



HEALTH PROBLEMS AND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE SERVICES FOR THE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN LAHORE.

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ABSTRACT... Objectives: This study aims to explore the major health problems of persons with disabilities, to see the difference between the health problems of persons with mild to moderate and severe to profound disabilities, and highlight the problems. **Study Design:** Quantitative Study. **Setting:** University of the Punjab, Lahore. **Period:** 09 months from 15 March 2018 to 14 Dec 2018. **Material & Methods:** The study included a quantitative survey conducted with interviews of 100 persons with different disabilities (50 mild to moderate disabilities, 50 severe to profound disabilities) selected by applying convenient sampling method. A questionnaire was used for the data collection. The questionnaire comprised of three parts: first part was about demographics, the second part consisted of items related to the health problems and third part consisted of items related to the access to health care services. Non-parametric statistical analysis was used for the data analysis. Comparison between persons with mild to moderate and severe to profound disabilities was made. **Results:** Results showed that persons with severe to profound disabilities generally experienced more health problems and problems in accessing health care services as compared to persons with mild to moderate disabilities. **Conclusion:** The study concluded that persons with disabilities experience physical, attitudinal and communication problems while accessing health services.

Key words: Access, Health Problems, Health Care, Mild Disabilities, Severe Disabilities.

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INTRODUCTION

Disability is an umbrella term that includes impairments, limitations, and restrictions as described by the WHO as a part of international classification system.¹ People with disabilities are classified into four major categories i.e., hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disabilities and intellectual disabilities.² Health is major aspect of our life. The World Health Organization defines health as “a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”^{1,3}

In Pakistan provision of health care services is responsibility of the government. Today, the doctor patient population ratio stands at 1: 997, dentist 1: 10658 and hospital bed 1:1584. While national health infrastructure comprises of 1201 hospitals, Basic health units 5518, Rural Health Centers 683, Dispensaries 5802, Maternity &

Child Health Centers 731 and TB centers 347, and the total availability of beds in these health facilities is estimated at 123394. To provide health facilities to general population government has been spending 0.5 to 0.8% of its GDP over the last ten years. In fiscal year 2017-18 a separate amount of 384.54 billion has allocated to the health department.⁴ So far, separate quota has not been allocated for persons with disabilities though they account for 10% (WHO, 1998) of our population. Whereas, globally over a billion, (15 percent) of the world's population is with some type of disability.⁵

People with disabilities have the greater general health care needs than everyone else, including the need of access to mainstream health care services. Disability does not accompany always with some health problem. However, persons with disabilities are at a greater risk of getting

health problems due to their certain physical and psychological conditions.⁶ The number of persons living with disabilities is growing as a result of factors such as population increase, ageing, and medical advances that preserve and prolong life. Hence, persons with disabilities may have greater health needs than the general population (Inclusive health services report, 2018). There are certain disabilities which are associated with certain health conditions most prominently in case of intellectual disability, musculoskeletal problems and cerebral palsy. Article 25 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) reinforces the right of persons with disabilities to attain the highest standard of health care, without discrimination.⁷ This study explores the major health problems of persons with major and minor disabilities and nature of problems they experience in accessing the health services in our social context.

The study will have impact on the quality of health care of persons with disabilities by highlighting the problems they are facing in accessing health facilities in their locality. The study will sensitize the society towards the health needs of the persons with mild, severe and profound disabilities and hence the awareness will be raised in the local communities and among policy makers. The study will add in the body of knowledge regarding persons with disabilities health problems and facilities available to address these problems.

1. To identify the major health problems of persons with disabilities.
2. To explore the problems faced by the persons with disabilities in accessing health care services.
3. To see the difference between the health problems of persons with mild to moderate and severe to profound disabilities.
4. To highlight the general health care services provided by the Government to the persons with disabilities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Present study was conducted on health problems and access to health care services by the persons with disabilities. Researchers used descriptive

research design to conduct the study.

A survey was conducted to collect the data. A questionnaire was developed to collect the data. The questionnaire was comprised of three parts: first part was related to demographics, 2nd was related with major health problems faced by the persons with disabilities and third part was related with the access to health care services. The respondents were provided two options to respond i.e., Yes, No against each item. The reliability of the questionnaire was (.81) estimated with the help of Cronbach alpha formula. The targeted population of the study consisted of persons with disabilities living in the urban areas of Lahore visiting public sector hospital in their vicinity from the age group of 20 to 45. A total number of 100 persons with different disabilities (50 with mild to moderate, 50 with severe to profound) who has or had the certain health problems in the period of last two years of their life and had consulted Government sector hospital during their period of illness were taken as sample of the study. The study duration was 09 months from 15 March 2018 to 14 Dec 2018. Only those persons were taken as sample who were conveniently available for the researchers and willing to be part of the study. The researchers personally met with every respondent and fill up the questionnaires. In case of persons with hearing impairment, the researchers used sign language to explain the questions and for blind persons researchers read out loudly the questionnaires for them. Collected data were subjected to quantitative analysis by using SPSS. Frequency of the responses along with their percentages was calculated and Mann-Whitney test was performed to see the difference between the health problems of persons with mild and severe disabilities.

RESULTS

The above table shows the sample characteristics. 50% of the sample was with mild to moderate and 50% was with severe to profound disabilities. Whereas 53 % of the sample was male and 47% was female.

The above table shows that the prevalence of

headache, hypertension, anemia, anxiety and muscle problems, diabetes, depression, upper respiratory tract infection are common health problems of persons with disabilities.

The above table shows that according to majority of the persons with disabilities, the facility of hospital services is available for them in hospitals catering general population. No separate purpose build area for them in hospital vicinity, only ramps are available in the hospitals and the buildings are not completely barrier free. The major health services which the government is providing are emergency facility, out - door facility, ambulance, diagnostic testing and treatment, food for

hospitalized patients and accommodation facility.

They are also facing problems with the attitude of para medical staff. The respondents also mentioned that majority of the nursing staff have only primary level of knowledge of disability. A good number of respondents said that the psychological environment of the hospitals is not good. More than half of the respondents responded that they also faced communication problems while dealing with medical staff in the hospital. Moreover, all of the persons with disabilities are not being provided with the facility of health insurance.

Sr. No			Frequency	%
1	Gender	Male	53	53
		Female	47	47
3	Profession	Professional	59	59
		Student	41	41
5	Category of Impairment	Severe to profound	50	50
		Mild to moderate	50	50

Table-I. Summary Table of demographics of the respondents.

Sr. No.	Name of Health Problem	Persons with Severe to Profound Disabilities N=50	Persons With Mild to Moderate Disabilities N=50
	Anemia	45	30
	Headache	45	30
	Anxiety	34	15
	Diabetes	13	3
	Musculoskeletal problems		5
	Vitamin deficiency	12	10
	Hypertension	12	10
	Asthma	09	Nil
	Fatigue	10	Nil
	Depression	07	Nil
	Headache	15	10
	Upper respiratory tract infections	07	03
	Obesity	05	01
	Hepatitis	05	03
	Thyroid Problem	05	05
	Tuberculosis	Nil	Nil
	Seizures	Nil	Nil

Table-II. Prevalence of health problems in persons with mild to moderate and severe to profound disabilities.

Sr.	Questions	Yes %	No %
1	Is facility of hospital available to you?	62	38
2	Are ramps available at the entry of the hospital building?	83	17
3	Are the ramps available in the entire building of hospital?	75	25
4	Is the lift facility available in the hospital?	65	35
5	Is the building of hospital barrier free?	26	74
6	Is the hospital parking have enough space for parking vehicles?	61	39
7	Do the hospital administrations provide you accommodation?	64	36
8	Is the physical environment of hospital good?	25	75
9	Is the psychological environment of hospital good?	38	62
10	Is the attitude of hospital administration positive towards you?	45	55
11	Is the mechanism of getting health facilities is difficult for the patient?	68	32
12	Does the hospital entertain you in emergency?	78	22
13	Do the emergency staff understand your problem easily?	32	68
14	Is the emergency facility provided free of cost?	53	47
15	Are the doctors always available to you?	52	48
16	Do the doctors have knowledge of disability?	85	15
17	Do the paramedical staff have knowledge of disability?	82	18
18	Do you face difficulty in scheduling appointment from physicians?	62	38
19	Does the specialist doctors give you proper time?	72	28
20	Does the physician deal you with respect?	55	45
21	Do the overall attitude of physicians empathetic with you?	49	51
22	Does the Para-medical staff deal you with respect and patience?	63	37
23	Does the Para-medical staff show personal concern to provide to relief ?	41	59
24	Does the Para-medical staff understand your communication?	34	66
25	Are all the medicines available in market near to hospital or your home?	34	66
26	Is every type of medicine in your purchase power?	27	73
27	Are the medicines available in market same as prescribed by the doctors?	85	15
28	Is the medical facility costly for you?	61	39
29	Is the public transport facility available to visit the hospital?	61	39
30	Do the counselling facility is available for you in hospital	0	100
31	Are you being provided with the services of health insurance by Government?	0	100

Table-III. Frequency of the responses on access of health care services obtained from persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Type of Disability	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney Z	
Mild to moderate disabilities	50	39.92	Z	-3.573
Severe to profound Disabilities	50	60.08	Sig	.000
Total	100			

Table-IV. Mann-Whitney test was performed to compare the prevalence of health problems between persons with minor and major disabilities.

The above table shows that persons with severe to profound disabilities are facing more problems in accessing health facilities as compared to persons with mild to moderate disabilities (Mean Mild to moderate disabilities = 39.92, and Mean of severe to profound disabilities = 60.08, Sig = .000).

DISCUSSION

Disability is an evolving field within public health

in Pakistan. People with disabilities account for more than 10% of the Pakistan population, but most of their health needs remain unmet due to less access to health facilities.^{1,8} The persons with severe to profound disabilities are suffering with the same health problems which the persons with mild to moderate disabilities are suffering but prevalence and magnitude of health problems are higher among persons with severe to profound

disabilities as shown in our study. These findings are inline with the study conducted by Karahn, Walker & Correa(2015).⁹ Another finding of the study showing that the various types of health impairments such as musculoskeletal problems, anemia, obesity and fatigue, menstrual problems (only in females)¹⁰, seizure disorders and depression are more common in persons with major disabilities is in conformity with the some of international research studies.^{11,12,13}

The major health care services available for persons with disabilities in the Government hospitals of Lahore are qualified Doctors, nurses, para-medics and hospitals but they are insufficient to meet health needs of persons with disabilities.¹⁴ This research also showed that major barriers to get health services are accessibility, physical, communication and attitudinal barriers. The study conducted by Daras, Konstantinos, et al(2018) has same findings.¹⁵ According Iftikhar, Alamgir, Maqbool, Rehan & Akhtar (2019) healthcare providers hold poor knowledge and, often incorrect, notions about persons with disabilities.^{16,17} Due to incorrect presumptions, healthcare providers have been shown not to communicate clearly with PWDs regarding their disease and its prevention.^{18,19,20,21,22} Our study has highlighted non-existence of health insurance policy for persons with disabilities while it is in practice in developed and some underdeveloped countries.¹⁹ Thus our study has drawn attention of health policy makers to look into this ever increasing need of healthcare services for the persons with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

Our study concludes that persons with disabilities are suffering from lot of health problems and difficulties in access to health care services which is further compounded by physical, attitudinal and communication factors. Thus highlighting urgent need to improve all areas of health care for patients with disabilities in the future health programs of the government. The physical infrastructure need to be barrier free and both medical and para-medical staff should be trained to use alternative modes of communication for the better understanding of the health problems

of persons with disabilities e.g., sign language, picture exchange communication systems etc. Moreover, the rehabilitation professionals should extend their services into community based fitness centers too. Finally, health insurance services should be offered to all persons with disabilities.




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AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTION DECLARATION

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2	Maimonna Ashraf	Data collection, Literature review.	
3	Uzair-ul-Hassan	Final review of paper, proof reading.	
4	Naila Yasmeen	Final review of paper and editing.	