
A Systematic Review of the Literature on Societal Attitude towards Inclusive Education in North-East India

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Abstract: Disability is a societal issue. Societal attitude often stands as a determining factor which determines the extent to which the physical, emotional and societal needs of a person with disability is met. Education of disabled children is one of the areas which have been largely impacted by the societal attitude. Therefore the concept of inclusive education emerged. According to UNICEF's Report, on the Status of Disability in India (2000) states that there are around 30 million children in India suffering from some kinds of disability. Besides the Sixth All-India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998) reports, that out of India's 200 million school-aged children (6-14 years), 20 million require special needs education. While the national average for gross enrolment in school is over 90 per cent, less than five per cent of children with disabilities are in schools. Therefore, certainly the idea of inclusive education is highly relevant in North-east India, where differences in ability are seen as a threat, rather than a source of richness and diversity. Further there is lacuna of research about the impact of societal attitude on inclusive education in North-east India. Therefore, the objectives of the study are to review the extent of implementation of inclusive education in North-East India and to identify how societal attitude act as a barrier in implementation of inclusive education. Further, this paper also suggests how social work as profession can change societal attitude to strengthen the process of inclusive education. The ontological framework on which the study is based is that social construct normalizes the exclusion faced by children with disability in education. The epistemological assumption is that the relationship between societal attitude and inclusive education can be understood by in- depth review of secondary literature. The logic of procedure as emanating from the theoretical framework is predominantly deductive. Further, the study design includes systematic review and synthesis of related literature. The paper is divided into eight sections namely, introduction, rationale of the study, objectives of the study, methodology, literature review, critical analysis of literature review, suggestion and conclusion.

Key words: Societal attitude, Disability, Inclusive education, Discrimination, North-east India

1. INTRODUCTION:

Disability is a broader concept of life which is influenced by socio-economic aspects. It has been outlined that prejudiced attitudes and stereotypical beliefs toward people with disabilities impact their societal inclusion despite legislation promoting equal rights (Sharma & Anna, 2017). Education is the most powerful weapon to change the structure of society changing inequality which is capable of bridging various social gaps. The educational system in the country has undergone major changes over the years, resulting in better provision of education and better educational practices. The inclusion of children with special needs in educational settings has become a primary service option since the adoption of the UNESCO's Salamanca statement and framework for action of special needs education, 1994 (cited in Lakshmi 2018). Inclusive Education (IE) means that all children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit (Mrunalini&Vijayan, 2014). Thus, inclusive education is about presence, participation and achievement of all learners (Lakshmi 2018). The efforts of the Government of India over the last five decades have been to provide a wide range of services for the education of disabled children. In 1974, the centrally sponsored scheme for Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was introduced to provide equal opportunities to children with disabilities in general schools and to facilitate their retention. In fact, the government initiatives in the area of inclusive education can be traced back to National Educational Policy, 1986, which recommended, as a goal, 'to integrate the handicapped with the general community at all levels as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence'. "The World Declaration on Education for All" adopted in 1990 gave further boost to the various processes already set in the country. Moreover, the Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 initiated a training programme for the development of professionals to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. Besides, the National Policy for Persons with Disability, 2006, which attempts to clarify the framework under which the state, civil society and private sector must operate in order to ensure a dignified life for persons with disability and support for their caretakers. Most recent advancement in this aspect is the "Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education" (2009) which guarantees right to free and compulsory education to all children between ages six to fourteen. By taking into account, Govt. of India had accelerated the new scheme of Inclusive Education to achieve the target of Education for All (EFA) by 2010. Despite notable progress in governmental policies that point towards efforts of inclusion in mainstream education in India, the current statistics and literature however points to a completely different situation on the ground. Various stakeholders are having issues with the implementation of their policies (Mrunalini&Vijayan, 2014). Studies reported that negative societal attitude is one of the greatest barriers in implementing inclusive education in India. Thus, in this scenario, it is necessary to study the impact of societal attitude on inclusive education.

2. RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

Present generation realises the importance of integrating disabled children in regular school. But at present there are few schools which actually inculcate inclusive education. Various literature have pointed out that societal attitude plays a major role in inclusive education. Due to negative societal attitude, differences in ability are seen as a threat rather than a source of richness and diversity. There are number of studies conducted on inclusive education but there is dearth of literature on impact of societal attitude on inclusive education in north-east India. The literature review also highlighted the lacuna of research about the extent of awareness and barriers in implementation of inclusive education in North-east India.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To review the extent of implementation of inclusive education in North-east India.
- To identify how societal attitude act as a barrier in implementation of inclusive education.
- To suggest how social work as profession can strengthen the process of inclusive education.

4. METHODOLOGY

Theoretical framework and logic of procedure

The ontological framework on which the study is based is that the social constructs normalises the exclusion faced by children with disability. Societal attitude largely determines the extent to which the needs of a disabled person are met. It plays a major hindrance on the way of inclusive education of disabled children.

The epistemological assumption is that the relationship between societal attitude and social exclusion of disabled children can be understood by in-depth literature review of secondary literature and studies undertaken on challenges faced by disabled children due to societal attitude.

The logic of procedure of the study as emanating out of the theoretical framework was predominantly deductive as the aim of the study was to develop an understanding of how societal attitude influences the children with disability hindering their development.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework has been derived from the literature review and it depicts the line of enquiry of this study. The framework helps to understand how societal attitude impacts inclusive educations in school. Children with disability face various hindrances which prevent them from attending regular school. The negative perception of society towards disable children makes them doubt their abilities restricting their overall development. Societal attitude is the building stone of social behaviour. Therefore, prejudiced social behaviour acts as a barrier to inclusive education. Thus, there is a need to recognise and accept the differences to promote inclusive education. Emphasis are mostly given on establishing separate schools for children with disability but there is a need to inculcate the culture of inclusive education so that disabled children develop a sense of belongingness and for the development of inclusive society.

Study design

The study design includes systematic review and synthesis of related literature. The research

study was carried out on the light of availability and feasibility of secondary literature. Various thesis, journal articles, online articles, and reports have been used to collect secondary data

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Disability: The term 'disability' means a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities. However, there is no definitive list of conditions that constitute a disability. Different definitions are used in different contexts- for instance to set eligibility criteria for particular services, or to outlaw discrimination on grounds of disability. World Health Organisations (WHO) defines disabilities as an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) defines disability as, "a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities".

People with disabilities form a significant part of the world population. The exact numbers are hard to discern due to suspected under reporting and differences in the definition of disability between countries, and cultures. India has some 40 to 80 million persons with disability. But low literacy, few jobs and widespread stigma are making disabled people among the most excluded in India. Children with disabilities are less likely to be in school, disabled adults are more likely to be unemployed, and families with a disabled member are often worse off than average (Shivaprasad, 2008).

2. Forms of disability

According to Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill (2006), there are twenty one types of disability. They are blindness, low vision, leprosy, hearing impairment, locomotors disability, dwarfism, intellectual disability, mental illness, autism, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, chronic neurological condition, specific learning disability, multiple sclerosis, speech and language disability, thalassemia, haemophilia, sickle cell diseases, multiple disabilities, acid attack survivors and Parkinson's disease. However, disability as a term itself denotes the stigma attached to it.

3. Stigma and social Construction of disability

Disability is a social construct with its root in societal attitude. Goffman (1963) developed the idea further with his use of the concept 'stigma' a term, he claimed, used traditionally to refer to a mark or imperfection denoting 'moral inferiority' obliging avoidance by the rest of society. He suggested that the 'stigmatised' such as 'the dwarf, the blind man, the disfigured, or mental patient' are generally viewed as not quite human. For Goffman, the application of stigma is the consequence of situational considerations and social relations between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal'. Societal attitude reflects the value system that stigmatise disability as being different and objectionable. Continued stigmatisation of disabled generates values which decree the disabled to be different perpetuating negative attitude. The person with disability is impaired by the behaviours and standard created by the society. The bodies of persons with disability are subject to the standards of society that makes them less than desirable and inferior to those considered to be the embodiment of normality. Thus, disability is defined as a consequence of a biological disability or the result of socially constructed form of disadvantage (Edward & Imrie, 2003). Disability is closely associated with social stigma because the condition of disability is considered as undesired differentness from socially defined norms of



normality. Discrimination against disability is due to the thoughtlessness

and indifferences of the society. The disadvantages faced by a disabled person are mainly due to the prejudice, ignorance, neglect and sheer thoughtlessness of society (Singh, 2003). The stigma is due to the societal attitude which influences inclusive education.

4. Societal attitude and inclusive education

Inclusive education means all children regardless of their ability level are included in the mainstream classroom or in the most appropriate or less restrictive environment where students of all ability levels are taught as equal and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all student benefit (UNESCO, 2012). Societal attitude is one of the factors that hinders inclusive education and promotes social exclusion. Societal attitude refers to the dispositions to view things in a certain way and to act accordingly. Social conduct is determined directly by the construct of social system (Cohen, 1966). Schools are one of the primary institutes which impact a child's socialisation. Spillers (1982) conducted a study to investigate third grade children's attitude towards physically disabled peers. He stated that children tend to do things that are socially preferred or expected even though those behaviour may not be what they honestly want to do. Social constructs define whether an able bodied child will accept or reject a disabled child. They often tend to make socially preferred responses. Disabled children often have to face discrimination and unequal opportunities in matter of education. Societal barriers severely restrict disabled people's personal resources and community engagement. People with disabilities remain at risk of being discriminated against in many important life domains. Research in a variety of countries and communities suggest that disabled people are less educated compared to non-disabled peers. They receive lesser education compared to non-disabled children (Neufeldt, 1995). As per the Census report 2011 and RMSA, Ministry of Human resource report, there are 53,480 children with disability of the age group 5-9 years and 1, 19,066 children within the age group of 10-19 years in North-east India. But only 8234 children with disability are enrolled in 2155 number of schools for inclusive education in NE India by 2013-14.

Mangain R. conducted her research on "In service school teachers attitude and self- efficacy towards inclusion of children with disabilities" in 2017. She aimed to study the nature of attitude, level of self-efficacy of the teachers appointed to teach in government elementary schools of Gwalior district in Madhya Pradesh. She had adopted a descriptive research methodology. She had selected 143 government primary school and 56 government middle schools. The findings of her research state that most of the schools do not have facilities to inculcate inclusive education and teachers share negative attitude towards including disabled children in regular school. Due to societal attitude towards disability, teachers are not keen on inclusive education. They consider it to be an additional burden to teach disabled children in regular school.

Bindal, S. and Sharma, S. (2010) in their article on 'Inclusive Education in Indian context' described the problem of general education system which yet needs to be sensitized to the educational needs of children with disabilities and therefore, the general system needs the assistance of specialist teacher for occasional help to make inclusive education work. Schools are being challenged to avoid traditional labels attached to specific groups (such as learning disabled, slow learner).

Kaul, P (2015), in her study on "A study of Status of Inclusion of Children with Special Needs at the Elementary School Level" have stated that disabled children often faces lack of



encouragement from teachers. There is a disinterested attitude of teachers towards

disabled children. Further, they also face discrimination from their peers who treat them differently.

5. Social work as profession on disability

According to Australian Association of Social workers (AASW) 2016, Social work emphasise on the principles of social justice and respect for human dignity and human rights. In their commitment to human rights, social workers prioritise a holistic understanding of the person, seeing their impairment as only one aspect of what makes them who they are. Socialworker as professionals focuses on individual, family, carer and community strengths and needs, and work collaboratively to support people with disability to achieve the lives theywant. They work alongside people with disability to advocate for their rights, and facilitate their empowerment (and that of their families) and achieve their needs and aspirations. Socialworkers who practice in the area of macro social work concentrate their work towards removing barriers to social development, social justice, and equality. Since people with disabilities face monumental barriers in obtaining employment, education, housing, and income, they form a large minority group that experiences perhaps the highest level of discrimination in society. Social workers who practice on the macro level of practice in intellectual disabilities work with social policy and advocacy programs to ensure individual rights and mainstreaming in society (Dejong& Batavia, 1990)

6. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Disability is a social construct. Society puts a limitation to what a person with disability can and cannot do. Various studies stated that a large population of our country are disabled in one form or the other according to various definitions and criterions stated. Over the years various state and non-state actors has implemented various laws, schemes and acts to benefit the disabled. However, due to lack of proper implementation and monitoring, these efforts could not fulfil the needs of the disabled. One of the important factors which play a major role in social exclusion of the disabled is societal attitude. Society treats disability as a disease. Due to their traditional prejudices or ignorance, society tends to exclude and discriminate people with disability. Right from birth, a disable child is socially excluded and discriminated by society who doubts his capabilities. At present government has made various efforts for inclusive education but the actual reality is far from the picture visualised by the state. Inclusion must happen at three level: physical inclusion so that schools become disable friendly, social inclusion which will promote full participation of children with disability in social activities and lastly cognitive inclusion where participation of disabled children are encouraged in teaching learning activities. But, despite inclusive education being implemented few schools have the disable friendly infrastructure. Moreover, the teachers or peer groups often lacks the mind-set to make the disabled children a part of regular school. Disabled children are treated as a burden because they requires additional effort of which teachers are not trained with or are unwilling due to the influence of societal attitude. Further, disabled children have to face challenge to get acceptance from their peer groups. They often have to be the victims of teasing and bullying by their non-disabled peers. Children with disabilities are

also considered to be a 'disturbance' to the class and as causing distractions which delay course completion. Thus it can be said that society disables a person and not disability itself. Often perception of people are coloured by the societal belief which treats disability as a burden. Thus disabled becomes the easy victims of discrimination and social exclusion. In this scenario, social work as profession can play a major role in changing societal attitude to inculcate inclusive education.

7. SOCIAL WORK AS PROFESSION IN CHANGING SOCIETAL ATTITUDE TO INCULCATE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Social work as profession seeks to promote social justice, social change and development. As professionals, social worker can help disabled people live a full and productive life. But for doing so, they need to change the societal attitude of people towards disability. Social worker can work at the community level to spread awareness about disability. Social worker can inculcate the principles of acceptance and inclusion so that society does not treat them as a burden and judge them by their inabilities. People with disability do not need sympathy but they need acceptance. To inculcate inclusive education social worker needs to develop an inclusive environment in society in general and schools in particular. Social worker can conduct campaign in schools to spread awareness and sensitisation about disability. Social worker can work with the teachers, children (abled and disabled) and parents of abled as well as disabled to incorporate a socially inclusive environment. Social worker can work at the individual level by providing counselling, making them aware of their rights and facilities available for them so that they can be independent and empowered. Social worker can identify the traces of discrimination or violence faced by disabled children at school and can address them through various social work interventions like case work, counselling, behaviour modification therapy, etc. Most of the time, parents also fear to send their disabled children to regular school due to fear of them being discriminated and abused or doubting their children's ability to cope. Therefore, such parents can be counselled and oriented by providing them information of the services and by helping them collaborate with the schools to assure the safety and well-being of the children. To inculcate inclusive education, an inclusive environment must be created which requires the joint effort by teachers, children as well as parents. The negative attitude towards disability must be eliminated to make disabled children feel accepted and part of society. Social worker can also ensure more teachers' training to promote inclusive education so that disabled children can also be a part of regular children and abled children also do not face any hindrances due to the disabled children. Social worker can help in developing the course work and methods of teaching in accordance to the well-being and development of all children.

8. CONCLUSION

Disability is a social issue, since society judge a person with disability by their inability to do certain things. Therefore to inculcate an inclusive environment, inclusive education is necessary. But due to societal attitude a large number of disabled children are deprived of education. Government has implanted various acts and schemes to promote inclusive education but still a large number of children are deprived of education in regular school due to lack of disabled friendly infrastructure as well as discriminatory attitude. Therefore to bring

about inclusive education an inclusive environment needs to be created where disabled children are not judged, discriminated and excluded. Social work as professionals can work at individual, group as well as community level to create an inclusive environment and remove the negative societal attitude to promote a socially inclusive environment where individual differences are respected and accepted.

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