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Psychological impact of physical disability on mental health

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Abstract

Disability refers to a condition that impairs one's ability to perform activities of daily living. With the development of science and social change, disability is seen as a societal problem rather than individual problem and solution became focused on removing the barriers to social change, not just medical care. The persons with a disability encounter discrimination; they tend to alienate themselves from society as they feel unwanted and rejected. It affects the psycho social condition of persons with disabilities. The human person is a complex entity composed of two distinct phenomena, the physique, and the psyche, commonly called body and mind. It is both common knowledge and scientific theory that a person's mental life and emotional reactions are influenced by his physical condition as well as his social and physical environment. This research paper aims to present Psycho-Social problems faced by a person with a disability.

Keywords: Disability, discrimination, mental health, stigma

Introduction

The most recent definition of disability come from the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), which states that disability is an "umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations or participation restrictions", which result from the interaction between the person with a health condition and environmental factors (e.g. the physical environment, attitudes), and personal factors (e.g. age or gender). A disability may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, and developmental or some combination of these. A disability may be present from birth or occur during a person's lifetime.

Disability encompasses any condition of the body or mind that makes it difficult to engage in activities and interact with one's environment. A physical disability is a much complex issue than most of us believe it to be. A physical disability is not simply impairment or a restricted ability to do a certain task. That is just one part of the whole picture. Physical disabilities have multifaceted impacts on a person's life that affects almost every aspect of her living. In this article, we will try to assess the impacts of physical disabilities on the mental health of the person inflicted with the disability.

Causes, types and effects of physical disability

A physical disability will limits the physical function of one or more limbs or fine or gross motor ability. Other physical disabilities include impairments which limit other facets of daily living such as respiratory disorder and epilepsy. Prenatal causes: Those disabilities that are acquired before birth. These may be due to diseases that have harmed the mother during pregnancy, or genetic incompatibility between the parents. Prenatal causes are those disabilities that are acquired during birth. This could be due to prolonged lack of oxygen or the obstruction of the respiratory tract, damage to the brain during birth (due to the accidental misuse of forceps, for example) or the baby being born prematurely. Postnatal causes are disabilities gained after birth. They can be due to accidents, infection or other illness. The number of people with disabilities is increasing due to population growth, aging, the emergence of chronic diseases and medical advances that preserve and prolong life. The common causes are chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer; injuries such as those due to road traffic crashes, conflicts, falls, landmines, mental impairments, birth defects, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases.

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Disability in mobility can either be congenital or acquired with age problem. This problem could also be the consequence of some disease. People who have a broken skeletal structure also fall into this category of disability. Visual impairment is another type of physical impairment. There are hundreds of thousands of people that greatly suffer from minor to various serious vision injuries or impairments. These types of injuries can also result in some severe problems or diseases like blindness and ocular trauma, to name a few. Hearing impairment is the category of physical impairment that includes people that are completely or partially deaf. People who are only partially deaf can sometimes make use of hearing-aids to improve their hearing ability. And the effects are on human person since it composed of two distinct phenomena, the physical, and the psychological and are always interdependent and indivisible. Their mutual influence and interaction form the basis of human action. The constant interplay of body and mind takes place invariably in a social setting, which in turn exerts influence on the actor provoking reactions in him and modifying his behavior. It is both common knowledge and scientific theory that a person's mental life and emotional reactions are influenced by his physical condition as well as his social and physical environment. Psychology as science deals with the mental and emotional life of an individual. It is evident that social expectations which have the force of standards will influence behavior. A person who has a socially approved physique will be treated differently and will be expected to behave differently than persons whose physiques deviate from the social ideal. Obviously, therefore, the self-image of the person those others believe one to be. In large measure, the self is created by social interaction with others. No person can develop a wholesome personality if he encounters only derogatory attitudes. The basic needs which one longs for such as belongingness, achievement, economic security, freedom from fear, love, and affection, freedom from guilt, decision making and understanding world are affected by the disability.

Statistics on Mental Health of Persons with a Disability

Studies and researches have time and again indicated that people with disabilities are at higher risk of mental health issues as compared to their non-disabled counterparts. Interestingly, some of those studies have also shown that people with mental health issues are more likely to develop a physical health problem.

Reasons Affecting Mental Health of a Person with Disability

Persons with disabilities often do not distress for the fact that they have certain disabilities. There are various factors that make people with disabilities more prone to mental health issues. Let us see some of the most common reasons behind the mental health issues of a person with a disability.

Societal Constraints

We are living in a time when we focus a lot on individualism but the fact can never be changed that human beings are 'social animals'. Society plays a crucial role in everybody's life, including persons with disabilities. Studies have shown that suicidal thoughts and tendencies in persons with disabilities do not come due to their physical limitations but due to the way, they are treated in their

society.

Persons with visible disabilities often face discrimination in public places. General public's 'different attitude' towards persons with disabilities may push them towards life-threatening depression. Of course, different cultures have different norms. Societies that consider people with disabilities relatively at par with non-disabled counterparts will have a lesser number of PwDs with mental health issues and vice versa.

According to a study done in 2018, around 32.9% of adults with disabilities experience frequent mental distress. The frequency is almost 5 times more as compared to adults without disabilities.

Loneliness and Isolation

Human beings, being social animals, are not designed to live alone or to be left alone. Some people with a severe disability do not have any means to get out of their house and participate in social life. Inaccessible infrastructure forces a lot more to live an isolated life within the four walls of their house. Many people with certain kinds of disabilities are isolated by society due to myths about their disability. Whatever may be the reason, it's difficult to save a person from mental health issues if they remain lonely and isolated for a long time. So, this is one of the factors contributing to the high incidence of mental health issues among persons with disabilities.

Barriers to Mental Health Care

Effective and accessible mental health care is rarely available for persons with disabilities. There is variety of barriers that prevent people with disabilities to see a mental health professional well in time. Sometimes infrastructure is not accessible, sometimes there's no support from the caregiver and sometimes stigmatization restricts persons with disabilities in seeking help when needed.

Sometimes even a mental health practitioner can push a person with a disability towards stress by sharing their own stigmatizing beliefs about the disability of the person. Not all mental health professionals are sensitized towards disability and hence can be an ableist.

Lack of Integrated Care

Many disabilities are painful and require frequent medical attention. The painful medical treatments may cause traumatic stress in many individuals. Long hospitalization periods may break a person's social connections and leave them lonely. People often tend to ignore mental health while they focus on physical comfort and pain relief. Due to a lack of integration in the medical field, persons with disabilities do not get the holistic care they need for their overall well-being.

High Incidence of Unemployment and Poverty

In most countries around the world, the incidence of unemployment is higher in individuals with disabilities. Moreover, the life maintenance cost for persons with disabilities too is higher than those without disabilities. The clubbed effect is poverty. Needless to say, a distressing condition like this, where a person has to deal with physical pain, limitations, and poverty, easily attracts mental health issues like depression. A person in such a condition does not even have the awareness or access to mental health care.

Communication Barriers

Mental health professionals can work best when they can communicate with the person who needs their help. Many disabilities affect a person's communication skills thereby significantly decreasing their chance of getting proper help. Even persons with disabilities with no limitation with communication often find it difficult to communicate their need for help. They do not want to have an extra layer of stigma added to them. A mental health issue coupled with a disability is a dangerous combination that can stigmatize a person to the level of isolating them.

Conclusion

Being mentally healthy is important for everyone, including persons with disabilities. Therefore, make sure to take care of your mental health as you try to keep your body healthy. And, if you need the help of a medical health professional, do get it. Don't let the social stigma dictate what you do to keep yourself healthy in all possible ways. Be a self-advocate about your needs.

And, if you are a friend or family of a person with a disability, treat them with love and dignity as you would have treated someone without a disability. Sometimes only a feeling of being valued can keep a person happy and away from stress and loneliness.

The research study manifests the capacity of persons with disability to do their daily routine activities and their perceptions of their disability or handicap. It is found that a vast majority of them are illiterate, unemployed but are independent in doing their daily routine activities. Most of them have realistic perceptions about their disability and which enable them to face the challenge and go ahead in life. Most of them also expressed insecurity about the future in their families due to the disabilities. The study also dealt with the extent of utilization of government and NGO welfare schemes. It is found that majority of them have utilized some form of government services. To utilize more government schemes there is need to have a provision of information about services to people with disability. From the study, we can understand that a majority of the persons with disability want to be independent in life and have potential to lead a good life in the society. But there is a lack of support from the families and the society. Whatever the welfare programs the government or nongovernmental agencies introduce, it will not be a success unless we give them full support; equal participation and better opportunity merge with the main stream of society. It is also needed to build self-confidence among the persons with disability and encourage inclusion in main stream social and cultural program. Further awareness programs must be organized for all the section of the community to build a disabled friendly environment. The policies and programs should be implemented in an effective manner and employment opportunities as per the persons with disability Act must be enforced. The formation of self-help group and Federation of persons with disability will help them to come together and fight for their rights and be self-sufficient and self-reliable.

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