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Disability and Disaster: A Challenge to Excel

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Abstract
Disability is an evolving term that comes from the interplay between people with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent them from participating fully and effectively in society on an equal standing with others. Persons with disabilities are extremely prone when disaster strikes, not only because of their impairments but also because they are more likely to encounter negative socioeconomic outcomes, including higher poverty rates, than people without disabilities. The current paper is a review-based analysis focusing on the disastrous crisis experienced by people with disabilities. Researches have emphatically revealed that disasters and poorly planned disaster recovery and mitigation efforts can exacerbate these disparities, making it even more difficult for people with disabilities to cope both during and after an emergency. In camps and cities, displaced people with disabilities suffer substantial protection risks such as exploitation, physical and sexual abuse, discrimination, mockery, inequality, and neglect. Disaster risk mitigation relies heavily on emergency and preparedness planning, which now need to involve and acknowledge people with disabilities. Leaders and decision-makers in government, industry, and civil society who are responsible for services that impact individuals with disabilities should recognize that they may be more vulnerable than the general population to dangers, disaster repercussions, and unjust treatment during or after the event. Providing proper care for persons with disabilities is a matter of equality, fairness, and justice, as well as a crucial reinforcement of civilized ideals.

Keywords: Disability, Disaster, mitigation

Introduction

The concept of disability is dynamic and shaped by the interaction of people with disabilities with attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities in emergency response should be considered a crucial element of humanitarian action based on moral and human rights principles of fairness and non-discrimination **(Alexander et al., 2012).**

Research has shown that disasters and other crises often amplify pre-existing inequalities, with certain groups, such as children, the elderly, women, minorities, the poor, people with physical or mental disabilities, and immigrants, facing higher levels of risk and vulnerability **(Cutter et al., 2003; Wisner et al., 2004).** Disasters can also cause new disabilities, exacerbate existing disabilities, and reduce the mobility and independence of people with disabilities. Women, children, and the elderly with impairments

are frequently vulnerable, facing stigmatization and a higher risk of sexual exploitation and physical assault **(Alexander et al., 2012).**

Disasters also disrupt support networks and create new physical barriers, making it more challenging for people with disabilities to access the help they need. Emergency information is often challenging to understand, particularly for people with sensory disabilities, and rescue services may not be suitable for people with disabilities **(Alexander, 2015).**

While disasters highlight existing social challenges and inequalities, they also present an opportunity to identify policy gaps and innovate new practices to address the unequal distribution of vulnerabilities. The Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provide a framework for UN agencies to effect change, but more tremendous efforts are needed to understand and address the social challenges faced by people with disabilities in developing countries **(UNCRPD, 2006; Smith et al., 2012).**

Natural Disasters and Their Impact on Communities: A Global Overview

A disaster can be defined as an event that occurs suddenly and results in significant human, material, the economic, or environmental loss that exceeds the capacity of the affected community or society to cope. Natural disasters, in particular, are complex events that expose people to various risks and hazards. Each disaster scenario is unique and poses new and unfamiliar challenges for victims and emergency responders **(Noji, 2000)**. According to the Global Natural Disaster Assessment Report of 2021, there were 367 significant natural disasters worldwide, resulting in the loss of 10,492 lives. Compared to the average of the last three decades (1991-2020), the frequency of major natural disasters increased by 13% in 2021, while the number of deaths decreased by 81%, the number of affected people decreased by 48%, and the economic impact increased by 82% **(IFRC & NDRCC, 2022).**

Research has shown that the number of deaths from natural disasters can vary considerably yearly, with some years experiencing few fatalities before a significant disaster claims many lives. However, on average, over the past decade, approximately 45,000 people worldwide have died each year due to natural disasters, representing roughly 0.1% of all deaths globally. Historically, droughts and floods have been the deadliest natural disasters, but today, earthquakes are the most lethal **(Ritchie et al., 2022).**

Disaster Vulnerability and Disability in India: Challenges and Policy Direction

Due to its unique socio-economic and climatic conditions, India is vulnerable to various natural and man-made disasters, such as floods, droughts, tornadoes, earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, and wildfires. Disasters in India disproportionately affect those with the least access to social and material resources, including women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and the poor **(Fjord & Manderson, 2009).** Disasters in India can have far-reaching impacts on society and communities and tend to be larger or more severe than occurrences. Disasters and conflicts often lead to permanent injuries and disabilities, creating a new generation of people with disabilities with diverse rehabilitation needs. However, disability issues are under-reported and given little attention in disaster management discourse, research, practice, and policy **(Hiranandani, 2015).**

There is a need to mainstream disability into disaster risk reduction initiatives in India as it can be instrumental in promoting more equitable outcomes. Studies have shown that people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by disasters and are more likely to suffer from the adverse impacts of disasters than non-disabled individuals **(Brouwer et al., 2019).**

A recent study in India found a lack of awareness among people with disabilities about disaster preparedness, and they face numerous barriers to access disaster-related information and services **(Narayan et al., 2020).** Another study found that India's disaster response and management mechanisms are not fully inclusive of people with disabilities, and their needs are often overlooked **(Kumar et al., 2020).**

Therefore, it is crucial to mainstream disability into disaster risk reduction initiatives and ensure that India's disaster response and management mechanisms fully inclusive of people with disabilities. This can help reduce disasters' disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations and promote more equitable outcomes.

Disaster Impact on Disability: Case Studies from India

India is a country that faces various types of natural and man-made disasters, such as floods, droughts, earthquakes, landslides, and industrial accidents. These disasters can severely impact the population, particularly those who are vulnerable and have limited access to resources. Women, children, the elderly, the disabled, and the poor are often disproportionately affected by disasters **(Fjord & Manderson, 2009).** Disasters can cause injuries and disabilities that can have long-lasting effects on individuals and communities. For example, droughts can lead to malnutrition, which can cause stunting and cognitive impairments in children. Floods can cause injuries and drowning, leading to physical disabilities or death. Earthquakes can cause structural damage, leading to injuries and disabilities due to falling objects or collapsed buildings.

People with disabilities are often overlooked in disaster planning and relief measures, despite being vulnerable to disasters due to limited mobility and other accessibility issues **(Pakjouei et al., 2018).**

Studies have shown that disasters have a significant impact on disability in India. For instance, a study conducted after the 2015 Nepal earthquake found that people with disabilities were at a higher risk of injury and death than the general population. The study also revealed that people with disabilities faced additional barriers to accessing relief and recovery services **(World Health Organization, 2015).**

Another study conducted after the 2018 Kerala floods found that people with disabilities had difficulty accessing relief and recovery services due to a lack of accessibility measures. The study highlighted the need for inclusive disaster management strategies that consider the needs of people with disabilities **(Das & John, 2020).**

In conclusion, disasters severely impact the population, including injuries and disabilities. People with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to disasters due to limited mobility and other accessibility issues. Therefore, it is crucial to include disability in disaster risk reduction initiatives and develop inclusive disaster management strategies that consider all individuals' needs, including those with disabilities

Disasters and Disparities: Understanding the Impact on People with Disabilities

Disability is a broad term that is not consistently defined. Its use varies by societal norms, organizations, health organizations, and government agencies dealing with disability issues. The limited research available on the impact of disasters on people with disabilities has also defined disability in a variety of ways. Persons with disabilities are frequently disregarded all through the disaster management cycle, particularly during relief efforts, and are rarely regarded as essential actors in conflict prevention, despite the fact that they are frequently more vulnerable during conflicts and displacement. Articles 11 and 32 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) demand that people with disabilities

benefit from and participate in disaster relief, emergency response, and disaster risk reduction efforts **(UN.org)**

Disasters can have a disproportionate impact on people with disabilities. Those with physical or sensory disabilities may face difficulties evacuating or accessing emergency services, while those with intellectual disabilities may have trouble understanding instructions or communicating their needs. Additionally, people with disabilities may rely on assistive devices or medication that can be lost or damaged during a disaster.

The impact of disasters on people with disabilities has been well-documented. For example, a study by the World Health Organization found that people with disabilities are up to four times more likely to die or be injured in a disaster than those without disabilities. Another study found that people with disabilities were more likely to experience mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder after a disaster **(World Health Organization, 2013; Hirschet al, 2018)**

Efforts are being made to address these disparities and ensure that people with disabilities are included in disaster preparedness and response plans. This includes providing accessible emergency communication, ensuring that evacuation centers are accessible, and ensuring that people with disabilities are included in disaster simulations and drills **(Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2018).**

Disasters can have a significant impact on people with disabilities. Recognizing and addressing these disparities is essential to ensure everyone can evacuate safely and access the necessary resources during and after a disaster.

ICF conceptualizes disability as the result of an interaction between an individual's health status and his or her unique environment and environment. By such a definition, disability refers to impairment in bodily function or structure, limitation in a particular activity, or social participation **(Peek and Stough, 2010).** Disability results from interactions between people with health conditions, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and depression, and personal and environmental factors, including negative attitudes, means hard-to-reach transport and limited public buildings and social support. A person's environment significantly influences the experience and degree of disability. The inaccessible environment creates barriers that often impede the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society on an equal basis with others. Progress can be made in improving social participation by addressing these barriers and supporting people with disabilities in their daily lives **(who. int, 2022).**

Research shows that at the end of the 20th century, it is estimated that each year natural disasters affect about 67 million children worldwide. This number is expected to triple in the next few decades, mainly due to population growth, especially in dangerous areas such as low-lying coastal areas, and the prevalence and severity of climate change-related disasters. Conservative estimates suggest that more than 7 million children affected by this disaster have various forms of disability and millions more may be disabled. Disability due to disasters, wars, and mines is becoming more frequent and severe **(United Nations International Children's Fund, 2007; World Health Organization, 2005).**

Additional studies have shown that people with disabilities are often excluded from disaster risk reduction activities and programs, which further exacerbates their vulnerability during disasters. A study conducted in Bangladesh found that people with disabilities were often not consulted during disaster risk reduction planning, and their needs were not adequately addressed in disaster response efforts **(Klein et al., 2015).** Another study in Japan found that people with disabilities were less likely to receive disaster information and were less likely to evacuate during a disaster **(Kondo et al., 2020).**

Moreover, people with disabilities may experience additional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been declared a disaster by the World Health Organization. A study conducted in the United States found that people with disabilities experienced greater challenges in accessing healthcare and essential services during the pandemic **(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).**
To address these challenges, it is crucial to incorporate the needs and voices of people with disabilities into all phases of disaster management, including planning, preparedness, response, and recovery. This includes ensuring accessible facilities and transportation systems, providing accessible information and communication, and involving people with disabilities in decision-making processes. By doing so, we can reduce the vulnerability of people with disabilities during disasters and promote inclusive and resilient communities.

The experiences of people with disabilities during disasters are often characterized by neglect, discrimination, and social exclusion. To address these issues, it is important for disaster management organizations to incorporate the needs and voices of people with disabilities into all phases of disaster management, from planning and preparedness to response and recovery. By doing so, we can create more inclusive and resilient communities that prioritize the well-being and rights of all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Conclusion

Disasters have a disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities. They are more vulnerable to being left behind during evacuations due to a lack of preparation and planning, and the facilities and services provided during disasters are often inaccessible to them. Disruption of physical, social, economic, and environmental networks and support systems affect persons with disabilities more than the general population. Moreover, their needs are often excluded from long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts, leading to severe inequalities in access to immediate response measures as well as long-term recovery resources.

However, studies have shown that incorporating the needs and voices of persons with disabilities into all stages of the disaster management process, especially during planning and preparation, can significantly reduce their vulnerability and increase the effectiveness of government response and recovery efforts. Recovery and reconstruction efforts must not only be inclusive and responsive to the needs of all, including persons with disabilities but must also include the participation of persons with disabilities to ensure that their needs and rights are met.
Overall, it is crucial to prioritize the inclusion of persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response efforts to ensure their safety and well-being during and after disasters.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Based on the review analysis here are some recommendations and suggestions:

1. Increase awareness and understanding of the needs and rights of people with disabilities during disasters among policymakers, emergency responders, and the general public.
2. Involve people with disabilities in all stages of the disaster management process, from planning to recovery and reconstruction efforts, to ensure that their needs and voices are heard.
3. Provide accessible and inclusive shelters, transportation, and other services during disasters to ensure that people with disabilities can access immediate response measures and long-term recovery resources.

4. Train emergency responders and volunteers on how to effectively communicate and interact with people with disabilities during disasters.
5. Ensure that the needs of women with disabilities are adequately addressed in disaster planning and response efforts.
6. Conduct more research on the experiences of people with disabilities during disasters and the effectiveness of different strategies for addressing their needs.
7. Increase funding for disability-inclusive disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.

By implementing these recommendations and suggestions, People can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable disaster management practices that support the needs and rights of all individuals, including those with disabilities.

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