



African Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences



Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Research Paper

Open Access

Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities in India Through the Rights of Education

Nguyen Thi Thanh Nhan¹  and Mohan S. Singhe² 

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Post Graduate Studies and Research in Social Work, Mangalore University, Mangalagangothri, Konaje, 574199, India. E-mail: thanhnhansocialwork01@gmail.com

²Associate Professor & Chairman, Department of Post Graduate Studies and Research in Social Work, Mangalore University, Mangalagangothri, Konaje, 574199, India. E-mail: drmohansinghe@gmail.com

Article Info

Volume 4, Issue 2, August 2024

Received : 27 January 2024

Accepted : 06 June 2024

Published: 05 August 2024

doi: [10.51483/AFJHSS.4.2.2024.31-41](https://doi.org/10.51483/AFJHSS.4.2.2024.31-41)

Abstract

Education is the key to developing and strengthening women and girls with disabilities (WGWDs) to effectively and efficiently function in every aspect of life. Like some other developing countries, India is home to many WGWDs who face various challenges in accessing educational opportunities. This research paper aims to identify how to empower WGWDs in India to approach their opportunities in education. In addition, two main research questions are given: how WGWDs are marginalized regarding their educational rights and which Social Work (SW) Interventions are needed to address this issue. To accomplish the study's objectives, the authors conducted data collection, analysis, and interpretation through a desk review of previous findings from articles, books, and other official sources. The article's theoretical framework is based on the term intersectionality, in which multiple hurdles have led to discrimination against the education of WGWDs in India. This paper also intends to illustrate other critical factors associated with the accessibility of education for WGWDs. Additionally, the present study aspires to find the relationship between SW practices and their role in strengthening WGWDs to engage in their educational rights. This research paper also highlights the role and functions of Social Workers in meeting the educational needs and upholding the rights of WGWDs. Last but not least, the author proposes applying three models of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), including the Social Model, Identity Model, and Rights-based Model, to recapture and enhance the educational rights of WGWDs in India.

Keywords: Empowerment, Women and girls with disabilities (WGWDs), Educational rights, Discrimination, Accessibility

© 2024 Nguyen Thi Thanh Nhan and Mohan S. Singhe. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

1. Introduction

A disability is any physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that restricts, hinders, or interferes

* Corresponding author: Nguyen Thi Thanh Nhan, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Post Graduate Studies and Research in Social Work, Mangalore University, Mangalagangothri, Konaje, 574199, India. E-mail: thanhnhansocialwork01@gmail.com

2789-3413/© 2024. Nguyen Thi Thanh Nhan and Mohan S. Singhe. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

with an individual's capacity to perform specific tasks or activities or participate in day-to-day activities and relationships. A person may be weakened for various causes, complicating their life and rendering them powerless. Additionally, there are numerous ways to empower people with disabilities. One crucial tool for the effective development and strengthening of disabled people, especially WGWDs, is education.

The empowerment of people with PWDs, particularly women with disabilities, should, therefore, be a primary priority for every country. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011), one in five women has disabilities or handicaps. Additionally, Ortoleva and Lewis (2012) note that one billion PWDs include WGWDs; nevertheless, this statistic is not officially recognized.

In less developed countries, a lack of resources and efficient policies, poverty, and cultural factors limit their access to fundamental rights, including the right to education. The World Bank (2009, as cited in [Women Enabled International, 2021](#)) confirms that only 25% of worldwide WWDs are employed. This statistic suggests that inadequate levels of schooling have a lasting impact on disabled females.

Therefore, the present article focuses on how to empower the WGWDs through education. In light of both gender inequity and disability, WGWDs from India, like those in many other developing countries with male-dominated societies, were facing discrimination and disparities. Consequently, several barriers hinder WGWDs from accessing educational opportunities, which will be thoroughly examined and depicted in the present work.

Based on data from the Indian Census (2011, as cited in the [Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2021](#)), it is estimated that 26.8 million people have special needs, accounting for approximately 2.21% of the total population. Furthermore, the Census of 2011 highlights that 14.9 million men and 11.9 million women, or 2.41% of the population, respectively, are disabled. Due to the male-dominated culture, WGWDs are more likely to be illiterate and drop out of schools compared to others, especially non-disabled individuals and males with disabilities. The 2011 Census also reveals that there are more illiterate WWDs in rural and isolated areas than in other locations.

The present study explores ways and methods to empower WGWDs to assert their educational rights effectively and efficiently. The research aims to draw a comprehensive picture of WGWDs' accessibility to educational rights. The analysis of these data highlights critical issues in Indian society concerning the educational accessibility of WGWDs.

Furthermore, the study aims to pinpoint the covert variables restricting WGWDs' access to educational opportunities. These leading factors are considered through an intersectional lens to analyze the problem's root causes and raise awareness for positive changes in WGWDs' educational rights. In addition, the study is dedicated to determining the correlations between SW intervention and solutions for enhancing educational opportunities for WGWDs in India.

As there are many different models of PWDs, the present work introduces three types of PWDs, namely the Social Model, the Identity Model, and the Rights-based Model, as the positive ways to consider the image and nature of WGWDs. Moreover, the present paper concentrates much more on the third model.

2. Literature Review

To fulfill the objectives of this research, the researchers have reviewed the literature to identify trends, patterns, themes, and pivotal publications. This information is crucial for debating and analyzing conflicts among findings from different official data sources. A vital duty of this study is to address gaps in the research trend on the empowerment of WGWDs in India through educational rights.

In the context of this research, women's empowerment encompasses promoting women's self-worth, autonomy to make decisions, and the right to impact social change for themselves and other women. Various dimensions empower women, such as the economy, society, politics, education, and legislation ([Mahila Housing Trust, 2023](#)). Sharma (2017) studies the social status of females with intellectual illness, emphasizing that a shortage of self-esteem prevents WGWDs from developing and strengthening their capacities to adapt to their circumstances.

Moreover, the feminist perspective is dedicatedly considered by some research scholars. Ghai (2002) notes that one approach to comprehending the multiplicities representing the situations of PWDs in Indian society is through a feminist lens, focusing on various oppressions. In the context of the advancement of WGWDs, some authors target specific impairments in their studies, such as Autism Spectrum Disorders, Locomotor Disabilities, and Intellectual Difficulties.

While several researchers, such as Singal (2006) and Kumari (2020), specify the educational promotion of WGWDs in India, only a few studies focus on introducing, criticizing, and evaluating bills, legislation, and other policies passed by the Indian Government regarding their educational rights. Singal (2006) emphasizes the need for the Government to be more aware of historical, political, and social factors that have marginalized children with disabilities from the education system. Kumari (2020) also assesses hurdles to the educational opportunities and rights of WGWDs stemming from societal and cultural obstacles, physical difficulties, and attitudinal issues.

Some researchers are interested in exploring the potential for higher education for marginalized women in India. According to Halder (2009), WWDs belong to a vibrant and varied community where their educational requirements are not given adequate consideration, leading to discrimination and social stigmatization that affects their higher schooling.

The literature review illustrates that some scholars specifically delve into the significance of empowering WGWDs nationwide. Their significant findings show that nearly all WGWDs experience double discrimination against their fundamental rights, including gender inequality and Disability. As Sharma (2017) states, women generally deal with various obstacles in a male-dominated culture, such as an ineffective approach to education and employment. Additionally, some traditional burdens leave a negative impact on WWDs. However, several scholars, including Monika (2020), make great efforts to provide official information on bills, policies, and legislation documents, encouraging WGWDs, their family members, caregivers, and authorities at different levels to implement them appropriately.

Furthermore, numerous studies intend to explore the significant roots of the lack of accessibility to education for WGWDs and then release critical recommendations for government policies, such as Forber-Pratt and Lyew (2020) and Sharma (2017). These authors specifically investigate and analyze the causes and effects of cultural and social variables on WGWDs' access to their educational rights rather than reiterating the same strategy. The researcher also applies the term 'intersectionality' to understand more about how both perspectives contribute to the double discrimination, including gender biases and disability, affecting the educational accessibility of WGWDs. According to Foster and Sandel (2010), the main emphasis of intersectionality is on multiple dimensions of identity orientation, revealing hidden attitudes and characteristics of big and more prominent groups, such as being White, Black, poor, or any combination of these classifications.

A few studies approach SW practices to promote the quality of schools for children with disabilities, for example, Quadri and Khalid (2019). However, the present study concentrates on finding out the functions of SW for solving the educational accessibilities caused by aspects of Indian customs and society toward WGWDs. In other words, this research introduces and suggests the roles and functions of social workers in breaking down the barriers of traditional and religious effects that limit WGWDs from schooling, serving as communicators, educators, advocates, and more.

Finally, the literature review shows that charity and medical models are popularly applied in identifying and approaching PWDs in some developing countries, including India. Nevertheless, the study also borrows three models of PWDs: the social model, the identity model, and the rights-based model as ultimate solutions to address social stigma and discrimination against the educational rights of WGWDs in India.

3. Analysis and Findings

3.1. Fact of Accessibility of Education for WGWDs

3.1.1. Statistical Findings of Accessibility of Education for WGWDs

Referring to the Census (2011, as cited in the [Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, 2021](#)), 2.68 crore persons were granted disabilities in the total population of 121 crores. Of the PWDs in the country, 44%

were women, and 56% were men. Additionally, the Census 2011 shows that only 61% of disabled children and adolescents between the ages of 5 and 19 attend schools (2011, as cited in the [Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, 2021](#)). Concerning the literacy status by sex in the nation, the Census displays that 55% (1.46 cr) of the total population of PWDs is literate, with WWDs representing 45% and men with disabilities accounting for 62%.

Additionally, as Figure 1 illustrates, 55% of female disabled individuals and 45% of PWDs are illiterate. In addition, just 9% of WGWDs attend secondary or primary schooling, although they still need to graduate, compared to 16% of males with disabilities. Meanwhile, regarding the rate of graduates and above, it makes up 6% for disabled men, which is twice that of WGWDs, 3%. Furthermore, graduates account for 9% and approximately 7.7%, respectively, disabled men literates and disabled women literates.

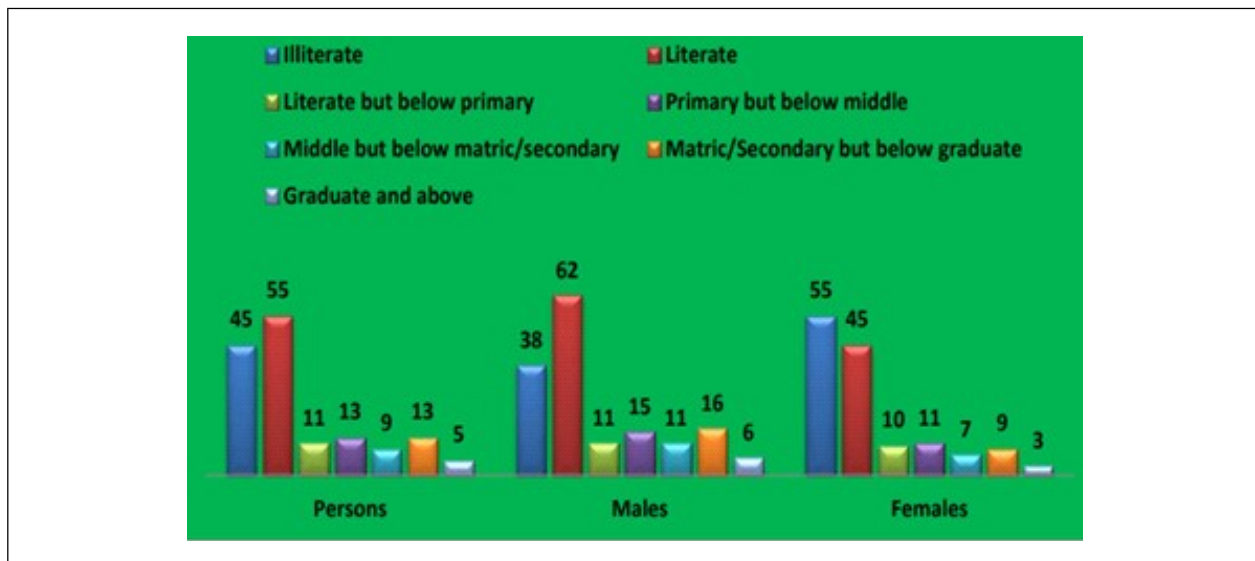


Figure 1: 2011 Indian Census - The Percentage of Disabled People with an Education

Note: The image was created from statistics in Chapter 3 - Dimensions of Disability in India about education status by sex. From “Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in India - A Statistical Profile: 2021,” by the Government of India, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation National Statistical Office, and Social Statistics Division (p.32), 2021.

3.1.2. Stigmatization and Discrimination against the Right of Education of WGWDs

In the Indian educational system, several types of schools for PWDs exist, such as special education, integrated education, and inclusive education. According to Halder (2009), in secondary schools, individuals with disabilities perform worse academically than their peers without impairments. Documents note that WGWDs must cope with numerous difficulties to obtain the right to education. Hadler (2009) also argues that in a nation like India, where it has been challenging to mandate required education for girls without impairments, the circumstances for the challenged are complicated. Like some other countries in the developing world, both males and females with disabilities have to experience discrimination against their educational rights, such as negative attitudes from teachers, staff, and peers in schools, a shortage of reasonable accommodations, and less chance to receive official admission in schools. The present paper concentrates on analyzing and interpreting three fundamental aspects of stigmatization and discrimination against the entitlement to the education of WGWDs, including School Bullying, Lack of chance to receive admission in school settings, and Inaccessibility to reasonable accommodations.

3.1.3. School Bullying

UNESCO (2021) states that in every age and school setting, bullying significantly affects students with disabilities, having adverse impacts on their education, health, and general well-being. Referring to Smith (2018, as cited in Aljabri et al., 2023), a person or group can intentionally, repeatedly, and persistently hurt another person or group, physically or emotionally, by bullying. Nowadays, school bullying happens in almost every educational center and school setting, with various types of verbal bullying, cyberbullying, and psychological bullying. A girl or woman with impairments in a male-dominated society like India is likely to

be bullied and abused more than bodied-able girls and women. WGWDs tend to be physically and mentally used in school settings worse than males with disabilities and other students without disabilities; for example, one participant expressed in one study:

They do not like me because I am not as pretty as other girls like 'Nirisksha' (Another girl in class). All the children had fun and played, but I sat alone in the classroom. If I go with them, they say, "See, football is coming with us," and laugh. So I do not go with them. (Ishita, nine years) – (Das and Kattumuri, 2011, p.33).

The girl's statement above captures the reality of prejudice against WGWDs in both educational settings and institutions as a consequence of their "abnormal" appearances and impairments. They may be teased, isolated, and made fun of by their classmates. Being body-shamed by peers brings a sense of low esteem and low self-respect to female students with handicaps. Bullying and harassment have a significant negative impact on WGWDs' mental health. In other words, they may suffer from anxiety disorders, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, till the end of their lives if they do not get any ultimate interventions needed.

3.1.4. Lack of Chance to Receive Admission in School Settings

Based on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, mainstream schools are responsible for permitting all children with disabilities to obtain admission without discrimination (2016, as cited in [National Human Rights Commission, India, 2021](#)). However, the rate of GWDs' approach to educational rights is lower compared to disabled boys. Kohama (2012, as cited in [Limaya, 2016](#)) considers that in comparison to males with disabilities in the nation, GWDs enroll in school at a lower level in a variety of sectors, including urban versus rural, type of schooling versus degree of education, and elementary versus secondary schooling. In India, where men predominate, many families choose to invest more in their boys' education than in their girls', particularly in the case of "special girls."

3.1.5. Inaccessibility to Reasonable Accommodations

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (2016, as cited in the [National Human Rights Commission, India, 2021](#)) also states that mainstream schools must provide reasonable accommodations per the persons' needs and transportation facilities for students with impairments. Nevertheless, several scholars note that most special schools are far and isolated from the central communities, and students are also afraid of being unsafe to travel on these campuses. For WGWDs, it will be more challenging to manage proper transportation and maximum security in schooling settings. Halder (2009) states that no nearby colleges caused the challenged ladies to drop out, referring to in-person interviews. Even though the school was far away, the parents did their best to get their severely young and challenged daughters there. WGWDs are regarded as a vulnerable group in society that is likely to experience sexual harassment even in school settings. For example, Halder (2009) also interprets that GWDs had fewer possibilities for education owing to the dangers of sexual assault and violence. Reflected by the insufficient data, the corresponding figure experiences more harassment at school than male students with disabilities.

3.1.6. Higher Education and Vocational Training for WGWDs

The statistics of WGWDs in approaching higher education and vocational education systems in Indian society are poor. Gogoi (2018) states that disabled women still face barriers to higher education. In addition, Halder (2009) emphasizes that challenged women at college frequently struggle with unfavorable peer attitudes, miscommunications with instructors and authorities, and restricted access to university accommodations. In contrast, male students with disabilities outnumber female students with disabilities in Co-Educational colleges. WGWDs tend to be marginalized and isolated from the labor market more than non-disabled persons. Empowering the challenged to explore prospects for higher education with career orientation to secure jobs is crucial to lowering the pressures on the community and their families. Reviewing Scheme for Implementation of Person with Disabilities Act, 2016, the term Vocational Training is emphasized in the Components of Skills Development, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, and its connected organizations such as National Institutions, National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation (NHFDC), National Trust and so on provide vocational training programs for PWDs. In addition, several additional State and Central Government Ministries offer vocational training and livelihood programs. NGOs and other

Public Sector Undertakings have also contributed to conducting Vocational Training for challenged female persons. However, the Census 2011 (2011, as cited in the [Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, 2021](#)) reveals that only 23% of WWD are working, while the corresponding figure for men with disabilities is double, representing 47%.

3.2. Social and Religious Perspectives on Accessibility to the Educational Rights of WGWDs

The literature assessment reveals that one trend in research on PWDs, in general, and WGWDs, in particular, is intersectionality. The present study also applies an intersectional approach to comprehend the hidden reasons preventing the challenged women and girls from obtaining opportunities in education. The results of this current research explore how cultural and religious components affect how society perceives the image of WGWDs. Various papers reflect that females with impairments in the nation endure discrimination based on both gender and handicap factors. In many societies controlled by men, the status of WGWDs is also lower than that of persons without impairments. India is not exceptional. The elements of culture and beliefs birth the idea of a male-dominated society in India, which is comparable to some Asian countries, for instance, Vietnam and China.

India has numerous divinities and religions influencing every aspect of life. The majority of Indians practice their unique rituals and hold their own beliefs. Different faiths and beliefs coexist in this country, contributing rich diversity to the country's cultural landscape. The Indian people approach religions because they firmly believe that their faiths can heal and save their physical and psychological pains and boost them to stay positive. As per the Census 2011 (2011, as cited in [Kramer, 2021](#)), Hindus account for 78.9% of the country's population. In contrast, Muslims comprise 14.2% of India's population, and the remaining 6% are made up of Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains.

3.2.1. Gender Inequality

Gender disadvantage is pervasive for WGWDs in numerous underdeveloped countries, including India, even in the absence of handicaps. According to the Census of 2011 (2011, as cited in the [Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, n.d.](#)), sex disparities vary among religious groups in India, with sex ratios for Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Jains recorded as 939, 951, 1023, 903, 965, and 954, respectively. Notably, Christians exhibit the best sex ratio, while Hindus and Sikhs have the worst.

Inglehart and Norris (2003, as cited in [Klingorová and Havlíček, 2015](#)) highlight gender inequality as one of the most common types of radical disparity globally, with various consequences. Root causes include historical evolution, geographic location, cultural legacies, and prevailing religious norms. Klingorová (2005, as cited in [Klingorová and Havlíček, 2015](#)) emphasizes how the interpretation of sacred texts and the cultural framework shape the status of women in society.

In Indian society, Hinduism and Islam contribute to a hierarchical system that reflects gender inequality, particularly evident in the practice of dowry. This custom, though traditional, perpetuates gender discrimination and leads to conflicts, resulting in the deaths of up to 15,000 women annually. In India, there is a disturbing practice where women are occasionally set on fire if their families fail to provide a sufficient dowry for their marriage ([Chaudhary, 2015](#)). Due to the burden of dowries, numerous families prefer having daughters over sons. In a society predominantly ruled by men, such as India, females are often expected to adhere to the authority of males within their families. Consequently, opportunities for girls and women in decision-making processes are limited.

Furthermore, a recent report reveals an alarming statistic of three documented rape cases on average every day, indicating a 4% rise in crimes against women in India over the previous year ([Aryata Nandi, December 13, 2023](#)). Faced with such concerning trends, many parents choose to overprotect their daughters, especially GWWDs, preventing them from attending school. Gender biases also contribute to parents overprotecting their daughters, including disabled girls, limiting their access to education.

Similar hierarchical systems exist in other Asian countries like China, influenced by male chauvinism from Confucianism. In such societies, girls are inherently disadvantaged even before experiencing impairment due

to gender prejudice. As a result, in such a male-dominated society, before suffering from impairment, a girl is intrinsically underprivileged from the gender prejudgment in her society.

3.2.2. Disability Biases

The literature review reveals that each Indian faith has a distinctive perspective on disability. In Islam, disability is considered Allah's punishment, and disabled individuals are encouraged to appreciate it as a blessing Watters (2010, as cited in [Kaur and Arora, 2019](#)). Hinduism and Buddhism attribute the disabled condition of PWDs to their "Karma," the consequences of their past misdeeds. Limaye (2016) notes that Hinduism's philosophy often depicts PWDs as evil and useless, suggesting that it is better to keep a distance from them to protect those without disabilities. Similarly, the concept of disability in the Bible portrays it as both a punishment from God and a call for compassionate understanding towards PWDs.

From a theological perspective, a person's disability is often viewed as a sin and a punishment from God. However, adopting a constructive approach and accepting disability as God's will without judgment can significantly support the well-being of PWDs, Women, and WGWDs. Conversely, within communities, WGWDs are often perceived negatively. Many families attempt to conceal their daughters or sisters with disabilities as if they do not exist, driven by a sense of shame.

Poverty and unsafe school environments, coupled with discrimination based on disability and gender inequality, further limit disabled women and girls' access to educational rights. Sharma (2017) emphasizes that while women worldwide strive for gender equality, disabled women face the additional challenge of being recognized as individuals before being accepted as women. Ghai (2002) argues that being a weakened daughter is perceived as a fate worse than death in societies where a baby girl is born and viewed as a misfortune. This issue extends beyond Indian society and is prevalent in other countries in the Global South, such as Vietnam.

In Vietnam, girls with disabilities are also treated as the "Other," representing shame for their families, a burden for the country's future development, and a challenge to nationalist discourse during government efforts to industrialize ([Nguyen and Mitchell, 2014](#)). The deep-rooted connection between gender biases and disability prejudice, combined with social stereotypes and parents' attitudes, poses significant barriers to the accessibility of educational opportunities for WGWDs in India and the broader Global South. Despite ongoing efforts to enact bills, laws, and acts to guarantee the rights to education for WGWDs, there remains a substantial gap in meeting these requirements.

3.3. Solutions

3.3.1. SW Practices in Promoting the Educational Rights of WGWDs

3.3.1.1. Status of SW Under the Indian Context

SW is a profession dedicated to supporting people in effectively managing difficulties and adapting to social environments. SW courses have evolved globally to address various social concerns. In India, SW has a deep-rooted history dating to the pre-Vedic Period, the Vedic Age, and the Gupta Empire. The transformation from charity and welfare to empowerment, development, advocacy, and vocational support for the disadvantaged has been gradual. Today, SW is a significant pillar in addressing diverse societal issues and advocating positive change throughout the country. Devoted professionals tirelessly assist challenged and underprivileged groups, overcoming hurdles specific to India's heterogeneous social, cultural, and economic platform.

Like other Global South nations, SW in India addresses various areas, including poverty reduction, education, social crime, child welfare, senior citizens, families, women's empowerment, healthcare, disability, ethnic and tribal people, and water hygiene. Despite a lack of government statistics, the number of Social Work Educational Institutions (SWEIs) has rapidly increased. According to Bhatt and Phukan (2015, as cited in [Bhatt, 2021](#)), 526 SWEIs offer SW courses at various levels, including bachelor of SW (BSW), post-graduation (MSW), Ph.D., and M.Phil. The data from the University Grants Commission (UGC) (2021, cited in [Bhatt, 2021](#)) reveals that 181 universities offer SW courses. Between 2010 and 2019, 298,233 students enrolled in BSW programs across 311 colleges, averaging 107 students per college per year. Additionally, 395,561 candidates signed up for MSW programs, with 66,173 students participating in BSW and 134,850 students in MSW

programs through Distance Education. Moreover, 3,766 applicants enrolled in M.Phil programs, and 4,152 students joined Ph.D. programs (Bhatt, 2021).

Despite SW facing challenges in some undeveloped countries, it holds an important position in India. The increasing number of individuals engaged in SW study, practice, and research suggests a potential rise in the prominence of SW practitioners in Indian society, contributing to solutions for the nation's challenges.

3.3.1.2. Correlations Between SW Practices and Disability

This research highlights many WGWD facing challenges in pursuing their educational goals. Being a girl in India is already considered a disadvantage, and the added factor of disability further impedes educational aspirations. With a substantial number of existing social work practitioners and enrolled students in SW courses, social work associations can lead in addressing this complex issue.

The study reveals a high rate of illiteracy among WGWDs in Indian society, rooted in complex issues. Negative attitudes from parents, teachers, and communities, influenced by gender inequality and disability discrimination, hinder the educational interests of many girls. Cultural and religious perspectives, poverty, and unsafe campus environments further limit the educational prospects of WGWDs. Given the controversial nature of this issue across India, SW can bridge the gap by collaborating closely with other specialists, such as educators, sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and more, to raise positive awareness regarding the educational rights of WGWDs among families, communities, and society.

Although SW has a long-standing presence in the country, practitioners must continually strive for social recognition. Engaging in the battle for the educational rights of WGWDs is a significant avenue for SW to gradually eliminate obstacles limiting educational prospects. Empowering and encouraging females with disabilities to pursue higher education addresses a critical societal issue and enhances SW's standing, credibility, and value in India.

3.3.1.3. Strengthening Roles and Functions of Social Workers in Promoting Educational Rights of WGWDs

To address this controversial issue, social workers must collaborate with public and private institutions and organizations, such as schools, hospitals, communities, and other NGOs, to empower WGWDs to access their educational rights. The Indian government, particularly the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, should create favorable conditions for SW professionals committed to resolving this matter.

These ministries should collaborate to implement training programs focused on skills needed when working with PWDs. Rothman (2018) suggests critical abilities for operating with PWDs, including effective communication, professional connections, empathy, avoiding assumption traps, developing patience and understanding, and reducing fear and discomfort. Social workers must eliminate deplorable attitudes towards WGWDs to deal with PWDs effectively.

Social workers' roles in educational settings are crucial. Schools are supposed to motivate social workers or psychologists to assist female students facing various burdens. The study indicates that a significant number of GWDs in the nation experience school bullying and a lack of safety on campus. SW professionals in educational institutions and school settings should engage in constructive dialogues with the parents of GWDs to promote positive awareness regarding their educational rights.

India's SW associations should establish strong connections across disabilities to refer ultimate resources supporting WGWDs in their education. These resources are critical in providing opportunities for ladies with impairments to seek higher education. They may come from NGOs fighting for the educational rights of underprivileged girls in Indian systems, such as K.C. Mahindra Education Trust, Udaan India Foundation, Vanavil Trust, Aarti for Girls, Vidya, and Child, among others.

3.3.2. Adopting Three Models of PWDs to Improve the Education Rights of WGWDs

The methods or approaches institutions and organizations use to define disabilities based on various perspectives from health, religion, human rights, society, and charity are known as models of disabilities. Widely used globally, these medical, religious, charitable, rights-based, and identity models aim to define disabilities, justify accountability, attribute causality, address the needs of disabled people, and formulate and

execute policies. However, these models have the potential to promote personal and social prejudice and discrimination, shaping the stereotypes and self-identity of PWDs. That indicates the importance of studying and practicing these models in academic fields by scholars and social workers.

India employs the rights-based, medical, and religious models of PWDs; however, the first model has yet to be widely implemented. As a consequence of the spiritual concept of PWDs, WGWDs experience bias and discrimination, and they are negatively impacting their approach to their right to education. Additionally, PWDs' perceptions have changed positively due to the medical concept of PWDs in India, represented in the Rights of Persons with Disability Act of 2016. Nevertheless, the medical paradigm views PWDs as individuals suffering from diseases. This research proposes three models of PWDs that could positively impact India's perception of PWDs.

3.3.2.1. The Social Model of PWDs

According to the social model, prejudice and discrimination in society are the primary factors that determine whether or not a person has a disability. Under this paradigm, differences in physical, mental, or intellectual abilities will not pose significant obstacles if society treats PWDs well.

3.3.2.2. The Identity Model of PWDs

The identity model is tied to the identity and social models. However, institutional, political, and environmental variables are not particularly interested in identification. The identity paradigm views impairment as individual personalities free from prejudgment, sympathy, and biases.

3.3.2.3. The Rights-Based Model of PWDs

This paradigm emphasizes that society must transform for the better to offer accessibility and opportunities for all facets of life that are equal. The right-based model places a strong emphasis on giving people responsibility and liberty.

Menon (2019) states in his book that India has a lot of disabled individuals, but there are additional social stigmas and negative attitudes. Concerning WGWDs, they even experience double versions of discrimination compared to males with disabilities. Therefore, adopting these three disability models may change how the public and the government view WGWDs and PWDs, promoting positive perceptions. When these three PWD models are successfully applied, it opens up positive perspectives about the prospects and values of WGWDs and their educational opportunities. Furthermore, it could lead to a bright future in which families of disabled daughters will not feel ashamed of them like the way they used to hide their children and restrict them from education. This approach demands that communities, schools, and families understand the importance of supporting their children's education to ensure their bright futures. Moreover, employing these disability models is a decisive step that authorities should carefully consider to remove significant obstacles related to social stigmas, biases, or discriminations against vulnerable groups like WGWDs and enable them to pursue their aspirations for higher education.

4. Limitations and Future Research

The research explores how females with disabilities in Indian society can obtain their educational rights. However, due to the methodology relying significantly on secondary data, it cannot capture the complex reality of marginalized WGWDs' rights and educational opportunities. Hence, the present work does not focus on identifying how schools and educational settings find a way to eliminate discrimination and stigmatization of teachers, students, and other staff members toward WGWDs and even the level of perceived stigma of female students themselves. Furthermore, future research should delve into these relevant aspects to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by WGWDs in accessing education in India. In detail, for further research, the authors are dedicated to identifying how school settings in India educate their students without disabilities to respect, support, and motivate other students with disabilities, including disabled girls.

5. Conclusion

India, representative of the Global South, highlights a scenario where disabled Women and Girls often encounter

numerous challenges in pursuing education. The inherent disadvantage of being a woman or girl in a male-centric society is compounded when they also face disabilities, making it even more challenging for them to access their educational rights. Discrimination against the educational rights of females with disabilities in Indian society is rooted in gender disparities and disability biases. This complex issue, prevalent in many Global South countries, is intricately connected to cultural and religious dimensions, especially in India. The study's findings demonstrate the prevalence of prejudgments and stigmatizations in Indian culture, affecting the aspirations of WGWDs in pursuing education. SW practices emerged as a powerful force in the country, gradually dismantling the obstacles that hindered WGWDs from accessing their educational rights. SW practitioners' commitment to advocating for and reclaiming the right to education for vulnerable WGWDs benefits these individuals and strengthens the status of SW within the nation. In practical terms, rather than contending with the diverse beliefs of each religion, the Indian Government could promote the adoption of social models, identity models, and rights-based models of PWDs. This approach aims to shape the perception of WGWDs in India in a humanitarian and constructive manner, facilitating their access to educational rights. Integrating these models into policy and societal practices could foster inclusivity and empower WGWDs in their pursuit of education.

References

- Aljabri, A.S., Bagadood, N.H. and Sulaimani, M.F. (2023). *Bullying of Female Students with Intellectual Disability in Mainstream Schools: Personal Experiences from Saudi Arabia*. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 5, 100287.
- Aryata Nandi. (December 13, 2023). <https://maktoobmedia.com/india/three-daily-rape-cases-in-india-delhi-up-most-unsafe-for-women-ncrb-data/>
- Bhatt, S. (2021). *Students Enrollment in Social Work Courses in Indian Higher Educational Institutions: An Analysis*. *Space and Culture*, 9(2), 50-64, India.
- Chaudhary, P. (2015). *Gender Inequality in Hindu and Muslim Personal Laws in India*. *Int J Home Sci Ext Commun Manag*, 1, 34-37.
- Das, A. and Kattumuri, R. (2011). *Children with Disabilities in Private Inclusive Schools in Mumbai: Experiences and Challenges*. *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education*, 2(8), 7.
- Forber-Pratt, A.J. and Lyew, D.A. (2020). *A Model Case: Specialized Group Home for Girls with Disabilities in India*. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 37, 315-327.
- Foster, K. and Sandel, M. (2010). *Abuse of Women with Disabilities: Toward an Empowerment Perspective*. *Sexuality and Disability*, 28(3), 177-186. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11195-010-9156-6>.
- Ghai, A. (2002). *Disabled Women: An Excluded Agenda of Indian Feminism*. *Hypatia*, 17(3), 49-66.
- Gogoi, D.K.P. (2018). *Disabled Women in India: Addressing Exclusion and Strategies for Social Inclusion*. 5(11).
- Halder, S. (2009). *Prospects of Higher Education of the Challenged Women in India*. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13(6), 633-646.
- Kaur, S. and Arora, N. (2019). *Religious Perceptions Towards Disability: A Changing Perspective*. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews (IJRAR)*, 6(1), 252-263.
- Kumari, D. (2020). *Educational Opportunities for Girls with Disabilities: Challenges and Prospects*. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 8(2320-2882), pp. 2453-2459.
- Limaye, S. (2016). *Factors Influencing the Accessibility of Education for Children with Disabilities in India*. *Global Education Review*, 3(3), 43-56.
- Mahila Housing Trust. (July 17, 2023). *The Significance of Women's Empowerment in India*. <https://www.mahilahousingtrust.org/the-significance-of-women-empowerment-in-india/>
- Menon, L. (2019). *Status of Disability in India: Analysis and Protection Measures*. Kanishka Publishers, Distributors.

- Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation. (n.d). *Population Related Statistics*. https://www.mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/reports_and_publication/statistical_publication/social_statistics/WM17Chapter1.pdf
- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. (2021). *Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in India – A Statistical Profile*. https://www.nhfdc.nic.in/upload/nhfdc/Persons_Disabilities_31mar21.pdf
- National Human Rights Commission, India. (2021). *Disability Rights (Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act & National Trust Act) and Mental Healthcare Act*. <https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/DisabilityRights.pdf>.
- Nguyen, X.T. and Mitchell, C. (2014). *Inclusion in Vietnam: An Intersectionality Perspective on Girls with Disabilities and Education*. *Childhood*, 21(3), 324-338.
- Ortoleva, S. and Lewis, H. (2012). *Forgotten Sisters – A Report on Violence against Women with Disabilities: An Overview of its Nature, Scope, Causes and Consequences*. *Northeastern University School of Law Research Paper*, (104-2012).
- Quadri, S.S. and Khalid, M. (2019). *Social Work in Education of Children with Disability: A Study of Hyderabad*. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 9(3), 240-256.
- Rothman, J. (2018). *Social Work Practice Across Disability*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315178028>
- Sharma, M.A. (2017). *Retrospective Analysis and Empowerment of Social Status among Adolescent Girls and Women with Intellectual Disabilities*. (628-643).
- Singal, N. (2006). *Inclusive Education in India: International Concept, National Interpretation*. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education*, 53(3), 351-369.
- Stephanie Kramer. (September 21, 2021). *Key Findings about the Religious Composition of India*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/09/21/key-findings-about-the-religious-composition-of-india/>
- UNESCO. (September 7, 2021). *Bullying Rates are Higher for Children with Disabilities*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/bullying-rates-higher-children-disabilities>
- Women Enable International. (2021). *The Right to Education for Women and Girls with Disabilities*. <https://womenenabled.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WEI-The-Right-to-Education-for-Women-and-Girls-with-Disabilities-English.pdf>.
- World Health Organization. (2011). *World Report on Disability*.