-workers sees women with disability as a burden and therefore avoid either acceptance or consider them as a burden, thereby making them feel alienated, creating a workplace stigma and also affecting the morals of persons with disability.

All these are mainly due to a lack of awareness and sensitisation.

Benefits of Inclusion of Persons with Disability in the Workforce : Now that we have seen some of the major basic reasons behind the exclusion or under-representation of persons with a disability, the further following are some of the major reasons why corporate's should favour the inclusion of persons with disability in the workplace:

1. Corporate Social Responsibility: Inclusion of marginalised section, especially women with a disability, will add and contribute in real terms towards the goal of social responsibility of corporates.
2. Low attrition: women with disability are quite loyal workers; they won't prefer switching company often and a big edge in high attrition sectors like hospitality.
3. Productivity Edge: Persons with disability are highly intellectual and are less distracted,

III. DISCUSSION:

the findings of this paper reveal that disabled women in India face unique challenges in both public and private sector workplaces. While the legal framework in India aims to protect the rights of disabled people, including in employment, the real-world application of these laws is often lacking. A key issue highlighted by the research is the persistence of physical accessibility barriers. Many workplaces, both in government and private companies, still lack basic accommodations like ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms. This makes it extremely difficult for disabled women to navigate their work environments and perform their jobs effectively. Another significant problem is the prevalence of negative attitudes and discrimination. Even when disabled women are able to secure employment, they often face unfair treatment from coworkers and supervisors. Some employers still hold the mistaken belief that disabled women are less capable or productive. This results in limited job opportunities, slower career advancement, and unequal pay. The study also found that while government jobs tend to offer more legal protections and job security for disabled women, they frequently

restrict them to lower-level, less prestigious positions. Private sector jobs may provide more diverse work options, but they lack consistent support and accommodations. Underlying these challenges are deeper societal attitudes toward disability, especially when combined with gender. Disabled women in India often face double discrimination - first for their disability, and then for being a woman. This can make it incredibly difficult for them to gain the education, training, and confidence needed to thrive in the workplace. To truly improve the situation, a multipronged approach is needed. This should include stricter enforcement of existing disability rights laws, better incentives for companies to create truly inclusive workplaces, and widespread awareness campaigns to change societal perceptions. Increased government funding for accessibility improvements and more targeted skill development programs for disabled women could also make a significant difference. Additionally, regular audits of both public and private workplaces, along with mentorship initiatives to support the career growth of disabled women, could help address the systemic issues they face. By addressing both the physical and attitudinal barriers, India can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive work environment for this marginalized group.

Based on the findings and discussion presented in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the situation for disabled women in the Indian workplace:

Pathways to Enhance Disability Inclusion

Based on the findings and discussion presented in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the situation for disabled women in the Indian workplace:

- Adopting cost-effective solutions for including women with disabilities in the workplace is crucial to encouraging greater uptake and implementation by the private sector. Collaborating with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and NGOs to access talent pools and training programmes can help reduce recruitment costs. For instance, *Mirakle Couriers* recruits hearing-impaired individuals through NGO collaborations, leveraging their strong memory and map-reading skills.

Additionally, digital solutions like virtual interviews and remote work lower operational costs, while public-private partnerships and government incentives. For instance, Tamil Nadu's MSME Department offers a seed fund for startups led by transpersons and persons with disabilities, along with payroll subsidies for SMEs employing over 25% of their workforce from this group.

- Accessibility is the cornerstone of an inclusive workplace. Yet less than 25% of Indian workplaces provide accessible infrastructure such as ramps, adapted restrooms, or assistive technologies. Notably, 17% of workplaces provide no accommodation at all. Digital accessibility, including user-friendly websites and software, is equally crucial to productivity and engagement. For instance, *SAP Labs India* recently implemented accessibility audits and introduced evacuation chairs and braille signage. Long-term partnerships with startups developing affordable assistive technologies can also drive innovation and inclusiveness.
- Cultivating an inclusive workplace culture is key. A culture shift is needed to eliminate biases and stereotypes about the capabilities of women with disabilities. This involves educating employees and management through workshops on disability etiquette and reasonable accommodation and celebrating success stories that highlight the value of diversity. For instance, *Lemon Tree Hotels* employs individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities in client-facing roles, effectively debunking myths about their employability. Continuous training programmes and senior management commitment are critical for embedding inclusion into workplace culture.
- Leveraging tax incentives and awareness campaigns help promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Tax incentives, such as Bangladesh's rebate model which offers rebates of up to 75% of salaries paid or 5% of tax payable for employers hiring at least 10% workforce of persons with disabilities and non-binary community, can inspire Indian SMEs to adopt inclusive practices. Additionally, raising awareness about the RPwD Act and building employer capacity can encourage the adoption of policies that promote equity. Skills training programmes can also empower persons with disabilities, equipping them with the qualifications needed to thrive in corporate roles.
- Stricter Enforcement of Existing Laws The government should ensure more rigorous implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and other relevant legislation, especially in the private sector. Regular audits and inspections of both— public and private workplaces should be conducted to identify and address accessibility and discrimination issues.
- Awareness Campaigns and Sensitization Nationwide public awareness campaigns should be launched to challenge negative societal attitudes and stereotypes about disabled women and their capabilities.

Sensitization training should be provided to employers, HR personnel, and coworkers to foster a more inclusive and respectful work culture.

IV. CONCLUSION:

This paper has examined the unique challenges faced by disabled women in both public and private sector workplaces in India. The findings reveal that it is critical for employers to make an extra effort, not only to employ women with disability but also to ensure that their workplaces are both inclusive and enabling. Even though the law provides for various mechanism and policies for inclusion of Persons with disability in the workforce and for the prohibition of discrimination but, still there exist many loopholes which are acting as a barrier in smooth and effective implementation of the law, thereby failing its objective and the plight of the persons with a disability still continues. Therefore, the Government should focus on bringing more clarity & wider policy into action. There is a need for a strict monitoring mechanism from the side of the Government. The Government should also encourage smaller organisation with financial & training support to increase inclusion.

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