Evaluating Persons with Disabilities about Awareness of their Rights as Citizens of Pakistan: A Survey with Reference to ICT Rights of PWD’s Act 2020

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Awareness of human rights are significant in the safety of the citizen of a country. While the government has set up detailed rights for people with disabilities, due to the lack of awareness many people with disabilities in Pakistan are not able to access educational, vocational or employment facilities. The purpose of this study was to evaluate people with disabilities’ awareness of their rights as citizens of Pakistan.

Methodology: The study was quantitative in nature. To collect and evaluate data, the researcher designed a questionnaire of twenty-four statements. The variance was calculated to evaluate awareness based on the age, gender, employment status and disability of the participants.

Findings: Major findings of the study revealed that participants of age twenty-seven and above and who were employed, were aware of most of the mentioned rights, while participants who were below age twenty-seven or students, were unaware or partially aware of most of the mentioned rights.

Implications: Seminars and webinars should be conducted to the awareness of the rights of people with different abilities in educational institutions for people with disabilities, for parents of children with disabilities as well as for the common public so, that people with different abilities feel included and safe in society.

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Introduction

According to the latest studies, done in 2020, the total population is 220.09 million and 3.41% population of Pakistan is suffering from mild to severe disabilities (Pakistan Social & Living Standard Measurement, 2020). This ratio includes people from both rural and urban areas. But this isn’t just the ratio of people who have disabilities, this is the ratio of people for whom there are rights but those rights are only on the people. People with disabilities in Pakistan are a minority that is being and for whom close to no services are provided by the government.
According to Pakistan Social & Living Standard Measurement powered by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) in 2019-20, 10.69% of the population is living with “functional limitations.” It is observed from data that 10.69 per cent population of 5 years of age and above are suffering from functional limitations or at least one disability (PSLM District Level, PBS, 2019-20). Murray and Nadel define functional limitation as “the restriction or lack of ability to perform an action or activity in the manner or within the range considered normal that results from impairment” (Murray & Nadel, 2016). This means that 10.69 per cent of the population of Pakistan is not able to perform day-to-day activities due to impairments.

Oliver (1996) presented a definition of a person with disabilities which contains three elements. These three elements include the ‘experience of externally imposed restrictions, the presence of an impairment and ‘self-identification as a disabled person. He believed that a person identifies himself as disabled when he faces limitations in society. If we presented our society as free of barriers and easy to access, people with disabilities shall not feel excluded.

Persons with disabilities do not have access to public places, buildings, transportation, education, employment and safety in their society because of their impairment. Research has shown that the overall level of access to public transportation has been poor for people with physical disabilities (Ahmad, M. 2015). Poor environmental conditions such as inaccessible facilities at, unfriendly vehicles, the behaviour of transportation staff, and travel safety and security threats made access to routes difficult and sometimes nearly impossible in Punjab. The findings indicated that it would be impossible to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in local transport. In developing societies like Pakistan, not having a clear understanding of the transport-accessibility challenges at transport-planning levels and adopting equities in practice creates a lot of issues in the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities (Ahmad, M. 2015).

In such a situation, it becomes the government's responsibility to make sure that every citizen has access to all facilities in the country. Because it is every person’s right to have the freedom to access their facilities as a citizen. But the reason for their inaccessibility is not that there are no rights established by the government of Pakistan. It is contrary to that because, in 2020, the government of Pakistan passed a bill called The Islamabad Capital Territory Rights of Persons with Disability Act 2020 for the rights of persons with disabilities.

The bill although passed yet its implementation has been overlooked. Public places and buildings, such as banks still do not have disabled-friendly access, neither ramps nor availability of braille-translated instructions and labels are available in the buildings. The person with physical disabilities, as well as visual impairments, finds barriers in the built environment, healthcare delivery processes, and the ceiling of health subsidies (Ahmad, M. (2013). Though it is difficult to say what could be the possible reason for this negligence one of the many reasons for the lack of implementation and awareness could be due to the negligence of the local representatives of the country who, sadly, are elected by none other than us.

It has been studied that fewer than half of the elected local representatives in Pakistan have an accurate knowledge of certain types of disability and their conceivable causes (Ahmad, M., & Ahmad, M. M., 2011). Only 16% of the politicians or public representatives had some knowledge of the special needs specific to a certain disability that are necessary to be added to the delivery of service and local development plans. This raises the question of whether they deserve and should be public representatives or not. Because as stated in the public policy on disability, district governments are primarily accountable to keep a strict check on the inception of disability and counselling required to the special needs at district level (Government of Pakistan, 2006).

Mehtab & Makbol (2011) further explained that some of the public representatives who had inadequate awareness of the matter had a view that disability might be a ‘personal matter’ of a family hence families...
may feel disinclined to share the discreet issues of the disabled members of their family publicly. In policies presented for persons with disabilities, it is the obligation of local governments to enforce policies of disabled persons to exclaim rights of disabled at the local level. However, only 16% of the total respondents had awareness regarding a few rights and laws for PWDs. Meanwhile, just 9.7% had clarity of a few laws and rights, whereas rest of the respondents has neither clarity nor awareness (Ahmad, M., & Ahmad, M. M., 2011).

Despite the district government being solely responsible to indorse and protect the rights of various segments at the local level, only 4 out of the 31 participants acknowledged themselves as accountable for promoting disability rights (Government of Pakistan 2006). Approximately 60% of the participants had no idea regarding the local offices in charge of implementing the rights of persons with disabilities. The respondents with some understandings of the matter were officials of social welfare who execute disability certificates on appeal, and provide charity based inclusive aid to those in need (Ahmad, M., & Ahmad, M. M., 2011).

This behaviour of the society leaves the disabled population confused, neglected, excluded and unaware of their rights as citizens of Pakistan. To know one’s rights as a citizen it is important to realize one’s importance as a society member. The reaction of society changes when society members and minorities speak up about their rights and leaves no choice to the stakeholders. J. Abascal & C. Nicolle (2005) explain this phenomenon as a social revolution that has advanced as a result of the combat against social exclusion ever since disabled people became conscious of their rights and needs. In their study regarding the advancement towards inclusive design, they explained that the advancement towards technology in education cannot be ignored as people with hearing impairment are now more aware of its importance in their lives.

It is revealed that the choice of a person’s social role and position in the system of social relations is based on an understanding of their goals in life. It implies that the active inclusion of the person in the system of social relations is understood under self-actualization (Lunev et al., 2014). It was further explained that the process of self-realization is structured by a dialectical unity of desire to participate in the social community and the longing for individuality, and allocation out of this community as an individual itself (Lunev et al., 2014). Hence, it proves that the awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities by themselves is important to bring change in the attitudes of the government and structural and moral development of society. It plays a major role in people with disabilities getting their rights and being equal members of this society.

In this study, we will be evaluating Persons with Disabilities' awareness of their rights as citizens of Pakistan in light of the PWD Act 2020. This act was first presented before the Standing Committee on Human Rights on April 24 in 2019. The bill was composed by the Minister of Human Rights Dr Shireen Mazari. However, the original draft needed certain amendments because due to the lack of inclusions.

This bill is called The Islamabad Capital Territory Rights of Persons with Disability Act. This bill enlists the rights of persons with disabilities regarding non-discrimination, equity before the law, right to ease of access and mobility, privacy, protection from abuse, violence and intolerant discriminatory behaviour, equity in education and employment, equity in health and medical rehabilitation services, right to live independently in the community, right to home and family, freedom of expression, right to political participation, right to justice, own property, participation in sports, cultural and recreational activities and Protection of persons with disabilities in risk and disaster situation.

Objectives of the Study
The purpose of this study is to evaluate if Persons with disabilities are aware of their rights as citizens of Pakistan or not. The purpose of this study was also to shed light on the importance of the self-realization of the awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities.
Methodology
The study was quantitative. A survey method of research was used to design the study. The population included the disabled population of Pakistan from age nineteen and above. The sample of the study was chosen through snowball and convenient sampling and was composed of fifty people with disabilities of age 18 and above from Lahore.

The data was gathered from the sample through a close-ended questionnaire which was composed of 6 sections. The first section of the questionnaire was composed of the demographic of the participant, and five general statements which evaluated the current awareness level of the rights of persons with disabilities. The second section was composed of three statements to assess the rights related to Protection from abuse, violence and intolerant discriminatory behavior. The third section evaluated the awareness of the rights of equity in education and included four statements. The fourth section evaluated the awareness of rights of equity in employment through four statements. The fifth section evaluated awareness of the rights of Equity in health and medical rehabilitation services through six statements. The last and sixth sections of the questionnaire evaluated the rights to Participation in sports, cultural and recreational activities and were composed of five statements. The data were analyzed by calculating frequencies and the relationship between awareness and age, gender and disability was found by applying the t-test using SPSS software.

Procedure Opted for Data Collection
The first step was to pilot test the instrument design by the researcher. After pilot testing the questionnaire a soft version of the questionnaire was created using google forms and was sent to the required sampling group through social media and WhatsApp. As the sample was collected through convenient and snowball sampling, most of the data were collected through online means. Interviews with participants were also conducted to find out about their experiences and observations regarding the practice of rights of persons with disabilities in Pakistan. Data was collected from forty persons with disabilities. The return rate of the questionnaire was 100%.

Findings
The results are presented in the form of tables and interpretations below:
Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Of the Participants</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of participants</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability of the participants</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Impairment</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Impairment</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work status of the Participants</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that 43.6% of participants were below the age of thirty and 56.4% were above thirty. According to table 2, the percentage of male participants was 64.1% and female participants were only 35.9%. It was also calculated that the percentage of participants with physical impairments was 43.6, the percentage of participants with visual impairments was 33.3, the percentage of hearing-impaired participants was 20.5% and people with IDD were only 2.6%. Lastly, the work status of the participants showed that 67% of the participants were employed, 21% of participants were students and 13% of the participants were unemployed.

**Discussion**

It was observed that the number of participants who were employed was mostly aware of their Employment, Educational, and Health rights. While most of them were unaware of their rights in case of abuse or violence and rights related to sports and cultural activities.

Participants who were unemployed or were students were aware of their educational rights but were only partially aware of their health, and employment rights and mostly unaware of their rights in case of abuse, health issues and sports and cultural activities.

While being interviewed for the research respondents agreed that they got to know most of their rights after or during their graduation and they and their peers were mostly unaware of their rights as PWDs in Pakistan till higher education and employment. It was recorded, during the interviews that uneducated, unemployed or people with only primary to secondary education were still unaware of their rights as PWDs in Pakistan.

During the interviews, the respondents gave common reviews regarding the implementation of rights which was that most of the mentioned services promised by the government in the ICT Rights of PWD’s Act 2020 with regards to education, employment and health services are being practised in Pakistan in public sectors, while the private sectors still need improvements. However, the legal services as well as the services mentioned regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities in cultural, sports and entertainment activities are not completely in practice. For example, accessibility to buildings such as theatres, cinemas, stadiums and other such public places of entertainment is not available. Shopping malls do have ramps but the number of wheelchairs is either less than five or none at all. Bathrooms and food courts are not disabled friendly and braille-translated, embossed directions in malls are not available.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been made based on the findings:

1. Seminars should be conducted on awareness of the rights of PWDS to make sure that people with disabilities, their families and peers are aware of their rights and how to practice them.
2. The special educational institutions and general education institutions of Pakistan, whether government or private, should organize workshops and awareness seminars for students as well as parents regarding the awareness of the rights of PWDs. These can be conducted on world disability day, blind person day etc.
3. The government needs to keep check in the private sector whether places of entertainment, such as
shopping malls etc. are accessible for people with disabilities.

4. In similar future research, disabled people of low economic status, education, and rural areas should be included and evaluated. As this research was not just for evaluation but awareness as well.

5. Common public, influencers, celebrities, politicians and other influential figures need to be more aware of the rights of people with disabilities and should talk about this on TV social media etc.

**Conclusion**

The govt of Pakistan has given many rights to people with disabilities “on paper.” While most of the services mentioned in the ICT Rights of PWDs Act 2022 are in practice in public educational, work and medical sectors, these however are not being practised in private sectors. Because the problem lies, not in the availability of resources, but in the awareness of the common public and people with disabilities. Due to most of PWDs being unaware of their rights, they cannot protest for being discriminated against, excluded and treated unfairly. Most of the people with disabilities, as mentioned by many respondents, have “accepted their situation” of inaccessibility. I request all public and private organizations striving to provide a better life for PWDs to not ignore this trivial yet significant matter and work on the awareness of the rights of PWDs in Pakistan among the disabled as well as the common public.

**References**


Ahmad, M. (2013). Health care access and barriers for the physically disabled in rural Punjab, Pakistan. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*
