



RESEARCH ARTICLE

International Conference: Inclusion Matters Making A Difference, December 2016.

GENDER AND DISABILITY.

Damen Queen.

Assistant Professor, P.G Dept of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Egmore.

Manuscript Info

Key words:-

Gender and Disability, Women and Disability, Disability

Abstract

The 'World Report on Disability' (2011) published by the WHO & the World Bank estimates that 15% (over one billion people) of the world's population are disabled. The prevalence of disability among women is higher than among men. Women with disabilities are the most marginalized and excluded group in the society. Women with disability are highly vulnerable, women are less powerful, weaker and the subordinate position and added the prevalence of disability makes the issues complicated. Women face double the discrimination in the society- Gender discrimination and for being disabled. Women with disability remain one of the most neglected and marginalized group in the society. Given the fact, Disability has very adverse effect among women and it also have with men with disability. Since Disability is a social construct, and the issues of gender is also socially constructed hence it is very important to study issues of disability in the context of gender. Hence this study focus on the gender issues related to disability, Where Gender is generally understood as the cultural interpretation of sexed bodies, surrounded in the whole apparatus of a society's roles and norms. This study will throw light on the fact the experience of men and women with disability is not in the same way. The paper will have the issues of disability with a Gender lens.

Copy Right, IJAR, 2017., All rights reserved.

Introduction:-

Disability "is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. (WHO) Impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Thus, disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an interaction between individual and the body.

Disabilities are features of the body, mind, or senses that, to a greater or lesser extent, affect a person's ability to engage independently in some or all aspects of day-to-day life. There are different kinds of disability. Each kinds of disability affect peoples in many different ways. It is interesting fact to know that some time the same kind of

Corresponding Author:- Damen Queen.

Address:- Assistant Professor, P.G Dept of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work, Egmore.

disability can affect each person differently. The 'World Report on Disability' (2011) published by the WHO & the World Bank estimates that 15% (over one billion people) of the world's population are disabled.

There are many diverse factors which contribute to the problem of person with disability. Certain factors like age, sex, social status, economic status, ethnicity, cultural heritage and gender. Out these factors Gender plays a major role in disability, where both the gender and disability are social constructed.

Rationale of the study:-

Disability is a global burden. The 'World Report on Disability' (2011) published by the WHO & the World Bank estimates that 15% (over one billion people) of the world's population are disabled. The prevalence of disability among women is higher than among men. Women with disabilities are the most marginalised and excluded group in the society. Women with disability are highly vulnerable, women are less powerful, weaker and the subordinate position and added the prevalence of disability makes the issues complicated. Women face double the discrimination in the society- Gender discrimination and for being disabled. Women with disability remain one of the most neglected and marginalised group in the society. Given the fact, Disability has very adverse effect among women and it also have with men with disability. Since Disability is a social construct, and the issues of gender is also socially constructed hence it is very important to study issues of disability in the context of gender.

Hence this study focus on the gender issues related to disability, Where Gender is generally understood as the cultural interpretation of sexed bodies, surrounded in the whole tool of a society's norms and norms. This study will throw light on the fact the experience of men and women with disability is not in the same way. The paper will have the issues of disability with a Gender lens.

Disability and its types:-

According to the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, "Disability" means - (i) Blindness; (ii) Low vision; (iii) Leprosy-cured; (iv) Hearing impairment; (v) Loco motor disability; (vi) Mental retardation; (vii) Mental illness. Types of disability includes,

1. Physical Disability
2. Hearing Disability
3. Learning Disability
4. Psychiatric Disability
5. Developmental disabilities
6. Intellectual Disability and
7. Multiple disabilities and Others.

Causes of disability in India:-

The most common causes of impairment and disability include chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer; injuries such as those due to road traffic crashes, conflicts, falls, landmines, mental impairments, birth defects, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases. Most of the Physical disability is mainly due to Polio, and accidents. Some other reasons include stroke, other illness and diseases, old age, arthritis, leprosy, cerebral palsy, TB, medical/ surgical intervention, cardio- respiratory diseases, cancer. Some disability causes from transition of communicable disease.

Disability and Gender as social construct:-

Disability is a social construct, because not all people with disabilities are equally disadvantaged and at the same time not both the gender is equally disadvantage. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), adopted by the United Nations gives two descriptions of disability it states that "Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". It also highlights that, "Persons with disabilities include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The gendered experience of disability reveals sustained patterns of difference between men and women. For people with disabilities gendering is conditional (Gerschick 2000).

Disability is a social label that describes a characteristic of a person that prevents or disables the person's ability to meet his or her needs. In Indian society it talks about the systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by

society (purposely or inadvertently) are the ultimate factors defining who is disabled and who is not in a particular society. Both women and disabilities can have an impact on a person in terms of decision making in the family, communication, social interaction, community participation, etc. Social stereotype

A person, for example, may be disadvantaged in one situation, and not disadvantaged in another situation because of the different needs within each situation. One person may be disadvantaged, while another person with a similar disability may not be disadvantaged.

Burden of disability among women in India:-

The disability manual by National Human Rights Commission elaborately describes various indirect causes of disability (NHRC 2005): one such cause is Malnutrition. In India it is a major cause of disability. It is estimated that currently 515 million Asians are chronically undernourished, accounting for about two thirds of the world's hungry people (NHRC 2005). Feminisation of poverty is an important gender issues which is the major contributing factor for malnutrition. Disability is a development issue, because of its bidirectional link to poverty: disability may increase the risk of poverty, and poverty may increase the risk of disability. A growing body of empirical evidence from across the world indicates that people with disabilities and their families are more likely to experience economic and social disadvantage than those without disability.

Women with disabilities experience the combined disadvantages associated with gender as well as disability, and may be less likely to marry than non-disabled women. Disability and gender are physical constructs that totally ignore the person. To be a disabled man is to fail to measure up to the general culture's definition of masculinity as strength, physical ability and autonomy. To be a disabled woman is to be considered unable to fulfil the role of homemaker, wife and mother, and unable to conform to the stereotype of beauty and femininity in terms of physical appearance. But yes, being a disabled woman fits well into the stereotype of passivity and dependency!

Some of the Gender issues pertaining to women with disability include, New born disabled girl child:-

In a society where women have low status, one can imagine the reaction to the birth of a disabled girl child. Typical example can be drawn from the Haryana case study: A newborn with Spina Bifida was starved to death by her parents and family in Haryana despite the intensive counselling, support and medical assurances of an NGO and the doctors. Infanticide of the disabled is widespread, with baby girls being at higher risk.

In equality from birth:-

A research study was conducted in 1998 by the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP), gathering data mostly from non-governmental organisations providing services to people with disabilities highlights that the health, nutritional, educational, mental, sexual, and employment needs of a disabled girls are the last in the list of priorities of a family. The girl child is more vulnerable to all kind abuse from physical, sexual and mental abuse. Women belonging to economic lower social status and having a disabled girl is a triple disadvantage.

In equality in Education:-

The percentage of girls with disabilities going to school (38.34 percent) was found to be much lower than the percentage of boys with disabilities (61.66 percent) getting an education. (NCPEDP, 1998). In India, only 54.16 percent of all women are literate. With such a high rate of illiteracy among women in general, the chances of girls with disabilities of getting an education are extremely poor. And because disabled gets less or megeropportunities for education, the productive employment is crucial and thus make them lifelong dependent on family and over a period of time they were only seen as burden to the family.

Employment issue:-

Women thus confront major obstacles not only in relation to overcoming disabling environments, but also in achieving equal outcomes as men similarly disabled (Fairchild 2002).

Inequality in service:-

The problems that confront women with disabilities are even more severe in the rural areas. The inadequate or total lack of access to information, health care and rehabilitation services is further compounded by much higher illiteracy rates, longer distances to services and facilities, if they exist at all, and more severe conditions of poverty than in

urban areas. In addition, traditions and prejudices that discriminate against women are more likely to be widely practised in the rural areas.

Community Ignorance and Social Stigma:-

People with disabilities in India are subject to deprivation in many dimensions of their lives. Many of these barriers are owing to the ignorance and attitudes of society and individuals, including towards disabled people. Social attitudes and stigma play an important role in limiting the opportunities of disabled people for full participation in social and economic life, often even within their own families

Unequal Participation in Decision-making:-

Decisions regarding the lives of women in India are generally taken by their dependents like fathers, brothers or sons. And again, it is more so for women with disabilities. The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) study shows that although women formed more than 50 percent of the professional workforce in the 119 apex-level NGOs, the percentage dropped to a mere 28.45 percent at the decision-making level. The data regarding women with disabilities is even more surprising. Their percentage amongst professional staff was found to be as low as 4.47 percent. The figure dropped further to 3.71 percent when it came to their numbers in the decision-making

Community participation:-

The disability community is no different to any other minority group in society. They have to fight for their rights to participate in society. Just as the women who constantly struggle to participate in the community. Disabled Women have to lobby for recognition of their status within society. Women thus confront major obstacles not only in relation to overcoming disabling environments, but also in achieving equal outcomes as men similarly disabled (Fairchild 2002).

Sexuality, Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights:-

Disabled are often treated as asexual, genderless human beings. People with disabilities deserve acceptance of their sexuality. A disability does not alter the right of an individual to express his or her sexuality. This includes the right to marry, parent, and care for children; to make choices about these areas; and to have access to accurate information which will enable them to make good choices and take appropriate actions.

Right to sexual education is completely denied for the disabled persons in a view that they are asexual and not capable for such sexual activity. They often face barriers to information and services. Furthermore, women with disabilities may receive inadequate access to maternal and reproductive healthcare services, and people with disabilities may also be at increased risk of sexual exploitation and violence.

Accessible sexual health education and information can enable disabled people to fully express their sexuality. Inclusive sexual health policies and initiatives are supported by articles 9, 13, 23, 24 and 25 of the Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Reproduction Pregnancy and Motherhood:-

Women with disabilities are, first and foremost, women, and many decide that they want to have children. Many men also decide that they would like to father children. Although there are often more complications when the female has a disability.

For most women contemplating pregnancy, issues for consideration include getting appropriate medical care, the possible impact of pregnancy on the body, concerns for labor and delivery, and care for the child following birth. Although a physical disability, for example, does not alter the ability for most women to be successful in all of the areas listed above, the disability does provide added cause for concern for the expectant mother. Much of that success depends on the information the women receive to assist them through pregnancy and the postpartum period.

Stereotype:-

People with a disability come in a variety of shapes, sizes, colours, sex and cultures - just as we all do. The only thing that separates a person with a disability is that, for one reason or another, they are unable to do certain things in the same way as the mainstream of society. They may require some form of adaptation or alteration to assist them to overcome the effect of their disability. One view is that people with disabilities are either not interested in sex or

are not capable. At the other end of the spectrum, people with disabilities are sometimes viewed as being overly interested in sex and out of control in their sexual behaviour. Ironically the interaction of stereotypes can generate resistance which consists of an embracing of stereotypes - for example, disabled women may be perceived as inappropriate mothers and only have status as receivers of care by others so their resistance may consist of asserting a desire for a traditional female carer role in relation to their own children (Grue and TaffordLaerum 2002).

Gender stereotypes interact with disability stereotypes to constitute a deep matrix of gendered disability in every culture, developed within specific historical contexts, and affecting those contexts over time. (Connell 2002)

Psycho-Social Problem:-

There is ample evidence that women with disabilities experience major psycho- social problems that remain largely neglected including depression, stress, lowered self-esteem, and social isolation (Nosek and Hughes 2003). Disabled women who are sexually abused are likely to have few if any social supports or options. Disabled women are less likely to be accepted as refugees by industrially-advanced countries.(Abu-Habib 1997; Meekosha and Dowse 1997; Snyder 1999; Charowa 2002)

Suggestions:-

Community education is more vital because the problem of gender and disability is socially constructed; in order to break that community sensitization is very essential. To break the stereotype and to elevate the prevalence of stigma and discrimination among disabled women, there is a greater need for community awareness program focusing on target populations in the society. Application of strength based perspective is more important to raise the resilient disabled individual.

India has one of the more progressive disability policy frameworks in the developing world. However, there remains huge gender gap in operationalizing the policy framework. The mainstream policies and programmes aimed specifically at people with disabilities should have a cross-cutting gender component to ensure the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

Conclusion:-

Women with disabilities have been described as being doubly marginalised on account of their disability and their gender. They may be more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, and often have limited social, political and economic opportunities and lack of access to basic services. Women with disabilities may also be at greater risk of sexual and physical violence and abuse. The problem is not how to wipe out the differences but how to unite with the differences intact" said by Rabindranath Tagore. Girls with disabilities often experience discrimination in the society and hence, for example in education and family life. However, to address these issues it is necessary to understand the social roles of and between women and men both with and without disabilities.