

Abstract

Persons with Disabilities in India: Socio-economic Differentials and their Implications

By

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The aim of this paper is to find out how the persons with disabilities (PWDs) differ from the general population in key variables such as social acceptance, education, nature of work, health care and other factors. The two main sources of data on disability in India are the 2001 census and NSS 58th round of 2002. The 2001 census found 21.91 million PWD (2.13 percent of the population), while the 2002 NSS estimate was 18.5 million or 1.8 percent of the population. The results differ for different disabilities largely due to differences in definitions and measurement procedures. Nevertheless the data reveal important socioeconomic differentials among PWDs and among households having PWDs. In both sources disability rates are found to be higher among men than among women and higher in rural than in urban areas. The PWD population has substantially higher rates of illiteracy and lower levels of educational attainment relative to general population. As with the general population, there are strong gender differences in educational attainment among PWDs, PWD female illiteracy rates being higher than male illiteracy rates. The proportion of heads of PWD households with secondary or higher education is around 15 percent lower than their proportion in the general population. The proportion of disabled children who are out of school is far higher than in other major social categories, with the average out-of-school rate for children with disabilities being five and a half times the rate for all children. The employment rates among PWDs are substantially below those of the general population in both urban and rural areas and for both genders. Equally significant are a greater proportion of single and widowed persons among PWDs than among the general population. The PWDs have lesser access to health care due to their disabilities as well as their social and economic condition. These observations indicate a substantial social marginalization of PWDs in India. Policies and programmes must address these inequities.