"VOICES OF ABILITY: EXPERIENCES, BARRIERS, ENABLERS, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND SOCIETAL INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES"

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Abstract

Disability inclusion has emerged as a critical global and national priority, particularly in societies striving to move beyond discrimination toward equity, dignity, and participation for all. In the Indian context, despite progressive legislation such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, persons with disabilities continue to experience exclusion arising from physical inaccessibility, social stigma, and institutional gaps. At the same time, their achievements and contributions remain underrepresented in academic and policy discourse. This study, titled "Voices of Ability: Experiences, Barriers, Enablers, Achievements, and Societal Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities," aligns with the conference theme by foregrounding collective responsibility and inclusive action.

Adopting a mixed-method research design, the study integrates qualitative interviews with visually impaired individuals and a quantitative online survey of persons with physical disabilities across India. The qualitative narratives capture lived experiences, discrimination, coping strategies, and success journeys, while the survey examines patterns of barriers, enabling factors, societal inclusion, and aspirations.

Findings indicate that persistent barriers—such as inaccessible infrastructure, limited employment opportunities and attitudinal discrimination—continue to constrain participation. However, strong family support, assistive technologies, inclusive educational environments, organizational accommodation, and personal resilience emerge as powerful enablers of achievement. Participants report successes in education, employment, entrepreneurship, and community engagement, challenging stereotypes and demonstrating capability beyond impairment.

The study highlights the need for a societal shift from sympathy-driven approaches to rights-based, ability-oriented inclusion, reinforcing the idea that disability inclusion is a shared societal responsibility. By amplifying voices of ability, the paper contributes to advancing inclusive practices among educators, rehabilitation professionals, employers, policymakers, and communities.

Key Words: Persons with Disabilities Lived Experiences, Barriers and Enablers, Achievements and Success, Societal Inclusion.

Introduction

Disability inclusion has emerged as a critical global and national priority, particularly in societies striving to move beyond discrimination toward equity, dignity, and participation for all. In the Indian context, despite progressive legislation such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, persons with disabilities continue to experience exclusion arising from physical inaccessibility, social

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Objectives
1. To examine the lived experiences of persons with disabilities, with specific reference to visually impaired and physically challenged individuals.
2. To identify the key barriers—physical, social, technological, and institutional—that affect their education, employment, and daily life.
3. To analyze the enablers and support mechanisms, including family support, assistive technologies, organizational practices, and policy interventions.
4. To document the successes and achievements of persons with disabilities in personal, educational, professional, and social domains**.**

Methodology
Adopting a mixed-method research design, the study integrates qualitative interviews and a quantitative online survey of persons with physical disabilities. The qualitative narratives capture lived experiences, discrimination, coping strategies, and success journeys, while the survey examines patterns of barriers, enabling factors, societal inclusion, and aspirations.

Ethical Considerations
1. Informed consent obtained (oral/digital).
2. Voluntary participation ensured.
3. Confidentiality and anonymity maintained.
4. Study conducted in line with principles of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

Survey Data Analysis
The Google survey form is circulated to around 1000 people through whatsapp groups and personal messages. Out of 1000 people communicated, 52 (5.2% only) people only responded. The following analysis is made to assess the 'Experiences, Barriers, Enablers, Achievements, and Societal Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities'.

Section 1. Demographic Profile
1.a. Age Group: Among the respondents 22% are below 25 age group, 38% are 26-35 age group, 24% are 36-45 , 10% are 46-55, 6% are 55 and above.
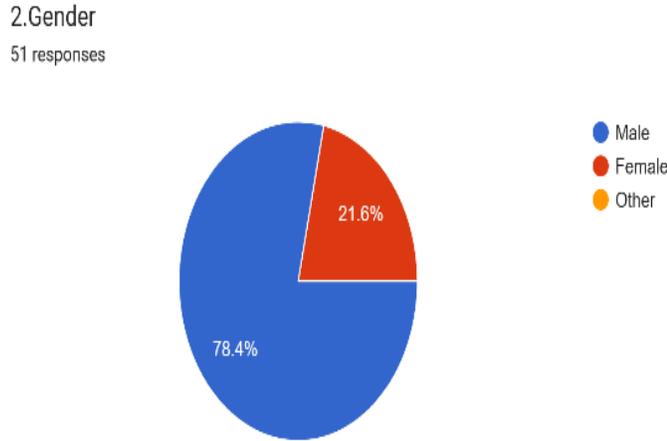
Diagram-1: Age Group
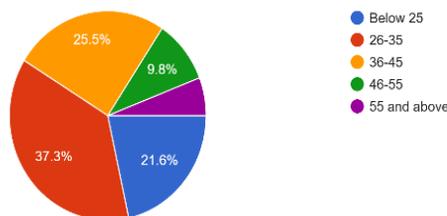
1.B. Gender: Among the total respondents, 78% are male and 22 % are female.

Diagram-2: Gender

2.Gender
51 responses

1. C: Type of disability: The following are the different types of disability of respondents.

Table 1: Types of Disability

Row Labels	Count of Disability Type Coded
Autism Spectrum Disorder	2
Blindness	3
Cerebral Palsy	2
Deaf	2
Hard of Hearing	6
Hemophilia	1
Intellectual Disability	2
Locomotor Disability	30
Multiple Disability	1
Non Disabled	1
Thalassemia major	1
Grand Total	51

1.D.Education: Among the respondents, 13% have school education, 3% diploma, 36% undergraduate, 40% post graduate and 6% graduates.

Diagram- 3: Education
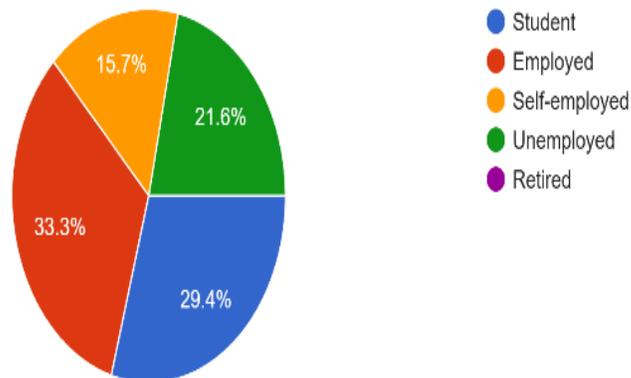
4. Highest Educational qualification
51 responses
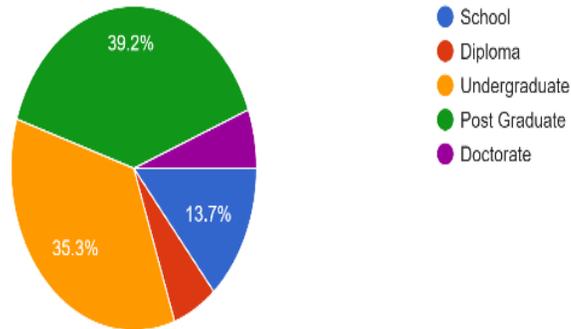
1. e. Employment status: Among the total respondents, 30% are students, 34% are employed, 14% are self-employed and 22% are unemployed.

Diagram-4:   Employment Status

5.Employment status
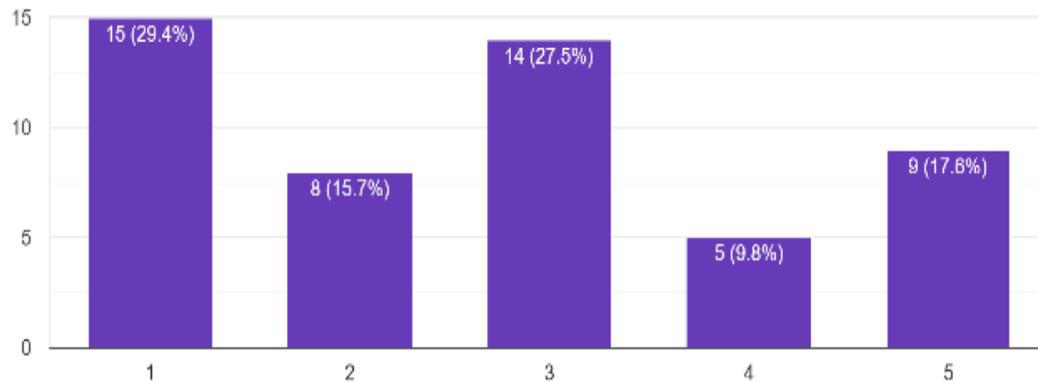51 responses

Section 2.Experiences and Barriers:
2.a:Physical infrastructure in public places is accessible to me: Among the total respondents, only 17.6 % strongly agreed , 9.8% agreed, 27.5% neutral, 15.7% disagreed and 29.4% strongly disagreed.

Diagram-5: Physical Infrastructure

6.Physical infrastructure in public places is accessible to me.
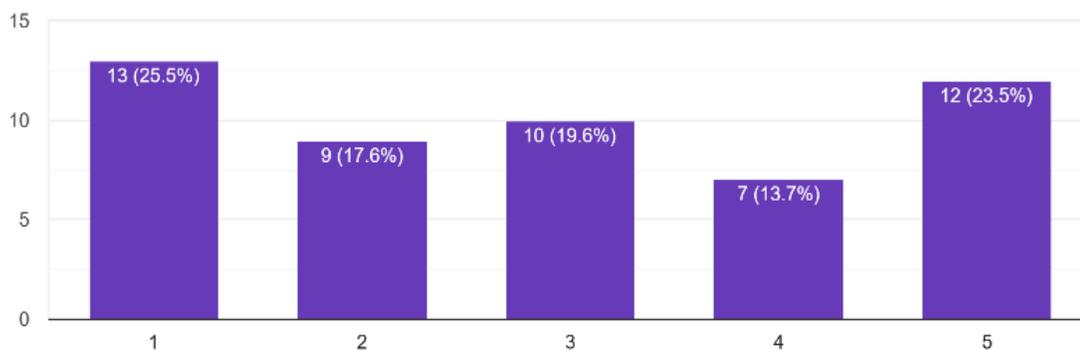51 responses

2. B.Iface barriers in accessing education or training opportunities: Among the total respondents, only 23.5 % strongly agreed, 13.7% agreed, 19.6 % neutral, 17.6% disagreed and 25.5 % strongly disagreed.

Diagram-6: Barriers

7.I face barriers in accessing education or training opportunities.
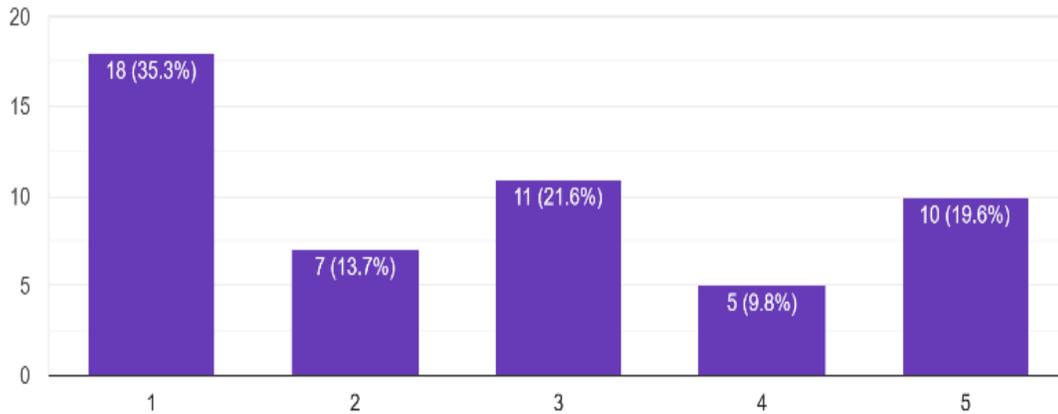51 responses

2. C.My disability limits my employment opportunities: Among the total respondents, only 19.6 % strongly agreed, 9.8% agreed, 21.6% neutral, 13.7% disagreed and 35.3% strongly disagreed.

Diagram 7-Disability limits opportunities

8. My disability limits my employment opportunities.
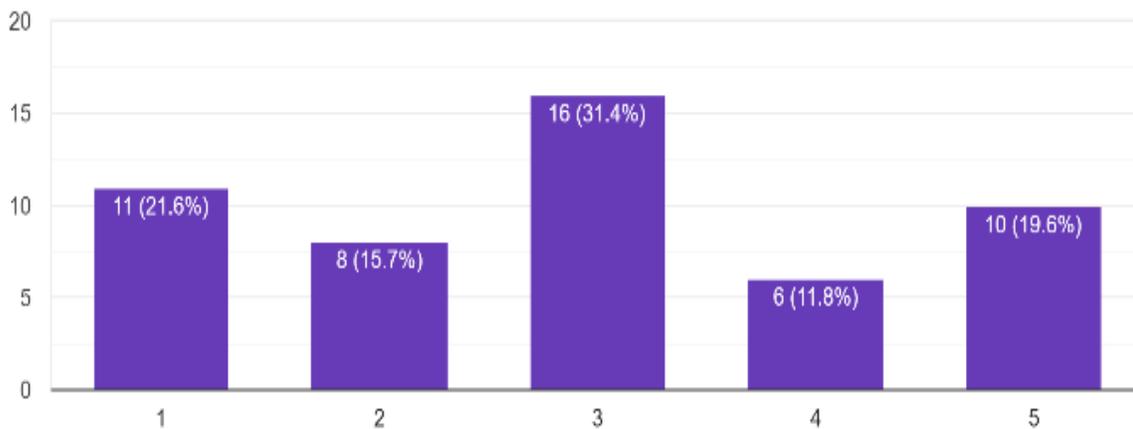51 responses

2.d. I have experienced social discrimination due to my disability: Among the total respondents, only 11.8 % strongly agreed , 9.8% agreed, 31.4% neutral, 15.7% disagreed and 21.6 % strongly disagreed.

Diagram-8 Social Discrimination

9.I have experienced social discrimination due to my disability
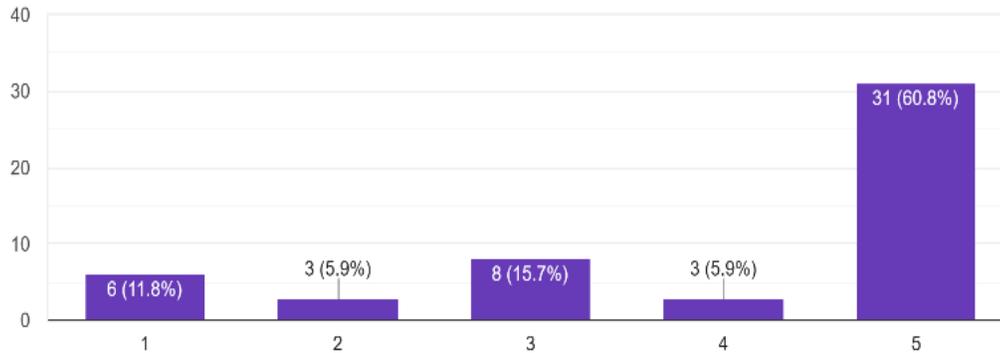51 responses

Section 3: Enablers and Support Systems:
3.a.My family provides strong emotional and practical support: Among the total respondents, majority ,60.8 % strongly agreed , 5.9% agreed, 15.7 % neutral, 5.9 % disagreed and 11.9% strongly disagreed.

Diagram-9 Family support

10.My family provides strong emotional and practical support.
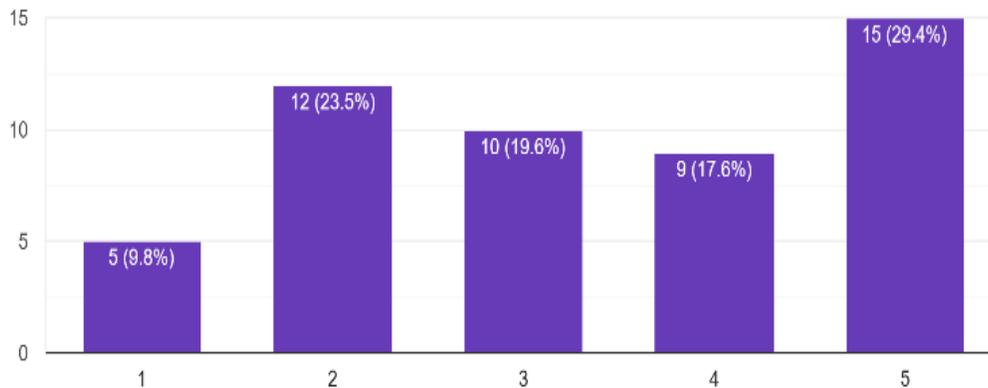51 responses

3. B.Government policies and schemes are helpful to persons with disabilities: Among the total respondents, majority, 29.4 % strongly agreed ,17.6% agreed, 19.6% neutral, 23.5 % disagreed and 9.8% strongly disagreed.

Diagram 10- Government Policies & Schemes

11.Government policies and schemes are helpful to persons with disabilities
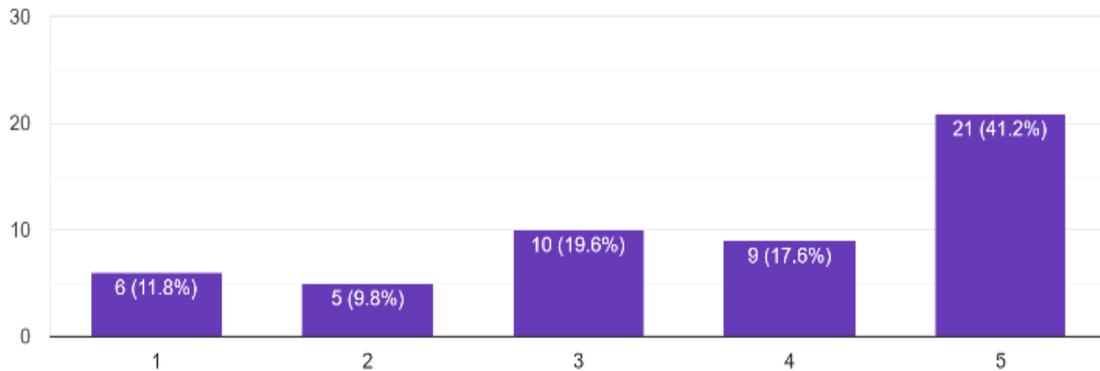51 responses

3. C.Assistive devices or technologies improve my independence: Among the total respondents, majority, 41.2 % strongly agreed, 17.6% agreed, 19.6 % neutral, 9.8 % disagreed and 11.8% strongly disagreed.

Diagram 11- Assistive Devices

12.Assistive devices or technologies improve my independence
51 responses

3. D.Educational institutions/workplaces are supportive and inclusive: Among the total respondents, majority, 23.5% strongly agreed, 13.7% agreed, 25.5 % neutral, 19.6 % disagreed and 17.6% strongly disagreed.

Diagram 12- Educational Institutions Support

13.Educational institutions/workplaces are supportive and inclusive
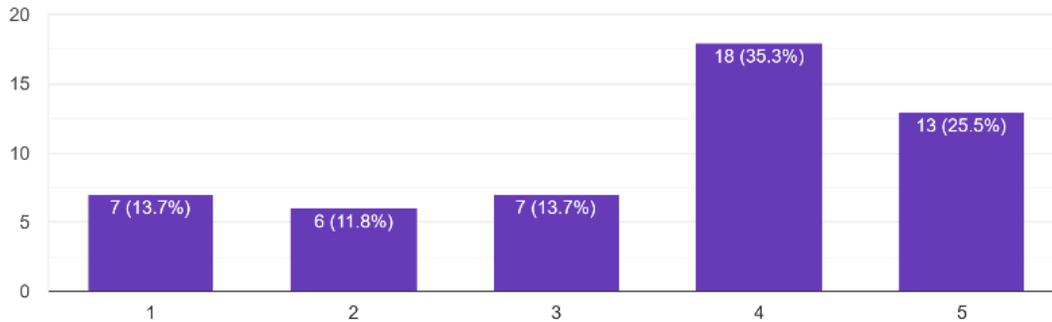51 responses
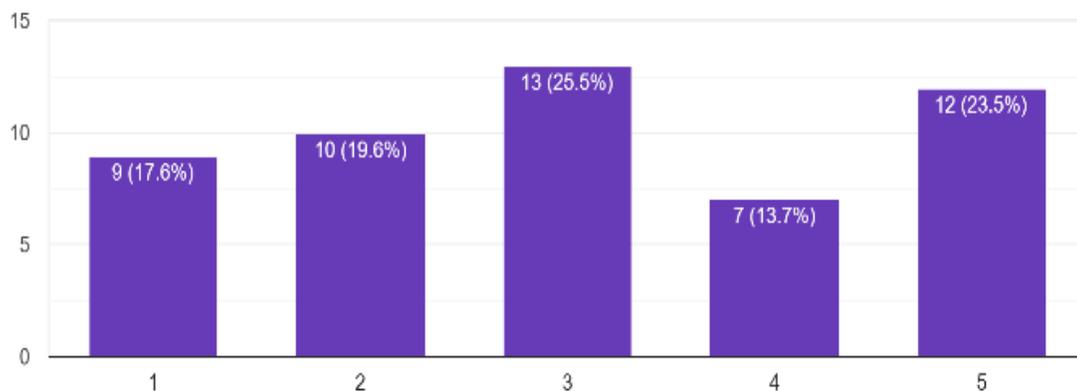
Section 4: Achievements and Success
4. A.I have achieved personal or professional goals despite challenges: Among the total respondents, majority, and 25.5. % strongly agreed, 35.3% agreed, 13.7 % neutral, 11.8 % disagreed and 13.7% strongly disagreed.

Diagram- 13 Achievements

14.I have achieved personal or professional goals despite challenges.
51 responses

4. B.My disability has strengthened my resilience and problem-solving abilities: Among the total respondents, majority, 33.3 % strongly agreed, 19.6% agreed, 15.7 % neutral, 9.8 % disagreed and 21.6% strongly disagreed.

Diagram- 14 Costiveness of Disability

15.My disability has strengthened my resilience and problem-solving abilities
51 responses
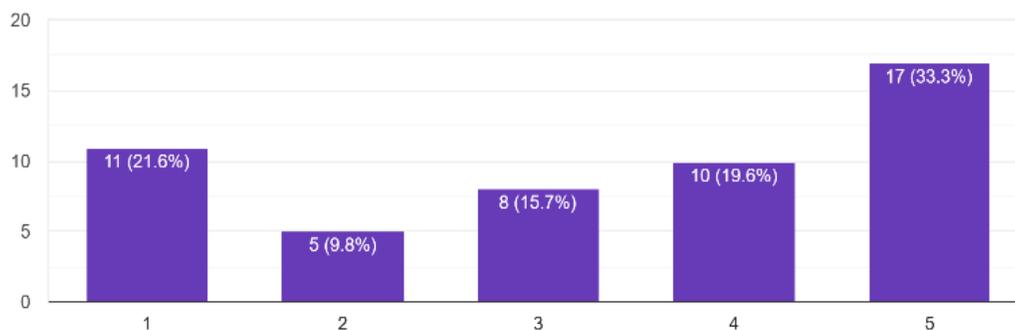
Section 5: Societal Inclusion and Contribution
5. a. Society is becoming more inclusive towards persons with disabilities: Among the total respondents, majority, 15.7 % strongly agreed, 27.5% agreed, 23.5 % neutral, 19.6 % disagreed and 13.7% strongly disagreed.

Diagram- 15 Societal Inclusion

16.Society is becoming more inclusive towards persons with disabilities.
51 responses
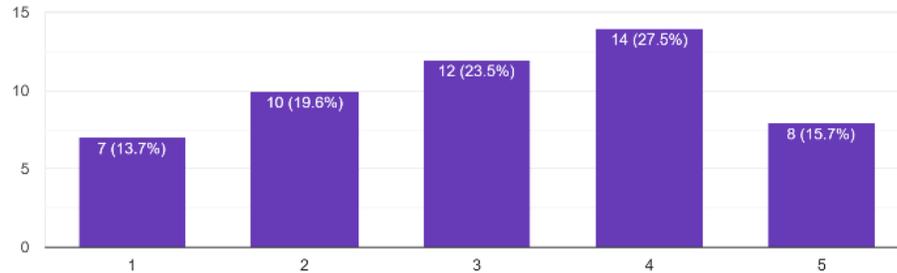
5. B. I feel respected as an equal member of society: Among the total respondents, majority, 31.4 % strongly agreed, 13.7 % agreed, 21.6 % neutral, 11.8 % disagreed and 21.6% strongly disagreed.

Diagram 16-Status at Society

17.I feel respected as an equal member of society
51 responses
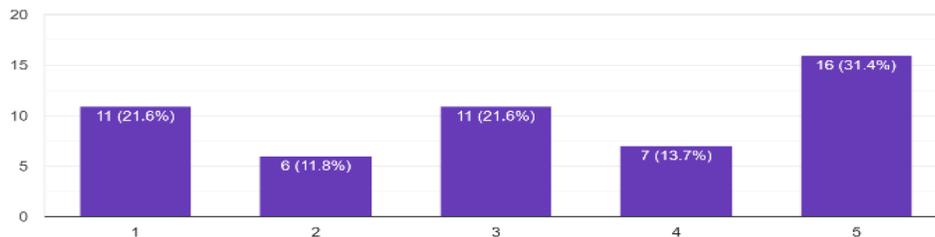
Section 6: Aspirations and Future Outlook:
Improved accessibility and awareness would enhance my participation in society: Among the total respondents, majority, 43.1% strongly agreed, 19.6% agreed, 11.8 % neutral, 11.8 % disagreed and 13.7% strongly disagreed.
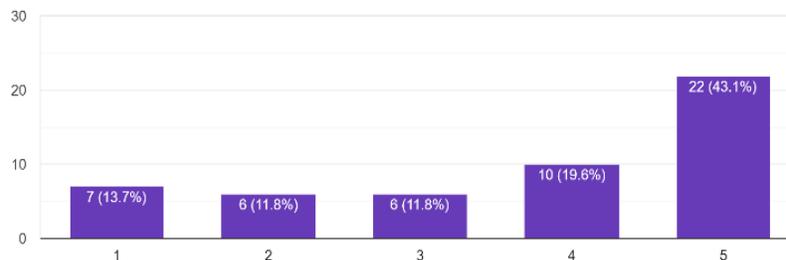
Diagram – 17 Aspirations

18.Improved accessibility and awareness would enhance my participation in society.
51 responses

Observations& Outcomes

1. Demographic Profile: The survey respondents represented diverse age groups, educational backgrounds, and employment statuses. A majority had completed at least secondary education, with a notable proportion engaged in employment or self-employment.
2. Lived Experiences: Participants described daily navigation of educational, professional, and social environments requiring constant adaptation and resilience.
3. Barriers: Major barriers included inaccessible infrastructure, limited employment opportunities, lack of inclusive design, and persistent social stigma etc.,
4. The findings of the present study reveal that persons with physical disabilities in India encounter multiple, intersecting barriers that restrict their full participation in education, employment, and social life.
5. Respondents frequently reported difficulties accessing public buildings, educational institutions, workplaces, and transportation systems. Interview participants described challenges such as absence of ramps, non-functional elevators, inaccessible restrooms, and poorly maintained roads and footpaths.
6. Participants highlighted inadequate institutional preparedness for inclusive education. Survey responses suggest that while some institutions demonstrate supportive practices, many lack accessible classrooms, adaptive furniture, and trained personnel. Interview narratives further revealed limited academic accommodations and insufficient awareness among faculty regarding inclusive teaching strategies.
7. Respondents reported restricted job opportunities, employer hesitation, and inadequate workplace accommodations. Some participants described being perceived as less productive or dependent, reflecting attitudinal bias.
8. Participants noted that societal responses often oscillate between sympathy and underestimation of capability. Overprotective family attitudes, while well-intentioned, sometimes limited autonomy and decision-making.
9. Respondents reported additional financial burdens associated with assistive devices, transportation, and healthcare. Limited economic independence further exacerbates vulnerability
10. Participants identified procedural complexities in accessing disability certification, scholarships, and welfare schemes.

Enablers and Support Systems: Family support, assistive technologies, inclusive institutions, and personal determination emerged as key enablers.

1. A dominant theme emerging from interview narratives is the pivotal role of family encouragement. Participants consistently described emotional reinforcement, financial assistance, and motivational support as foundational to their educational and professional progress.
2. Assistive technologies emerged as critical enablers of independence and productivity. Respondents identified mobility aids, modified vehicles, ergonomic adaptations, digital accessibility tools, and workplace accommodations as transformative factors.
3. Participants who studied in inclusive or supportive institutions reported higher academic confidence and smoother transition into employment.

Achievements and Success: Participants reported achievements in education, professional careers, entrepreneurship, and community leadership, challenging deficit-based perceptions of disability.

1. Both qualitative interviews and survey responses reveal that success is rarely individual in isolation; rather, it is shaped by layered support systems operating at familial, institutional, technological, and policy levels.
2. Interview descriptions reveal that self-determination, perseverance, and adaptive coping strategies are powerful internal enablers.
3. Achievements also included independent mobility, home ownership, family life, and social participation

Societal Inclusion and Contribution: Respondents emphasized that persons with disabilities contribute meaningfully to society and sought recognition based on ability rather than sympathy. Participants described involvement in advocacy groups, mentorship roles, community service, and awareness campaigns. These contributions challenge stereotypes and position persons with disabilities as active social contributors.

Aspirations: Participants expressed aspirations for independence, career advancement, and a more inclusive and accessible society. Respondents emphasized that, when employers provide reasonable accommodations—such as flexible hours, accessible infrastructure, and task modifications—job performance and job satisfaction improve significantly.

It is agreed by majority of respondents that, while barriers persist, strong enablers significantly enhance achievements and social participation. The above analysis highlights the need for a societal shift from sympathy-driven approaches to rights-based, ability-oriented inclusion, reinforcing the idea that disability inclusion is a shared societal responsibility. By amplifying voices of ability, the paper contributes to advancing inclusive practices among educators, rehabilitation professionals, employers, policymakers, and communities.

Practice-Level Guidelines for Institutions in India
Drawing from the study findings on barriers, enablers, and achievements of persons with physical disabilities, this section proposes actionable, institution-level recommendations.
1. Institutions should adopt a written disability inclusion policy that clearly defines reasonable accommodation procedures, Outlines accessibility standards, Specifies grievance redressal mechanisms.
2. Assigns accountability to designated officers.
3. Regular conduct of Annual accessibility audits to assess, Physical infrastructure (ramps, elevators, restrooms, signage), Classroom/workplace layouts, Emergency evacuation systems, Digital platforms etc.,
4. The policy must be publicly available and periodically reviewed.
5. Higher education institutions should establish or strengthen Disability Support Cells.
6. Faculty development programs should include Training on differentiated instruction, Flexible assessment methods, Accessible digital content creation etc.,
7. Institutions should ensure availability of learning materials in accessible formats.
8. Conduct of Regular Sensitization Programs for Faculty and administrators, HR professionals, Students and employees.
9. Persons with disabilities should be included in Policy formulation committees, Institutional planning bodies, Accessibility review panels, Inclusion must extend beyond representation to meaningful participation etc.,

Conclusion

The research study examined the barriers, enablers, and achievements of persons with physical disabilities in India through a rights-based and inclusion-oriented lens. The findings indicate that disability-related exclusion in India is less a function of impairment and more a consequence of structural, attitudinal, infrastructural, and institutional constraints. Persistent barriers in education, employment, mobility, and social participation continue to limit equitable opportunities.

However, the findings also reveal a parallel narrative of resilience, agency, and achievement. When enabling conditions—such as family support, inclusive educational practices, assistive technology, workplace accommodations, and progressive institutional policies—are present, persons with disabilities demonstrate significant academic, professional, and social accomplishments.

Moving forward, inclusive governance must prioritize structural reform, inter-sectoral coordination, and participatory policymaking. When policy shifts from accommodation to systemic inclusion, disability ceases to be a constraint and becomes part of a diverse and equitable social fabric.

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3. Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities: Information on rights, legislation, and grievances.https://ccpd.nic.in/
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