

Research Article

Exploring the Socio-Economic Challenges and Daily Life of Persons with Disabilities Insights from Mehendiganj Upazila: A Case Study Approach

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of persons with disabilities in Mehendiganj, Barisal, Bangladesh. This study uses a qualitative approach, including in-depth, case-based interviews to gather detailed insights from a group of participants who were persons with disabilities. Key findings of this research shows that people with disabilities in a particular region encounter with significant barriers, including limited access to financial resources, inadequate access to education and vocational training, and a breakdown of society. A lack of infrastructure and support services exacerbates these challenges. Despite of the challenges, the research reflects the core strength and knowledge of the participants in different fields. Many of them strongly desire to overcome adversity and pursue aspirations of life through better education, employment opportunities, and social acceptance. The research also replicates the importance of the role of family support and social networks in reducing some of the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities. This research highlights the insistent need for comprehensive policies designed to address the unique needs of person with disabilities. Recommendations include developing vocational and educational programs addressing the need, improving access to public services based on the requirements, and social awareness programs to combat discrimination and creating a social acceptance. This study will provide a valuable insight for the policymakers, social activists and development professionals to create an inclusive and supportive environment for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

Keywords

Socio-Economic Impact, Daily Life Experiences, Persons with Disabilities, Case Study, Mehendiganj Area, Challenges and Opportunities

Introduction

Persons with disabilities represent a significant portion of the global population, and their socio-economic conditions and daily life experiences are influenced by numerous factors.

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The Mehendiganj area, understanding these aspects is vital for the creation of effective policies and interventions. Globally, approximately 15% of the population lives with some form of disability (World Health Organization, 2024). In low- and middle-income countries, Persons with disabilities are more likely to face severe socio-economic disadvantages. For instance, a recent report indicates that 70% of persons with disabilities in developing regions experience poverty compared to 40% of those without disabilities (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). This disparity is often exacerbated by barriers to accessing education, employment, and healthcare services. In Mehendiganj upazila, similar patterns are observed. Approximately 65% of Persons with disabilities report difficulties in accessing education and vocational training, while 50% face significant barriers to employment (International Labour Organization, 2023). These challenges are further compounded by infrastructural deficiencies and limited support services, which affect the daily lives of Persons with disabilities. Recent studies have shown that around 55% of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in this region struggle with inadequate healthcare access, resulting in poorer health outcomes and reduced quality of life (Groce et al., 2022). Understanding these statistics and the lived experiences behind them is crucial for designing targeted interventions. This case study employs a qualitative approach to delve into the daily life and socio-economic challenges of Persons with disabilities in Mehendiganj upazila, aiming to provide actionable insights for improving their inclusion and support.

The findings from this study are intended to inform policy-makers, practitioners, and advocates working towards disability inclusion and empowerment.

Methods

This study utilized a qualitative approach, and the case study methods were used to explore the experiences of people with disabilities in Mehendiganj, Barisal, Bangladesh. A total of 10 case studies were selected using purposeful sampling to establish the various characteristics of different disabilities and the challenges they face. In each case study, in-depth interviews were conducted with persons with disabilities, supplemented by interviews with their caregivers and local service providers to gain a holistic view of support structures and barriers. The data collection process was conducted in the local language and the interviews were recorded, documented, and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns and themes across the 10 case studies (5 male and 5 female), reflecting participants' experiences and the effectiveness of current support mechanisms. Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent and ensuring confidentiality, taking care not to expose participants' vulnerabilities.

Results

In the 10 case studies from Mehendiganj Upazila involving individuals aged 16 to 50 years, all participants had physical disabilities and major challenges. There were many occupations such as sewing, fishing, small businesses, and agriculture locally available but they still faced economic problems, lack of education, and social exclusion due to lack of access. Access to essential services, health care, and support is limited or non-existent. Despite of these difficulties, they showed a remarkable strength and ability to improve the situation. More support is needed, including financial aid, vocational training, and better health and social services, to improve economic and social inclusion. These case studies highlight the urgent need to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities in Mehendiganj.

Case Study 1:

A man who has been physically disabled since birth has faced numerous challenges, including limited education and opportunities. His family's situation was better when his father was alive, but after his father's death in 2017, he faced a lot of financial and life problems. Currently lives with his wife and two children in a small house built by his brother. The man faces financial struggles and often feels socially isolated due to his disability and lack of education. Despite managing daily activities such as bathing and dressing individually, the family often struggles to provide food on a daily basis and sometimes, he has to rely on the kindness of others. Currently, he has a small business selling bananas, but he can't afford to shop, and his income is low. He wants to set up a grocery store to improve his family's life. He is not aware of training and awareness sessions organized by NGOs and government organizations, nor has he seen training courses or intensive training. He also doesn't know about skill development opportunities, income-generating activities, or disaster preparedness programs. He makes independent decisions without asking for advice from his wife or others. Not being informed about the status of disabled people and the services available, he has been able to access public benefits through the Shoborno card, but he is not aware of other support available to him. Economic disadvantage, physical disability, and lack of education are major barriers related to problems in accessing resources and managing health. Economic disadvantage limits access to healthcare, nutritious food, and increases stress, all of which worsen health. Physical disability restricts mobility, increases medical costs, and can lead to dependence on caregivers, making health management harder. Lack of education results in poor health literacy and decision-making, making it difficult to understand and manage medical needs. Together, these barriers make accessing resources and managing health more

challenging. It is difficult for him to pay for the treatment because his physical condition requires constant treatment which he cannot afford. Although his family offers some emotional and practical support, financial constraints limit the amount of help they can provide. His dream is to set up a grocery store and build a house for his family, hoping to create a source of income and improve their lives.

Case Study 2:

An 18-year-old guy lives in the tranquil village of Chorhakarta, Chanpur, Mehendiganj, despite having a physical impairment that affects his left leg. He is still committed to creating a better future for himself and his family despite the obstacles, which include the death of his father and the trials of everyday existence. He loves fishing and relies on it for a small income, so every morning, he goes to the river. However, he faces challenges due to the lack of proper facilities for people with disabilities, which makes traveling to school difficult. Balancing his daily commute with his responsibilities as a student is a constant struggle for him. Despite receiving kind treatment from his community, he sometimes faces avoidance and criticism, which makes him feel alone and sets him apart from his classmates. His family was wealthy once, but the unrelenting power of river erosion took most of their land, leaving them with little but the will to rebuild. Despite these obstacles, he has received training from the Department of Community Development and NGOs, giving him the information and abilities that support his goals. He enjoys talking with his mother about their future and takes satisfaction in his capacity to make decisions on his own. Despite the obstacles, he maintains his optimism, thinking that he and other persons with disabilities may realize their aspirations if businesses are more inclusive and accessible. His financial worries are lessened by the government's Shuborno Card assistance, which frees him up to concentrate on his objectives. In the future, he wants to operate a grocery store. He believes this would provide him financial security and allow him to accumulate enough cash for him to someday construct his family a house or even flats. His journey serves as a monument to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of hardship, and he faces the future with hope and determination.

Case Study 3:

An 18-year-old girl from Mehendiganj, Barisal resident has a vision impairment that significantly affects day-to-day activities. She comes from a large family that includes her brother with a physical disability and her visually impaired father. Even with the family's difficulties, she remains committed to finding a way forward. She was first reared in Dhaka by her brother and his wife before moving back to her small rural community, where she now endures everyday struggles. She

is currently jobless and has no source of income. Malnutrition exacerbates her illness, impairing her general health and productivity, and her vision is so fuzzy that even simple tasks become difficult for her. Her ability to cook and manage various daily tasks reflects her strong sense of independence. However, she constantly faces financial difficulties that prevent her from accessing essential resources and therapies. Despite having only completed the fifth grade, she has a strong passion for sewing and enjoys spending time with animals, especially riding goats and cows. Unfortunately, her lack of resources limits her ability to continue pursuing these hobbies or turn them into potential sources of income. Sewing, rearing chickens and ducks, and betel nut cultivation are among the hobbies available in her village. But even though she has a financially secure family, she has never received any financial assistance from them. She has also not participated in any awareness-raising or training initiatives that might have assisted her in acquiring new skills or finding sources of revenue. Her problems are exacerbated by her ignorance about the rights of people with disabilities and the resources offered by both governmental and non-governmental organizations. She has trouble making decisions and lacks awareness of the resources that may help her, leaving her feeling helpless to take control of her life. She has not had enough food assistance or medical care which has made her physical and health problems worse. Still, her family is very important to her, providing the support and guidance she needs to go about her everyday life. She is driven and ambitious, and she has a great desire to improve her financial circumstances despite the numerous obstacles she must overcome. In the hopes of overcoming her obstacles and achieving financial security, she is resolute in her pursuit of investigating the range of income-generating alternatives in her neighborhood. Her desire to change her life shows a strong sense of inner strength and a desire to seize any possibilities that present themselves.

Case Study 4:

Living in Olania, Mehendiganj, Barisal, an eighteen-year-old guy manages his everyday life despite physical disabilities affecting his hand and leg. He lives with his parents and three brothers. As he continues upper secondary school in the arts stream, he maintains a solid academic performance with a GPA of 3.83 out of 4, enthusiastically participating in his studies and enjoying outdoor activities. His physical handicap has forced him to adapt creatively, and part of his daily routine involves doing things like dressing and eating with his left hand. He sometimes has trouble going out in public because of how other people react to his disability. He farms chickens to make ends meet, but he has trouble keeping proper financial records, which makes it hard to monitor his earnings. He still looks at other business options despite the difficulties, like starting a computer store or a small store, but he hasn't made

any firm moves in this direction yet. He resides in the same location as his family and relatives, and while he has never had official training, his parents do periodically provide financial support for his educational needs. His local store taught him basic computer skills, and he doesn't have access to possibilities for further growth. His mother doesn't participate in family issues very much; therefore, his father makes the majority of the decisions. This limits his engagement in family affairs. Even though he has a Shuborno card, which has certain advantages, he is unsure of the help that is accessible to him since he is unaware of the particular services or allowances that it gives. His lack of knowledge also encompasses other outside services and medical assistance, which he has not used, depriving him of further help that would improve his circumstances. In spite of these obstacles, he is upbeat and committed to making improvements in his life. His goals are to launch his own company, get work, and improve the lives of those with disabilities. He is motivated by a desire to help others going through similar struggles, and he finds strength in his family's encouragement to keep going after his objectives and get beyond the barriers that stand in his way.

Case Study 5:

A young lady from Chanpur Union, Mehendiganj Upazila, Barisal District, demonstrates resilience and determination in overcoming obstacles in her life despite a physical impairment affecting her left hand. She lives with her father, and her three married sisters. While she manages everyday activities and household chores independently, more difficult tasks can be a struggle. Currently, she is a third-year Bachelor of Arts student, deeply passionate about inspiring and educating others. Her dream is to become a teacher, but she envisions going further than that—she wants to start her own business by opening a computer store in her community. Although her first attempt at funding her education didn't work out, she remains determined to find a way to support herself. She is equally committed to using her own journey to uplift others, encouraging people with disabilities to pursue education and fight for their rights.

Her father makes all of the major decisions in the family, and she doesn't always have a say. Her family is supportive, but she has no special training or financial aid for health care. She must pay for her tuition and a disability allowance to finish her studies. The societal stigma associated with her impairment poses further difficulties, affecting her social connections and opportunities. Despite these obstacles, she remains optimistic and committed to achieving her goals. She is dedicated to helping others facing similar challenges and is motivated to overcome the social biases that have limited her prospects. She wants to empower people with disabilities by becoming a teacher and working with non-governmental organ-

izations. Her aim is to assist them in finding their own pathways to independence and education.

Case Study 6:

A sixteen-year-old girl from Olania, Mehendiganj Upazila, Barisal, lives in poverty with her parents and brother. She enthusiastically participates in regular domestic duties like cooking and washing despite her physical limitations. Due to a lack of assistance and financial difficulties, her schooling ended after the tenth grade leaving her with few opportunities to continue her education or learn new skills. Her family provides minimal support for her living needs, but their financial struggles limit her chances for personal development. She keeps up strong ties with her friends and family yet lacks a personal income and hasn't taken part in any training courses that would enable her to become financially independent. She does not personally possess any assets, even though her family has inherited land. Her wish to become self-sufficient and study tailoring is still unrealized because she hasn't had access to any training possibilities. She knows very little about the advantages of having her Shuborno Card, which is a handicap card, and she doesn't know much about the services and assistance that local government or non-governmental organizations offer. Her family makes most of the decisions, therefore she doesn't have much to say about what goes on in the house. She does not currently need any special therapies, despite having regular access to healthcare. Her family finds it challenging to continue funding her studies due to their financial strain. Currently, she envisions marrying and starting a family, as these seem to be her most practical options. Her circumstances serve as a stark reminder of the substantial obstacles that young people with disabilities must overcome in households that are financially tight. These obstacles are made worse by their restricted access to support services, education, and training. She might be able to overcome these limitations and go toward a future in which she is more powerful and autonomous if given the right support and chances.

Case Study 7:

In Uttar Olania, Mehendiganj, Barisal, a 36-year-old woman lives with her spouse and their two young children, aged two and six. She has a disability ID card (Shuborno Card) and her spouse is also physically disabled. She is a resilient person who makes a living by sewing and tailoring, despite these obstacles. A sewing machine provided by a local NGO has significantly enhanced her tailoring skills, allowing her to support her family. Apart from overseeing her domestic responsibilities, which encompass cooking and raising her kids, she also actively participates in her community by imparting sewing and tailoring skills to other women. Nonetheless, she continues to face difficulties due to her physical infirmity and

financial limitations. Her family is struggling financially, including her husband who finds it difficult to make ends meet because of his infirmity, and her father who is a poor farmer. She is a supportive member of a self-help group and gets assistance from her family and the neighborhood. She also asks the Department of Social Services for aid in running her home. Her mobility was impacted by a high fever when she was four years old, which led to the start of her impairment. She completed her studies through the ninth grade but had to quit after getting married. She attends to her therapy appointments, but because of her limited resources and the dearth of good treatment options in her area, she finds it difficult to get the care she needs. She faces financial difficulties, but she finds fulfillment in providing for her family through her tailoring business. She is aware of her alternatives for loans, but she is discouraged by the high interest rates. She is dependent on her family's assistance and has not obtained outside therapeutic services. Her tale demonstrates her tenacity and will to overcome the challenges she encounters. Her family's financial situation could improve with financial support to help her expand her tailoring business by investing in supplies and equipment. Her passion for sewing and community service is indicative of her desire to improve her family's future and her own.

Case Study 8:

In their modest home in Olania, Mehendiganj, a 23-year-old man resides with his 20-year-old wife, Moina. His older brother lives on the family land, although they both live separately. Since he was five years old, he has lived with a condition that has greatly limited his movement. Though he has trouble moving about, he nevertheless handles his everyday responsibilities on his own but frequently needs assistance from others. He has informed the Department of Social Services about his transportation challenges, but he has not yet obtained any assistive technology to improve his mobility. He owns a modest food store, but his revenues are constrained by his tiny investment. In order to increase revenue and diversify the merchandise in his shop, he hopes to increase his enterprise by going into goat farming. He is, nonetheless, ignorant of credit alternatives, the rights of people with disabilities, and outside instruction and direction. His mother in particular gives him a lot of support, which goes a long way toward ensuring his wellbeing. He pays a monthly rent of 500-1000 taka for his store space and serves as the family's main decision-maker. He doesn't need any extra medical assistance at the moment. His main objective is to ensure his son has a brighter future by making sure he receives an education and by strengthening his own financial security. By having access to investment possibilities and assistance equipment, he aims to become more independent and make a more meaningful contribution to his family's well-being. His narrative demonstrates a will to overcome obstacles to one's movement and

financial situation. He may improve his standard of living and strive towards a more successful future for himself and his family by taking care of his assistive device needs and offering assistance for business growth.

Case Study 9:

A young woman with a visual impairment from a remote town faces many obstacles. She depends on her family for support because her condition makes it hard for her to work or do her daily tasks. She lives with her parents and siblings and was forced to leave school early when her impairment became more noticeable. Though she struggles with vision she tries to manage her regular task. However, her major challenges were to avail access to education from the local area. In the locality, there was no facility available to provide education support to persons with disabilities like vision impairment.

Despite having a disability ID card (Shuborna Card) and receiving a small government fund, her physical limitations continue to make life difficult. Her family's financial situation is fragile, depending mainly on her brother's income as a daily laborer. She has no personal income or property, and her opportunities are limited by her lack of education and training. She is not well-informed about her rights or the services available for persons with disabilities, nor does she know about local programs that could help. The lack of healthcare support worsens her struggles.

In the future, she hopes to contribute more financially to her family, perhaps by starting a small business or engaging in other income-generating activities. However, this is a difficult goal to achieve due to her limited resources, lack of experience, and the challenges posed by her impairment. Her story highlights the importance of providing better access to healthcare, education, and vocational training for disabled individuals living in rural areas. With the right support, she could gain the skills and confidence needed to build a more secure and fulfilling future.

Case Study 10:

A 38-year-old man from Chanpur, Mehendiganj Upazila, Barisal, faces numerous challenges due to his physical impairment. He and his spouse have been together for eleven years and have a daughter who is nine years old and a boy who is four years old. His impairment significantly affects his everyday life and movement. His physical constraints forced him to resign from his former position as a teacher. He currently runs a cooperative fish farm, raises cows, and raises poultry. Despite his best efforts, his health condition causes him to suffer financially. Due to his anemia, he needs frequent blood transfusions, which come at a cost of about 1500 taka each. His financial strain is further increased by a loan of seventy thousand taka he took out. While he is capable of handling many

everyday activities on his own, such as eating, he requires assistance with dressing and using the restroom. He participates actively in a self-help organization that offers some community assistance for persons with disabilities. However, he believes that the resources and networks available locally for those with impairments are insufficient. His father gave him small piece of property, but it restricts his potential to further his farming endeavors. His main goal is to start a farm and use the cattle and poultry industries to better his financial status. To do this, he looks for instructions and directions to improve his farming methods and increase the scope of his agricultural endeavors. He is certain that he can overcome his physical limits and create a more sustainable living with the correct guidance and specialized expertise. His story provides an example of the tenacity and will of people with impairments who must overcome great obstacles. By tailoring training to his specific requirements, enhancing community support networks, and offering financial and medical support, we can help him get over hurdles and improve his quality of life. He and others in such circumstances may strive toward a more affluent and satisfying future for themselves and their families by concentrating on these areas.

Limitations

The research on persons with disabilities in Mehendiganj has several limitations, one of which is that it has a highly concentrated sample that may not accurately reflect larger populations or geographic areas. The findings may lack objectivity due to the subjectivity present in self-reported data and possible researcher bias. Furthermore, the study could not have included all relevant information on the accessibility and efficacy of outside support services, and it might not have adequately examined contextual elements such as regional cultural norms and budget constraints case studies' qualitative format restricts their capacity to be broadly applied, thus longitudinal and comparative studies are required to record long-term results and offer a more comprehensive picture of the difficulties experienced by persons with disabilities.

Recommendations

- Launch targeted awareness campaigns and training programs for both persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities. Focus on educating communities about disability rights, accessibility, and inclusion to reduce stigma and foster supportive environments.
- Improve the accessibility of healthcare, vocational training, and financial support services for persons with disabilities. Ensure that these services are well-publicized, easily reachable, and tailored to meet the specific needs of the disabled community.

- Develop and implement financial assistance programs, including grants and low-interest loans, specifically for persons with disabilities. Provide technical training and mentorship to help them start and sustain small businesses or engage in income-generating activities.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements to make public spaces, transportation, and buildings more accessible infrastructure for the person with disabilities. Provide assistive devices such as wheelchairs and prosthetics, and ensure they are available to those in need.
- Advocate for and contribute to the development of inclusive policies and legislation that address the needs of persons with disabilities. Ensure that these policies are effectively implemented and monitored for compliance.
- Implement regular follow-up and evaluation mechanisms to track the effectiveness of support programs and interventions. Adjust strategies based on feedback and changing needs to ensure ongoing improvement and relevance.
- Support educational institutions and employers in creating inclusive environments that accommodate persons with disabilities. Encourage the adoption of inclusive practices and provide incentives for organizations that employ or educate persons with disabilities.
- Provide legal support and advocacy services to help persons with disabilities understand and exercise their rights. Establish hotlines or support centers where they can receive guidance and assistance with legal matters related to disability.

Conclusion

The study on persons with disabilities in Mehendiganj reveals significant challenges and barriers faced by this population. The case studies highlight issues such as limited access to education and healthcare due to lack of resources and infrastructures, inadequate support systems, financial constraints, and insufficient awareness of rights and available services. Despite these difficulties, resilience and person with disabilities demonstrate their capacity to overcome adversity and strive for a better quality of life. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and inclusive strategies to address these challenges. Expanding and diversifying research efforts, enhancing disability awareness and training, improving accessibility to essential services, and providing financial and technical support are crucial steps. Additionally, creating robust local support networks, improving infrastructure, developing comprehensive policy frameworks, and facilitating access to legal and advocacy services are essential for fostering an inclusive environment. By implementing these recommendations, we can address the gaps identified in the research and work towards empowering persons with disabilities, enabling them to lead more independent, fulfilling lives. Creating an inclusive society that values and supports all individuals,

regardless of their physical abilities, is not only a moral imperative but also a necessary step toward achieving social equity and justice.

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