

Models of Employment for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in India

Abstract: Employment is both a need as well as the right to work for an individual. Persons with intellectual disabilities experience many barriers or challenges to secure and retain a stable remunerative job. The field of disability rehabilitation has minimally attempted to showcase or record appropriate models of employment and their ability to perform when given an opportunity. This theoretical article attempts to outline the relative merits, demerits, problems, issues, challenges, and limitations involved in the various attempts to their employment in India. If there are sentiment-loaded opinions that such persons are incapable and, therefore, not to be burdened with work, others describe them as unexploited human capital with the right to work that has to be identified and respected. Each approach is defined, explained, illustrated, and discussed by focusing on the targeted persons with intellectual disabilities.

Running Title: Employment for persons with intellectual disabilities

Keywords: Sheltered, Competitive and Open Employment - Work Behavior - Corporate Social Responsibility

Intellectual disability (ID) involves problems with general mental abilities that affect three things. Their intellectual functioning level (measured as intelligence quotient or IQ) is below 70-75. They have significant limitations in adaptive skills—the basic conceptual, social, and practical skills needed for everyday life. The condition begins before age 18 and affects about one percent of the general population. Their severity levels vary from mild, moderate, severe and profound. ID is not a disease and condition to be cured. Early diagnosis and intervention can improve adaptive functioning in childhood and adult life. Persons with intellectual disability (PID) show everyday problems in attention-concentration, memory, thinking, judgment, and problem-solving. They have difficulties in interacting socially, may need supervision or assistance for a living [1-2].

Employment rates for PID is lower than those with other types of disabilities. Many of them are under-employed or unemployed. Even if employed, they work for limited work hours and are paid lower wages. They require added support services. The help of family members cannot be avoided or ignored. Caregivers often choose the jobs for them [3]. They do not have many options to choose. A high level of job customization (including job carving, job sharing, and job creation) is required to suit their individual needs. Closure or change of jobs is frequent due to their alleged shortcomings or because their job was short and finished. Transitioning from home or school to employment is necessary [4-5]. More than owing to their inherent shortcomings, the poor knowledge of employers and negative attitudes of coworkers is a common reason for their job loss [6]. Despite these challenges, employment is a key element to ensure rights and quality of life, reduce poverty, enable social supports, or promote inclusion and economic participation in their everyday lives [7]. Their right to work is enshrined in Articles 41 & 42 of the Indian Constitution for one all.

There are dire consequences of having to share the burden of unemployed and dependent PID. The adverse effects on the economy by an unused human capital can be ill-afforded in a developing economy. The advantages of having a job for them are increased income, better standard of living, improved independence, well-being, mental health, quality of life, meaning for life, sense of accomplishment, social-self worth, feeling of being valued and increased social status. Public opinion is typically against employment for PIDs [8]. Some view that employing such persons needs more mentoring or monitoring, negatively impact the image of a workplace, create more accidents and safety problems, increase absenteeism, lower productivity, and show trouble getting along with coworkers [9].

A typical Work Support Profile (or work behavior) of PIDs typically cover aspects like readiness or willingness to work, obeying workplace rules, effective communication, taking responsibility, showing accountability, professionalism, trust and mutual respect or interpersonal relationships with colleagues. Other expected or desirable work behaviors are punctuality, regularity, speed, persistence or perseverance at work. Added qualities like spontaneously seeking for more work, reporting finished work, using safety measures, acceptance of authority figures, and team work are welcome. By contrast, some behaviors not expected in the workplace are thefts, lying, having extended breaks, avoiding or delaying work, taking credit for others work, verbal harassment or abuse, violence, and doing non-office related work. Evidence shows that employees with ID show most of the desired qualities. They have lower rates of turnover [10-11].

The everyday work experiences for PID differ across nations. A World Bank Report released in 2007 states that the employment rate of disabled people (not PID alone) has actually fallen from 42.7% in 1991 to 37.6 % in 2002 [12]. Available snapshot of employment rates of PID in the US is 44% for the age group 21-64 compared to 83% for adults without disabilities [13]. These figures are further down following the pandemic

across continents [14-15]. Figures are unavailable on employment rates on PIDs from India [16]. Statistics cannot tell the whole story [17]. In advanced countries, the well-being, independence, life experience, self-esteem, and life satisfaction of PIDs are likely to be high.

The common workplace experiences of PIDs are interpersonal conflict, gossip, bullying, victimization, communication problems, performance issues, poor job fit, discrimination, harassment, low motivation, and job satisfaction [18-19]. A crucial question is whether PIDs need to be employed at all? These persons are part of a social capital that cannot be ignored [20]. Several available employment models are recommended, such as contractual, interning, or apprenticeship, full-time or part-time competitive employment, train-and-place model, sheltered, supported, customized, group and self-employment. They are also classified as a charity, religious or moral model, medical model, social model, economic model, and the rights-based model, respectively [21].

The traditional medical model promotes a **train-place scheme** for rehabilitation. In this practice, PIDs are carefully assessed and trained on a range of job roles, duties, and responsibilities. They are then placed in the real world of work and under independent living situations. The training requires a few months or years. After that, they apply for a suitable job. By contrast, in the **place-train scheme**, the reverse is attempted. The placement is supported by on-the-job training [22]. The advantage of the latter scheme is that time lost on job search after a training period is saved. Attrition or extinction of learned job skills during the waiting period is prevented [23].

1. Government Jobs:

An ongoing debate is whether PIDs can be given a full-time government job or employment. Since its inception in the 1980s, the National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (NIEPID; Formerly the National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped) has undertaken several projects to substantiate that such persons are capable of regular remunerative work-albeit with minor alteration or accommodation in the job entry or work conditions. For example, some jobs identified in Indian Railways include that of peon, messenger, cleaner, gardening assistant, waiting or retiring room attendants, servers, call-boy, and khalasi in workshops. Other jobs identified outside government service, include packers, orderlies, sweepers, poultry-farm or sericulture assistants, bee-keepers, or other assistant level activities [24-25].

After enacting the Right of Persons with Disabilities Act (2017), the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Government of India, notified some posts for persons with autism and learning disabilities-but none for PIDs. This was done by adding one percent to the earlier three percent reservation quota for low vision and blindness, deaf and hard of hearing, and locomotor disability. Persons with multiple disabilities are subsumed under the category of ID. There are far too many for a slice of the cake. The PIDs are likely to lose in this count. The rules for implementing these mandates on job reservations for PID is unclear. The negative attitudinal barriers keep them out of the ambit for employment in government sectors [26-27].

The Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India, is the nodal hub to facilitate economic rehabilitation. There are more than 950 Employment Exchanges including about 50 Special Employment Exchanges for the disabled, over 20 Vocational Rehabilitation Centres (VRC) to evaluate their capabilities, and sponsor them to prospective employers. What started in 1968 as setting up two VRC in Mumbai and Hyderabad with training on different trades, such as, electronics, electrical, general mechanic, radio & TV repair, commercial practice, air-conditioning & refrigeration, automobile, cutting and tailoring, computer applications, woodwork, chair canning, arts & crafts, screen printing, photography, metal trades, secretarial practice, and painting has largely left out PIDs. The VRCs are now re-named as National Services Centres for Differently Aabled. The Vadodara center caters exclusively to women with disabilities [28]. The VRCs have not been proactive in catering to PIDs. Even if a few individuals with IDs were accommodated in the different trades of the ongoing training programs, they could not enter the open job markets with those testimonials like similar trained peers with other types of disabilities.

Instead of anchoring on job reservations for PIDs, recent initiatives provide pay and work opportunities under various government schemes. Under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005), meant to enhance the livelihood security of people living in rural areas by assuring at least a hundred days of wage employment in a year, a small percentage (6 %) of PIDs were included. The works typically assigned to such persons were supplying drinking water, plantation, bringing, carrying, dumping, shifting, transferring materials, digging or leveling, putting mortar in the trolley and fencing [29].

District Rural Development Authority (DRDA) is a central government scheme wherein funds are released to manage and oversee the implementation of different anti-poverty programs of the Ministry of Rural Development. The Council of Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) is an autonomous body set up by the Ministry of Rural Development to interface between the Government and NGOs seeking to improve the quality of life in India's rural areas. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) is another centrally sponsored scheme of the 1990s for the rural poor in the age group of 18-35

years to take up income-generating activities (self/wage employment). Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) and many such schemes are available for drawing funds or assistance for employment of disabled in the country. There is Government run Special Employment Exchanges for persons with disabilities. However, no empirical audit has been undertaken on how much these facilities and schemes have benefitted PIDs [30-31]. The NIEPID and its regional centers run a Diploma in Vocational Rehabilitation of Intellectually Disabled despite there being few takers for this course [32]

2. Traditional or Family-based Employment:

Familial entrepreneurship provides opportunities for skill development, social interaction, and participation in meaningful activity. Such arrangement respects and accommodates the true abilities of one another. While at work, the same rules apply to family members and other coworkers. All personal matters are kept personal, and business matters are kept business. The job duties and responsibilities of each worker are defined. Employment relationships, practices, and dynamics are surprisingly little explored in the literature and generally unobserved involving PIDs working in their family enterprises [33].

There are case instances of youth or adults with mild to moderate levels of intelligence who have been trained and placed in their family-based remunerative jobs. In one instance, a youth belonging to a rich family of corporate entrepreneurs in health, hospitality, beedi, and incense industry, was placed on a sinecure in their company. Another lad accompanied his father, a cloth merchant, during door-to-door sales of ladies' blouses or matching cloth in small towns and villages. A baker's son was placed on the sub-job of arranging pastries in a tray for window display. Another teenager was trained to assist his father in weighing, packing, or delivering goods in a retail store. Other examples of such persons employed as errands boys in a textile shop, for polishing works in goldsmithy, assistants in dairy or Agri farms, pet carers in kennels, or temple priests highlight this employment model. Attitudinal barriers often impede their employment in family-based occupations. Parents sometimes hesitate to employ the wards at an inferior or lower job level along with their other hired staff [34].

3. Open or Competitive Integrated Employment:

Mainstream or open-labor market employment occurs where the jobs are open to all people with or without disability. Barriers to open employment for PID include unstable labor market conditions, disrespect, under-valuing, and discrimination. In this scheme, minimum wages are assured. Securing a job in open employment and retaining them is a considerable challenge despite better pay and connections with the community. Most PIDs hold only entry-level jobs in retail, fast food, or office work. In the retail sector, are doing tasks like piling or stacking. In food services, they may wash dishes or deliver food. In office work, their routines typically include stamping, sorting and delivering mail, filing, and office coffee run. For example, Intel's Center for Economic Empowerment of Intellectually Challenged (CEEIC) has developed a specialized curriculum based on people with below-average intelligence needs and intellectual capabilities. Over hundreds of PIDs have been trained and placed. In-depth accounts of PIDs have shown that competitive employment builds invaluable life experiences, give them a place of work, and, above all, make them feel like an invaluable member of society, like everyone else [35].

4. Supported Employment:

The concept of supported employment emerged in the 1980s for PIDs. This consists of paid work near or at a standard competitive wage. They have the opportunity to work alongside and associate with the non-disabled workers. This is a method of integration than inclusion. In other words, they have to cope or work in the same circumstances or conditions as their nondisabled peers. There are different forms of supported employment. For *individual placements*, an officer or job coach identifies the potentially suitable job, provides on-job training and other assistance to the individual in the workplace. The goal is to enable the employee to work at a competitive rate, produce the same quality of goods or services as the non-disabled worker. The support is provided as long as the employee needs assistance to achieve satisfactory levels of quality and productivity. When this goal is achieved, the individual is paid the same wages or given similar opportunities for career advancement. Sometimes, a team of PIDs work on specific tasks alongside the supervisor. In other instances, they are converted into a mobile work crew to complete tasks like gardening or cleaning as a contractual job. The tasks may include counting, weighing things to be packed, putting items in boxes or bags, labelling, and tagging packages. Others may be given kitchen work like sorting or cutting vegetables or stacking fridges. In a plant nursery, they help in watering, pruning, weeding, or lawn-mowing [36-37].

5. Sheltered Employment:

This involves a setting or environment in which PIDs receive customized services and training to develop work-related skills and behaviors. It is a self-contained work site without integration with nondisabled workers.

Sheltered implies a safe and protected milieu [38]. Such facilities were started in the west by the church or charitable organizations solely for the uplift and spiritual redemption of the disabled (especially the blind) than for their vocational rehabilitation. Activities like knitting, weaving, chair caning, and music were used to engage these persons who were thought to be “unemployable” [39]. There is a growing trend to combine PIDs with peers affected by sensory or physical disabilities to train them in common trades like making files, paper bags, chalk-pieces, polishing, plastic molds, bookbinding, candle-making, and rolling incense sticks. Among the advantages of sheltered employment for PIDs are that it ensures safety, eases transportation, gives flexible work hours, retains their disability benefits, provides availability of personal supports and opportunities for relationship development [40-41].

Although positive on one side, such inclusions have few negative repercussions such as segregation, scapegoating, or separation of the PIDs as a minority sub-group [42]. Sheltered employment can sometimes become a trap for PIDs-particularly for those with a stronger skill potential. Ideally, there must be a gradual shift for any person from sheltered to supported and integrated employment to eventually competitive open employment over some time. Research opinion is divided on the impacts of the different types of employment on their quality of life [43]. Psychological well-being and job satisfaction are reported to be least for PIDs in sheltered rather than integrated employment [44], competitive employment [45], and community-based employment [46]. It is reported that PIDs in non-sheltered workplaces earn significantly more per week, work more hours, and cost less to serve than those in sheltered employment [47].

6. Self-Employment:

Self-employment is the state of working by oneself as a freelance or owner than as an employee. This approach involves getting paid by one's own work. When self-employed, one is in full control. They feel secure or empowered, can be passionate or more involved in their work, maybe homebound or within their community, and choose one's coworkers as well as by their time schedule [48]. Micro enterprises or small businesses with the scope of self-employment for PIDs is a strengths-based approach. They cover low-cost activities like preparation of necklaces, jewelry, or decorative gift items, painted wooden figures and letters, in-home child care services, pickups and deliveries, walking the pets, assistance in cooking, cleaning services, or other highly individualized person-centered or small-group oriented services [49-50]. The challenge of self-employment is greater for PIDs compared to their healthy peers or those with other types of disabilities. The income disparity is noticeable. Irregularity of income, not being able to work due to illness or injury, not being financially prepared for retirement, lack of training qualifications, and not being paid on time by a client are common experiences for self-employed PIDs [51-50].

7. Group Employment

This modified version of sheltered employment provides remuneration, involves parents and community, and fosters overall personality development in the trainees. The procedure involves forming parents associations or self-help groups, create awareness in the community on the capabilities and organize group employment for PIDs. In a project on “Employment leads persons with mental retardation towards independent living,” nearly 133 jobs were identified, including 50 in the private sector. The trades were available at various production centers screen printing, lamination, candle making, mushroom cultivation, weaving, and packaging [53].

8. Community-Based Approaches

The essence of this approach to the employment of PIDs is to house and train them within the community before facilitating their independent living and employment. According to one of these innovative approaches, as illustrated by Swayamkrushi-a voluntary organization rooted in Hyderabad, these persons are placed in group homes under the supervision of resident staff members and are trained in livelihood skills before returning to their respective families [54]. The homes appear like all other dwelling units in a locality without a name board. The residents organize their cooking, washing, and living, organize the family events, invite neighbors, exchange greetings, and interact as with any other family in the neighborhood. A highlight of the approach was the participation of the PIDs in a training program of the National Cadet Corps to receive training in camp craft, map reading, first-aid, and weapon training before culminating as participation during the Republic Day Parade. In a related study, non-professional resources available in the community were used to identify and place PIDs within their own community in trades from the rural sector [55-56].

9. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

This contemporary self-regulating business model helps a company to become socially accountable. CSR helps society, raises morale in the workplace and improves the brand image of the company. In recent years,

several Multi-National Companies have undertaken CSR for disabilities. The SAKSHAM project of Spark Minda Group, for example, attempts to increase accessibility for PIDs. The Mind Tree, an L&T company, has partnered with the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) to institute annual awards, create equal opportunities and an enabling work environment for such people. Other initiatives pioneered by HERO MOTO CORP, KHS Group, ANZ-India, Tech Mahindra Group, and others. Bank of America has been providing meaningful, supportive employment services for PIDs. Shakti Masala is another example of CSR practices for PIDs in a company that has grown from a humble trader of turmeric in Perundurai village, Erode District, Tamilnadu, during the 1970s [57].

There are intermittent news reports, such as Electronics Corporation of India Limited, a Government of India Enterprise located in Hyderabad, handed over a school bus for children with IDs, IDFC First Bank has partnered with an NGO to provide a monthly stipend for women with IDs, or Lemon Tree Hotels provide comprehensive education, vocational training and work opportunities for PIDs under their project titled MUSKAN. Big Bazaar of Future Group, in coordination with Mysore District Parents Association for Empowering Developmentally Disabled (MDPAED) launched an AUTISM QUIET HOUR for such persons to enjoy a hassle-free shopping experience in one of their retail outlets. CSR initiatives have sponsored other activities like a SPECIAL CRICKET TOURNAMENT termed as Corporate United Premier League (CUPL) with five players with autism in each team. The Association has successfully roped in 6-8 companies or business units, under their unique projects titled Sadhya, Kuteer, and Swayam, to employ around 30 PIDs periodically mentored or monitored by a specially qualified person tutor. The special employees are treated on par with other regular employees. Rather than pity and sympathy, moved by recognition of human rights, the corporates need to notify an Equal Opportunity Policy, particularly for PIDs. There is skepticism about CSR activities as merely greenwashing tactics. They convey false impressions, make unsubstantiated claims, deceive customers by providing misleading information about the cause for which they claim to work. In this entire discourse, CSR initiatives for PIDs have remained invisible and neglected compared to other types of disabilities [58-60].

Summary

PIDs need to work regardless of the type of employment provided at home, under sheltered, supported, or outside competitive, community-based jobs. The social service or philanthropy model advocates merely keeping them busy or engaged. There must be work to earn a living or contribute to the profits of the enterprise. The CSR Model for accommodating PIDs at their workstations needs to be stimulated. Whether or not affected by ID, every person is human capital or a social asset to be exploited to their fullest potential. The provision of equal opportunities, inclusion, non-discrimination, and accommodations are stressed.

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