

Voc. Rehab.

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A MODEL IN EMPLOYMENT  
AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES  
IN INDIA

Mithu Alur



The  
Spastics  
Society  
of India

# REFERENCE



## A MODEL IN EMPLOYMENT AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES IN INDIA

*Mithu Alur*

To begin with, I'd like to draw your attention to the magnitude of the disablement problem, which I'm sad to say, is often not recognised. People are generally not aware of the fact that the number of people around the world who are physically or mentally disabled has crossed the five hundred million mark. Every year, this number increases by some fifteen million - being victims of war, accident malnutrition and disease. In human terms, the problem is one of suffering and misery and today, we are gathered here to discuss this.

Dependent and insecure, faced with woefully inadequate services, specially here in our country, the disabled feel like third-class citizens. Many turn to begging. Many, specially in the rural areas, remain permanently damaged and on their knees crawling around amidst the heat and dust, regarded as outcastes of society, often laughed at, as the "*village idiot*".

REFERENCE

To turn to our area of vocational rehab - People have stereotypes and fixed notions about the disabled. They are convinced that someone on a wheelchair, or someone who walks and talks differently, must be some kind of cabbage. And when unemployment is rife, as it is here in India, the handicapped suffer more than most. Their prospects of obtaining work in the open employment market are minimal, unless they have been well trained and the community has been educated to accept them. They community here generally rejects them, closing the doors on them.

With the advances in technology, increased use of computers and improved communications, broad based training facilities have been set up all over the world.

Employment outlook for handicapped persons is undergoing a sea change. More than ever, are people looking beyond the physique and accepting the thought that you don't have to be a mountaineer, or an athlete, to operate a computer.

Vocational rehabilitation and placement is no longer regarded as a "service programme", but all over the world, it is emerging as a science with professionally and qualified specialists to do assessment of work potential, vocational guidance training and eventually placement. And the disabled are emerging as a potential labour force and manpower, taking their rightful places as nation builders. Because such a prospect provides a *raison d'être* for society

and community at large, vocational rehabilitation of the disabled has to be tackled in a professional manner. Some of the basic principles of vocational rehab with the disabled being followed based on international standards laid down by ILO are the following:

## **TRAINING:**

### **Clients**

One of the most effective means of overcoming stigma and irrational fear associated with the disabled is to provide them with skills, and opportunities for employment. This training equips the disabled to compete on equal terms with other workers, thus building their self respect and the confidence of employers.

### **Rehab Team:**

The quality of the training services and their success depends on the rehab team.

### **Professionals:**

A mature and senior social worker can work with the client / family in close co-ordination. Training Instructors we find are abysmally few, therefore another element crucial in a vocational rehab centre on employment, are courses for the training of vocational rehab instructors, placement officers, vocational counsellors. Modifications of work site

and adaptation of machines is another important function for rehab engineers. Quite often, this is not done and a very talented person can be jobless.

**Parents:**

Full knowledge is needed of the family, their socio economic background, their attitude to employment. We find that in majority of cases. the family presents the greatest attitudinal obstruction to disabled people In their initial meetings with me, they always say that they don't want their son/daughter to have a job. They usually say: "*We have provided for him, we don't need him to work*"- as if work and employment was something lacking in dignity and prestige.

Majority of research studies show that a large proportion of people receiving training are mismatched, therefore their training has been irrelevant to their employment. Further surveys show a high drop-out rate because of frustration and lack of self esteem. Often disabled people who have been trained on computers, etc. are given a "C" or "D" category job.

## EMPLOYERS AND THEIR ATTITUDES:

Research also shows that disabled often do not get jobs for the following reasons:

- Lack of proper technical training
- Access problems - most buildings do not have ramps or Lifts most building and public places remains inaccessible.
- Transportation - no buses are available allowing wheelchair access.
- Employer attitudes
- Community attitudes

Employers need to be more than willing to employ disabled workers in their enterprises. But mere employment does not ensure that the disabled can sustain their contribution. The employers need to be educated too and they need to realise that if proper training is given to disabled people in their organisations there would be job efficiency and productivity.

Employers attitudes have to be changed. They have to outgrow their traditional mould of merely churning out profit orientated organisations, and reach out, showing social commitment.

A review of a research study showed that although many employers felt *that to employ someone with a disability is to*



*employ a liability.* Majority felt that the disabled are dependable, conscientious and productive, spending less time off work.

More importantly, all over the world, the employer has learned that the disabled worker is quite competent in many areas, and can be a valuable human resource person.

## **COMMUNITY AWARENESS:**

### **LACK OF COMMUNITY AWARENESS:**

Another key factor in the country and perhaps common throughout the world is the lack of awareness in the society which tends to overlook the abilities and skills of people who are disabled. They are not included in decision making and are not thought worth consulting even in matters that directly concern them. Timely, quality advice and information is also not available, so neither the beneficiaries themselves, nor their family, friends or well wishers can make appropriate choices based on sound knowledge.

**ATTITUDINAL STUDY OF THE DISABLED WORKERS** shows that the most significant undercurrent running through our investigations is the intense desire of the disabled to be independent and stand on their own feet, rather than be a burden. But this is of course not possible without systematic and selective training in job oriented courses. With these objectives in mind, we began the National Job Development Centre - NJDC.

We decided to set up a multi-disciplinary team work approach in which disabled persons and their families form the basic constituents together with professionals and potential employers in moving towards a successful rehab effort in getting a job and seeing that the person sustains it.

#### **INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES:**

According to the Constitution, the Supreme Law of any nation - every person is equal and shall be equally protected by law. However, there can be no legal equality, unless the factual one exists - society will only treat persons equally when they are equally able. Unfortunately, the disabled in India are a large amorphous group without any rights or protection.

Governments in advanced countries in Europe, USA, Japan have tried to correct this through legislation and through a quota system.

The most recent and dynamic legislation which has been passed internationally for the disabled has been the Americans with Disabilities Act signed into Law on July 26 1990.

By this Act, it is mandatory for employers to employ disabled people and if a trained disabled worker is refused a job, the employer liable to prosecution and penalty under the Federal Laws.



Disabled people are to be legally given employment and any discrimination can lead to federal punishment. ADA addresses itself to problems of discrimination against disabled people, in such areas as employment, access, transportation, accommodation and services.

Legislation by itself is of not much use. It has to be followed up by fiscal backing and penalty action for non-compliance just as there is penalty if certain taxes are not paid.

### **GLOBAL POLICIES ON REHABILITATION**

It can be easily appreciated that although all rehabilitation programmes give top priority to promotion of employment, their success rate is directly proportional to economic and labour market conditions of the country in question.

Because disabled individuals are often considered marginal workers, they face severe prejudice and discrimination on jobs irrespective of quota systems. This is the reason why these workers are demanding more aggressive job policies to create greater awareness and affirmative action for themselves.

### **QUOTA SYSTEMS:**

Despite criticism, the point remains that quota system is the only legal method that guarantees access to employment.

Quota systems are endorsed throughout the world, functioning of these systems has often received severe criticism . Many organisations in Europe, are now demanding scrapping of such systems altogether, because many disabled workers feel that **public employment agencies are unable to enforce existing reservation policies.** On the other hand, some organisations in parts of Europe, U.K., and even some developing countries are demanding continuation and strengthening of quota system. Thus, quota systems and their application has become a very controversial issue.

We have requested the Government to privatise the public employment agencies called S.E.E.'s and let NGO's involved with vocational rehab and job placement run these

#### **WORK ASSISTANCE OR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SCHEMES:**

Many industrially advanced countries (U.S., Canada, Australia) emphasise on extensive welfare assistance so that employment is not imperative, consequently, in these countries there is a minimal dependence on reservations.

Briefly, the research indicates that the number of countries with some kind of provision for compulsory employment of the handicapped is steadily increasing and more and more countries are looking into the pattern of legislation. Already, legislation exists in 52 countries of the world,

twenty three have got provisions, eight countries are considering legislations while a few east european countries are relying solely on public awareness.

In recent years, rehabilitation institutes are attempting to move away from sheltered employment and trying to integrate disabled workers into competitive labour market. In recent years, this programme seems to have grown at an impressive rate in Belgium and France.

#### **WORK EXPERIENCE AND JOB PLACEMENTS:**

Judging from the available data, special apprenticeship programme or work experience in jobs is very successful. At the end of one year many were employed by the employers, In fact, this appears to have a greater success rate than traditional vocational guidance centres.

#### **WORK SITE ADAPTATIONS/MODIFICATIONS:**

In case of some disabled workers, it is at times necessary to make modifications into the work sites for optimal work efficiency. Nature of adaption and modifications may range in complexity from changing positions of switches or levers to make major alterations in height, number of successive operations required etc. These may also include aspects such as changing location of switches, safety indications, etc. Many of these adaptations **are not** very expensive.

Work site modifications is a new concept in India but in most other countries it is an integral part of the rehabilitation efforts. In fact, many Governments give grants

to either the employer or the individual for getting suitable adaptations vocational rehabilitation institutes are also given financial assistance to make contributions towards the cost of work clothes and necessary tools. In addition, companies employing disabled individuals who require work bench modifications are either given loans or loan guarantees at a concessional interest rate. The primary idea is to motivate employers to make work bench modifications.

#### **SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SCHEMES:**

Private sector employers often put forward the idea of commensurate wages. In their opinion if a disabled employee is working at less than average efficiency or productivity he should be paid accordingly. Under the financial assistance scheme the Government provides subsidy which brings disabled persons wages upto the minimum wage limit acceptable for the particular industry. In other words, in some countries, labour regulations and relations authorities allow an employer to pay a sub minimum wage based on the productivity of the worker. This wage arrangement is valid for one year and is subsequently reviewed annually. Necessary financial adjustments are then carried out. I have seen this in England and I know it costs in the USA. Wage subsidy scheme is available for all categories of jobs including high categories like computer professionals, systems analysts, management consultants, financial advisors, etc.

Finally, there is a growing tendency to take **affirmative action for employment and positive notion towards ability**. It is now appreciated that a negative focus on disability unnecessarily places emphasis on general inability which may have no bearing on job performance. Trained disabled people all over the world now demand opportunity not security and they prefer challenges of life to doles.

They are ready to take a calculated risk to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed.

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**MALINI CHIB-ALUR**