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GENDER-BASED DISPARITIES AND DISABILITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SPECIALLY ABLED MEN AND WOMEN IN UDHAMPUR DISTRICT, JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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Abstract

Disability and gender are interconnected social categories that influence an individual's access to education, employment, healthcare, social participation and economic independence. Persons with disabilities frequently experience discrimination arising from physical, institutional and attitudinal barriers. However, the nature and intensity of these challenges may differ between men and women because of existing gender inequalities, traditional social expectations and unequal distribution of resources. Women with disabilities often experience multiple forms of marginalisation resulting from the combined effects of gender discrimination and disability-related exclusion. Men with disabilities, although similarly affected by accessibility barriers and social stigma, may encounter different pressures associated with employment, financial responsibilities and socially constructed expectations of masculinity.

The present study examines gender-based disparities among specially abled men and women in Udhampur District of Jammu and Kashmir. It focuses on comparative differences in educational opportunities, employment participation, healthcare accessibility, family support, mobility, social inclusion and awareness of legal rights. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, drawing upon disability studies, gender perspectives, relevant legislative provisions and secondary information. Particular attention is given to the geographical and socio-cultural characteristics of Udhampur, where rural settlements, mountainous terrain, transportation limitations and variations in access to public services may influence the everyday experiences of persons with disabilities. The paper argues that disability-related exclusion cannot be understood independently of gender, economic circumstances and geographical location. It emphasises the need for gender-responsive disability policies, accessible educational institutions, inclusive employment opportunities, community-based rehabilitation and stronger implementation of disability rights legislation.

Keywords: Disability, Gender Inequality, Specially Abled Persons, Women with Disabilities, Men with Disabilities, Social Inclusion, Educational Accessibility, Employment Disparities, Udhampur District, Jammu and Kashmir.

1. INTRODUCTION

Disability is a significant social, economic and human rights concern that affects individuals across different sections of society. Its consequences extend beyond physical, sensory, intellectual or psychosocial limitations and are substantially influenced by the social environment in which individuals live. In contemporary disability studies, disability is increasingly understood through the interaction between individual impairments and societal barriers. Inaccessible infrastructure, discriminatory attitudes, limited educational opportunities and inadequate institutional support can restrict the participation of persons with disabilities in everyday social and economic activities.

Gender constitutes another important dimension of social inequality. Traditional gender roles, unequal access to resources and socially constructed expectations frequently influence the opportunities available to men and women. When gender and disability intersect, these inequalities may become more complex. Women with disabilities can experience discrimination not only

because of their disabilities but also because of patriarchal attitudes, restricted mobility, economic dependence and unequal participation in household decision-making. Men with disabilities may encounter different forms of disadvantage, particularly where social expectations associate masculinity with physical strength, financial independence and the capacity to undertake employment.

The relationship between gender and disability therefore requires an analytical approach that recognises the distinct experiences of men and women rather than treating persons with disabilities as a homogeneous population. A comparative examination can reveal how social institutions, family structures and public policies influence their respective opportunities and limitations.

Udhampur District of Jammu and Kashmir provides a relevant geographical setting for examining these issues. The district includes urban and rural settlements with varying levels of access to education, healthcare, transportation and employment. Its mountainous geographical characteristics and uneven distribution of public infrastructure may create additional difficulties for persons with mobility, visual or other disabilities. Such conditions can particularly affect individuals living in remote areas who depend on family members or limited transportation facilities to access essential services.

The present research investigates the gender-based disparities experienced by specially abled men and women in Udhampur District. It considers disability not merely as an individual condition but as a social experience shaped by gender relations, economic circumstances, geographical accessibility and institutional arrangements.

Persons with disabilities continue to encounter multiple barriers that restrict their participation in education, employment, healthcare and community activities. Although disability rights legislation recognises equality and non-discrimination, the practical realisation of these rights remains influenced by social attitudes, institutional capacity and the availability of accessible facilities.

The difficulties experienced by men and women with disabilities are not necessarily identical. Women may face additional restrictions arising from gender-based discrimination, domestic responsibilities, limited financial autonomy and social expectations concerning marriage and family life. In certain circumstances, families may prioritise the education and employment of male members while providing comparatively fewer opportunities to female members with disabilities.

Men with disabilities may experience pressure to fulfil conventional expectations of economic provision and family responsibility. Inadequate employment opportunities can therefore affect their social identity, confidence and economic independence. These differences indicate that disability policies must account for gender-specific circumstances.

Despite growing recognition of disability rights, district-level comparative research examining the experiences of specially abled men and women in Udhampur remains an important area for investigation. The present study addresses this research concern by examining the major dimensions of gender-based inequality and identifying measures for promoting inclusive development.

Disability research has increasingly moved away from the medical understanding of disability towards social, human rights and intersectional perspectives. These approaches provide a broader understanding of the relationship between individual impairments and the social structures that determine opportunities and participation.

Oliver (1990), through the social model of disability, argued that disability is produced not simply by an individual's impairment but also by social and environmental barriers. This perspective is particularly relevant to rural and geographically challenging areas, where inaccessible roads, buildings, educational institutions and transportation systems can restrict independent movement.

Shakespeare (2014) further examined the relationship between impairment, disability and social barriers, emphasising the need to understand disability through multiple interacting factors. His approach provides a useful theoretical foundation for comparing the experiences of men and women with disabilities.

The intersectional perspective developed by Crenshaw (1989) offers another important analytical framework. It explains how different forms of inequality interact rather than operate independently. Applied to disability studies, intersectionality demonstrates that women with disabilities may experience overlapping disadvantages associated with gender, disability, poverty and geographical marginalisation.

Garland-Thomson (2002) examined the importance of integrating disability into feminist analysis. Her work suggests that conventional discussions of gender inequality frequently overlook the experiences of women with disabilities. Consequently, disability-inclusive feminist research must examine how social expectations concerning femininity, physical appearance, marriage and motherhood influence the lives of disabled women.

The World Health Organization and World Bank (2011), in the *World Report on Disability*, identified environmental barriers, inadequate institutional support and limited access to rehabilitation as significant factors affecting persons with disabilities. The report also highlighted the importance of inclusive education, employment opportunities and accessible healthcare.

In the Indian context, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, represents an important legislative development. It recognises equality, accessibility, inclusive education, employment and social security as essential rights. Section 4 specifically addresses the rights of women and children with disabilities, demonstrating the legislative recognition of their particular vulnerabilities.

Although these studies provide substantial conceptual and policy foundations, there remains a need for geographically specific comparative investigations that examine how gender interacts with disability in districts such as Udhampur. The present research seeks to contribute to this area by integrating gender, disability and regional accessibility into a common analytical framework.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study draws upon three complementary theoretical perspectives.

2.1 Social Model of Disability

The social model, associated particularly with Oliver (1990), distinguishes between impairment and disability. Impairment refers to an individual's physical, sensory, intellectual or other functional condition, whereas disability arises substantially through social and environmental restrictions.

For example, a person using a wheelchair may be capable of pursuing higher education, but the absence of ramps, accessible classrooms and suitable transportation can prevent educational participation. Therefore, the problem is not necessarily the individual's physical condition but the inaccessible environment.

2.2 Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality provides a framework for understanding how gender and disability interact with other social categories. A woman with a disability living in a remote village may experience different disadvantages from an urban woman with a disability or a rural man with a similar impairment.

The framework helps explain why gender-neutral disability policies may fail to address the particular circumstances of women who experience restrictions arising from both disability and patriarchal social structures.

2.3 Capability Approach

Sen's (1999) capability approach emphasises individuals' substantive freedom to achieve valuable functioning. Access to education, healthcare, employment and social participation should therefore be assessed not merely through the availability of services but through individuals' actual ability to utilise them.

This perspective is particularly useful for examining whether specially abled men and women in Udhampur possess genuine opportunities to make independent choices and participate in community life.

3. Research Methodology

The present paper adopts a descriptive, analytical and comparative research approach. It examines gender-based disparities among specially abled men and women in Udhampur District through a combination of conceptual analysis, legislative review and available secondary statistical information.

- **Nature of the study:** The paper is primarily based on secondary information. It does not claim to represent the findings of a completed household survey or field investigation.
- **Sources of information:** The study draws upon Census of India 2011 disability tables, statistical publications of the Jammu and Kashmir Government, disability-related legislation, international reports and established academic literature.
- **Study area:** Udhampur District, Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Comparative dimensions:** Educational participation, employment, income, healthcare, rehabilitation, family support, mobility, social participation and awareness of legal rights.
- **Method of analysis:** Descriptive interpretation and gender-based comparative assessment of the available information.
- **Research limitation:** The available district-level statistical figures do not independently establish the extent of gender-based inequalities across all the dimensions examined. Recent primary data, disaggregated by sex, disability type, age, rural–urban residence and socio-economic background, would be necessary to establish these relationships empirically.

4. GENDER-BASED DISPARITIES AMONG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN UDHAMPUR DISTRICT

4.1 Educational Disparities

Education is a fundamental instrument of empowerment and social mobility. For persons with disabilities, educational attainment influences future employment opportunities, financial independence and participation in public life.

In Udhampur District, geographical conditions and uneven access to educational infrastructure may create additional challenges for students with disabilities. Individuals living in remote rural settlements may face difficulties reaching schools and colleges, particularly where public transportation is inadequate or educational buildings lack accessible facilities.

Girls with disabilities may experience additional restrictions arising from family expectations and concerns about independent mobility. In conservative social environments, families may be reluctant to allow daughters to travel long distances for education. The absence of female support staff, accessible sanitation facilities and appropriate learning resources may further discourage educational participation.

Boys with disabilities may also experience exclusion because of inaccessible classrooms, limited assistive technologies and inadequate specialised educational support. However, traditional expectations concerning male employment and financial responsibility may sometimes encourage families to prioritise boys' vocational education.

Gender-sensitive educational policies should therefore focus on accessible infrastructure, inclusive teaching practices, assistive technologies, scholarships and safe transportation facilities.

4.2 Employment and Economic Independence

Employment is closely associated with financial security, social recognition and individual autonomy. Persons with disabilities frequently encounter barriers in recruitment, workplace accessibility, professional training and career advancement.

For men with disabilities, unemployment or underemployment may create additional pressure because traditional social expectations frequently associate masculinity with earning capacity and household provision. Inadequate employment opportunities may affect their confidence, social identity and ability to establish independent households.

Women with disabilities may experience a combination of disability-related discrimination and gender-based employment inequality. Employers may hold stereotypical assumptions about their productivity, mobility or ability to perform professional responsibilities. Women may also have limited access to vocational training, financial resources and entrepreneurial opportunities.

In rural areas, agricultural employment and informal economic activities may provide limited opportunities for individuals with particular disabilities. The lack of accessible workplaces and suitable equipment can further restrict participation.

The implementation of disability-inclusive recruitment, workplace accommodation, vocational education and self-employment programmes is necessary to address these disparities.

4.3 Healthcare and Rehabilitation Accessibility

Healthcare accessibility is an essential component of disability inclusion. Persons with disabilities may require regular medical consultations, physiotherapy, assistive devices, psychological support and rehabilitation services.

In geographically dispersed areas of Udhampur, reaching healthcare institutions may involve considerable travel. Individuals living in remote settlements can experience difficulties because of transportation costs, inaccessible vehicles and limited availability of specialised healthcare facilities.

Women with disabilities may encounter additional barriers in accessing reproductive healthcare, maternal services and gender-sensitive medical consultations. Dependence on family members for transportation and financial assistance may reduce their privacy and decision-making autonomy.

Men with disabilities may also experience difficulties in obtaining rehabilitation and psychological support, particularly where social expectations discourage the expression of emotional vulnerability.

Healthcare institutions should provide accessible examination facilities, trained personnel, communication assistance and appropriate gender-sensitive services.

4.4 Family Support and Social Attitudes

Family support plays a major role in determining the quality of life of persons with disabilities. Families may provide financial assistance, emotional support, healthcare arrangements and help with daily activities.

However, family relationships can also reproduce gender-based inequalities. Women with disabilities may experience overprotection, restrictions on mobility and limited participation in household decisions. Their dependence may be interpreted as a reason to restrict education, employment or marriage-related choices.

Men with disabilities may experience social pressure to demonstrate independence despite requiring assistance. Such expectations can create emotional stress and discourage them from seeking support.

Social attitudes towards disability are therefore important determinants of inclusion. Awareness programmes should challenge stereotypes, promote dignity and recognise the decision-making capacity of persons with disabilities.

4.5 Mobility and Transportation

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Mobility is essential for accessing educational institutions, workplaces, healthcare facilities and community services. In districts with mountainous terrain and dispersed settlements, inaccessible roads and limited transportation can create significant barriers.

Women with disabilities may face additional restrictions because of safety concerns and gender-based limitations on independent travel. Their mobility may depend on the availability of family members who can accompany them.

Men with disabilities may experience similar physical barriers, although the social expectations governing their mobility and independence may differ.

Accessible public transportation, properly designed footpaths, ramps, handrails and barrier-free government buildings are essential for improving independent mobility.

4.6 Social Participation and Decision-Making

Social participation involves the ability to engage in cultural activities, religious gatherings, community organisations, sports, political processes and local decision-making.

Persons with disabilities may be excluded when public spaces and community events are not designed to accommodate different accessibility requirements.

Women with disabilities may experience comparatively greater restrictions in participation because of gender norms, household responsibilities and limited freedom of movement. Men with disabilities may encounter exclusion from activities that emphasise physical strength or conventional masculine roles.

Meaningful inclusion requires more than physical access. Persons with disabilities must be recognised as active participants in community decision-making and public institutions.

5. STATISTICAL PROFILE OF DISABILITY IN UDHAMPUR DISTRICT

Official statistical publications provide an important starting point for understanding the prevalence and distribution of disability in the district. According to the Jammu and Kashmir Government's *Regional Digest of Statistics 2024–25*, based on Census 2011, Udhampur recorded 11,515 persons with disabilities, representing approximately 2.07% of the district's total population.

The reported distribution by disability category is presented below.

Table 1: Distribution of Persons with Disabilities in Udhampur District (Census 2011)

Category of disability	Number of persons
Visual disability (totally blind)	1,971
Hearing disability (reported as totally dumb)	2,179
Speech disability	806
Movement disability	1,980
Intellectual disability (historical census classification)	721
Mental illness	508
Multiple disabilities	1,418
Other disabilities	1,932
Total	**11,515**

Source: Government of Jammu and Kashmir, Regional Digest of Statistics 2024–25, Table 1.06; Census of India 2011.

The figures demonstrate that disability in Udhampur encompasses a diverse range of functional conditions. Hearing-related and movement-related disabilities account for substantial numbers within the recorded population. These categories have different implications for accessibility, communication, employment and independent mobility.

The statistical profile also highlights the importance of distinguishing between different types of disabilities when developing public interventions. For instance, individuals with visual disabilities may require accessible information and assistive technologies, whereas those with hearing disabilities may require sign-language interpretation and appropriate communication support.

A significant limitation of the above table is that it does not provide the male–female distribution of each disability category. Consequently, these figures cannot independently establish the magnitude of gender-based disparities. A gender-disaggregated examination of Census Table C-20 would be necessary to calculate reliable comparative proportions.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SPECIALLY ABLED MEN AND WOMEN

The preceding discussion indicates that gender influences the manner in which disability-related barriers are experienced. The following table presents the principal dimensions of comparison. It identifies potential differences requiring investigation rather than claiming statistically established outcomes for the district.

Table 2: Comparative Dimensions of Gender-Based Disparities

Dimensions	Specially abled men	Specially abled women
Education	Barriers associated with accessibility and educational resources	Accessibility barriers combined with gender-related restrictions
Employment	Pressure to fulfil conventional earning responsibilities	Gender and disability-related discrimination in recruitment
Economic independence	Limited employment and livelihood opportunities	Greater potential dependence where financial resources are restricted
Healthcare	Difficulties accessing specialised treatment and rehabilitation	Additional concerns relating to reproductive and gender-sensitive healthcare
Mobility	Inaccessible transport and geographical barriers	Transport barriers combined with safety concerns and mobility restrictions
Family responsibilities	Social expectations concerning financial provision	Domestic responsibilities and restricted decision-making opportunities
Social participation	Exclusion from activities requiring physical accessibility	Possible exclusion arising from disability and patriarchal expectations
Legal awareness	Limited awareness of disability entitlements	Additional barriers in accessing information and institutional support

Source: Author's conceptual comparative framework based on disability and gender literature.

The comparative framework suggests that gender-based disparities are not necessarily expressed through identical experiences. Men and women may encounter common structural barriers, but their consequences can differ according to social expectations, family responsibilities and access to resources.

An important analytical distinction is between the availability of opportunities and the ability to utilise them. A vocational training programme may be formally available to both men and women, but inaccessible transportation, household responsibilities or family restrictions may prevent women from participating. Similarly, employment opportunities may exist for men with disabilities, but unsuitable workplace conditions can prevent them from obtaining or retaining employment.

Thus, equality in policy provision does not automatically guarantee equality in actual outcomes.

7. MAJOR FINDINGS AND ANALYTICAL OBSERVATIONS

Based on the secondary information and theoretical examination, the following observations emerge:

- **Disability is a multidimensional social issue.** The recorded disability population of Udhampur includes different disability categories, indicating the need for specialised and differentiated support mechanisms.
- **Gender creates additional dimensions of disadvantage.** Women with disabilities may encounter overlapping restrictions associated with gender expectations, economic dependence and disability-related discrimination.
- **Education is central to long-term inclusion.** Accessible educational infrastructure, assistive learning technologies and family support are important for improving educational participation.
- **Employment remains a critical area of intervention.** Both men and women require accessible workplaces, vocational training and fair recruitment practices. Women may additionally require interventions addressing gender discrimination and unequal access to economic resources.
- **Geographical accessibility influences service utilisation.** The distribution of settlements and transportation challenges in Udhampur may affect access to healthcare, education and

rehabilitation, particularly among rural residents.

- **Family attitudes influence individual autonomy.** Overprotection and restrictive social expectations can limit the ability of persons with disabilities to make independent decisions.
- **Gender-disaggregated information is required.** Available aggregate statistics do not adequately establish the comparative socio-economic conditions of disabled men and women. Further empirical investigation is necessary.

These observations should be interpreted as analytical findings from secondary evidence and conceptual assessment, not as results of a primary household survey.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Reducing gender-based disparities among persons with disabilities requires coordinated action by government institutions, educational organisations, healthcare providers, civil society and local communities.

8.1 Promotion of Gender-Inclusive Education

Educational institutions in Udhampur should strengthen inclusive education through accessible classrooms, ramps, appropriate sanitation facilities, assistive technologies and trained teaching personnel. Special attention should be given to girls with disabilities from rural and economically disadvantaged households.

Scholarships, transportation assistance and academic counselling can improve educational continuity and reduce the risk of exclusion.

8.2 Strengthening Employment Opportunities

Government departments and private organisations should promote equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Vocational training programmes should be designed according to different disability requirements and local economic opportunities.

Special initiatives should encourage women with disabilities to participate in entrepreneurship, self-employment, digital occupations and skill-development programmes. Financial literacy and access to institutional credit can strengthen their economic independence.

8.3 Improvement in Healthcare Services

Healthcare facilities should incorporate disability-accessible infrastructure and gender-sensitive service delivery. Regular medical camps, rehabilitation services and awareness programmes should be organised in rural and remote areas.

Women with disabilities should receive appropriate reproductive healthcare, counselling and confidential medical services. Healthcare personnel should be trained to communicate respectfully and recognise the autonomy of persons with disabilities.

8.4 Development of Accessible Infrastructure

Accessibility should be incorporated into the planning of public buildings, educational institutions, transportation systems, hospitals and community facilities.

In geographically challenging areas of Udhampur, accessible transportation and local service-delivery arrangements are particularly important. Public infrastructure should accommodate individuals with mobility, visual, hearing and other disabilities.

8.5 Awareness and Sensitisation Programmes

Community-level awareness programmes should challenge discriminatory attitudes and misconceptions concerning disability. Panchayati Raj Institutions, educational institutions, women's organisations and community groups can contribute to creating inclusive environments.

Such programmes should involve persons with disabilities as resource persons and decision-makers rather than treating them merely as beneficiaries.

8.6 Effective Implementation of Disability Rights Legislation

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, provides an important legal foundation for equality and inclusion. Section 3 addresses equality and non-discrimination, while Section 4 specifically recognises the rights of women and children with disabilities. Sections 16–20 address educational and employment-related responsibilities.

District-level authorities should strengthen awareness of disability entitlements, improve access to disability certification, facilitate social security benefits and establish effective grievance-redressal mechanisms.

8.7 Gender-Disaggregated District-Level Research

A systematic district-level database should record information on disability according to sex, age,

disability category, educational attainment, employment status, income, marital status and rural–urban residence. Such information would help identify the specific needs of women and men with disabilities and support evidence-based policy decisions.

9. CONCLUSION

Gender-based disparities among persons with disabilities represent an important dimension of social inequality that requires greater academic and policy attention. The experiences of specially abled men and women are shaped not only by their individual impairments but also by social expectations, economic opportunities, family relationships and institutional accessibility.

The examination of Udhampur District demonstrates the relevance of considering geographical and socio-cultural conditions when understanding disability-related exclusion. The Census 2011-based statistical information records 11,515 persons with disabilities in the district, representing approximately 2.07% of its population. However, aggregate disability figures cannot adequately explain the differences in educational attainment, employment participation, healthcare access and social autonomy between men and women.

Women with disabilities may experience additional disadvantages arising from the intersection of gender discrimination, restricted mobility, unequal economic opportunities and traditional family expectations. Men with disabilities also encounter significant challenges, particularly concerning employment, financial independence and social expectations associated with masculinity. These differences demonstrate that disability-related interventions must be responsive to gender-specific circumstances.

The study emphasises the importance of combining the social model of disability with intersectionality and the capability approach. These perspectives highlight that meaningful inclusion requires more than formal equality or the availability of welfare schemes. Individuals must possess genuine opportunities to exercise their rights, make independent decisions and participate in social and economic activities.

For Udhampur District, particular attention should be given to accessible infrastructure, inclusive educational opportunities, employment generation, community-based rehabilitation and gender-sensitive healthcare. Strengthening local institutions and involving persons with disabilities in policy formulation can contribute to more effective implementation of disability rights.

Further empirical research involving specially abled men and women from rural and urban areas of Udhampur is necessary to establish the extent of gender-based disparities through measurable indicators. Such research would provide a stronger evidence base for developing district-specific interventions and promoting a more equitable and inclusive society.

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