

Violence Against Women with Disabilities: Pervasive and Under-Addressed Human Rights Violation

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Abstract:

This article is based upon the preliminary findings of a semi-systematic literature review on women with disability and gendered violence. It presents analysis using the Rights perspective as well as salient issues related to violence against women with disability in India. The review was done of the academic and theoretical articles as well as of the newspaper reports related to violence against women with disability over one year and a few months; specifically, from October 2018 till January 2020. Though there were news reports also on the discriminatory practices and negative attitude of people towards persons with disability, only those newspaper reports were taken where either serious physical or psychological harm has taken place. The analysis of the newspaper article as well as literature sourced from other academic sources showed that the women with disability had to face physical (including sexual) as well as psychological violence, sometimes of life-threatening nature and multiple times. The perpetrators of the violence can be known or strangers and location also can be in the house of the victim or outside including public places. The article also discusses the causes and risk factors behind the gendered violence against women with disability and how society invisibilizes this violence. Changes need to be brought about at the systemic and structural levels by government as well as non-government agencies to prevent the violence against women with disabilities. Attitudinal change and conscious efforts by each individual are also recommended for building an inclusive society.

Key Words

Women with Disability, Girls with Disability, Gendered Violence, Human Rights Violation, Discrimination, Invisibilization of Women with Disability.

Introduction

"Violence is not something that advertises itself."

– Meena Kandasamy, 2017

Where violence tries to make itself invisible, violence against women is even more unseen due to societal and cultural norms that 'normalize' it. It has taken decades of struggle by the women's rights movement to persuade the international community to view gender-based violence against women as a human rights concern and not just as a private matter in which the state should not interfere (OHCHR–Office of High Commissioner Human Rights n.d.).

Violence Against women is considered as one of the most widespread violations of human rights worldwide (UNGA 2012) and is now firmly at the forefront of the international development agenda as an urgent human rights issue requiring national government and international action (Dowse et al 2013, as cited in Frohmader et al 2015).

Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW) Committee came up with a document defining Gender Based Violence (GBV) as 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately (Nam 2016).

The invisibility of violence is closely associated with unaccountability of perpetrators. Perpetrators of violence, especially violence against women, have five weapons to ensure unaccountability of their actions – denial, forced secrecy, forced silence, attack on the woman's credibility and rationalization. If a woman is vulnerable due to lack of resources, absence of any support system, negative societal attitude directed at her or any other reasons, the risk of violence increases manifold. That is why; women with disability are at even higher risk of violence. Women and girls are reported to be the largest group in the global disability population, and they have been historically subjected to multiple types of discrimination (Reina et al. 2007).

The definition of disability has undergone a huge change based on the change in perspectives over time – from demonic to charity to social to human rights. The

recent definitions of disability reflect the social model of disability that challenge the belief that people with disability are 'lesser' or 'abnormal'. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that 'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (Nam 2016).

In the same lines, the 'Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016' in India defines 'person with disability' as a person with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment, which hinders his/her full and effective participation in society equally with others". This Act included twenty-one types of disabilities, thereby expanding its reach to many people with disability who were excluded in the previous legislations. One of the categories in the new Act – Acid attack victims, was included when the plight of women who have been survivors of acid attack became visible due to newspaper reports.

Women with disabilities are more likely to experience multiple victimization (Cotter 2018). Women and girls with disabilities are at increased risk of gender-based violence in their homes, schools, institutions, and the community at large. Women living with disabilities are prone to the violence as they look "weak" in the eyes of the society and more importantly in the eyes of the perpetrators (Nam 2016).

This one fact itself highlights the vulnerability of women in India. When women as a group face discrimination, it is important to study the situation of women who have even lesser resources and status like women with disability.

Women and girls with disabilities are often excluded from prevention programs, support services, and access to legal redress due to stereotypical views about their sexuality, physical and communication barriers, and lack of materials in accessible formats. "Women and girls with disabilities are too often the victims of violence, yet get too little information on where to go for help", as said by Shantha Rau Barriga, disability rights director at Human Rights Watch (Include Women 2015).

This paper is based on the analysis of secondary data on women with disability that have experienced violence – magnitude, types of violence, perpetrators, possible causes, impact and coping strategies. It is an attempt to bring into light the violence faced by women with disability and integrating the human rights perspectives.

Literature Review as a Research Methodology

Literature review is the selected method to research the data available on the topic of violence against women with disability. A literature review is, in simple words, a systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research (Tranfield, Denver & Smart 2003). Traditionally, literature review has been used in research studies though often its use has been limited to concept clarification and identification of research gaps. It is only recently that its potential as a research methodology on its own is getting the due recognition (Snyder, 2019). It is an effective method to assess the collective evidence in a particular area, integrate findings and perspectives from many empirical findings to address the research questions (Webster & Watson 2002). There are different types of literature review depending upon the nature and process of data collection and analysis.

This article is based upon the preliminary findings of a semi-systematic literature review. Where the systematic literature review is used to synthesize and compare evidence quantitatively to find out the evidence of effect; semi-systematic literature review uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis to identify, analyse and report patterns in the form of themes within a text (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Current article is based on the literature review on women with disability and gendered violence. The article presents analysis using the Rights perspective as well as salient issues related to violence against women with disability in India. The review was done of the academic and theoretical articles as well as of the newspaper reports related to violence against women with disability over the last one year and a few months; specifically, from October 2018 till January 2020. The E-newspapers that were studied to gather information on news related the topic of the research included Times of India, Indian Express, DNA, The Hindu, Diplomat,

and Guardian. Out of these six newspapers, archives of three newspapers – Times of India, Indian Express and DNA had reported cases of violence against women with disability.

In addition to newspapers, literature was also sourced from the research studies done on violence against women with disability and reports by international organizations such as World Health Organisation and Human Rights Watch. The publication of this other part of the literature dates earlier than 2018.

Information was collated and analysed on violence against women with disability – magnitude, types of violence as well as forms of violence, risk factors or factors responsible for the perpetuation of violence, impact of violence and strategies of prevention and intervention.

The questions that guided the process of literature review on the topic of violence against women with disability were:

1. In what **forms the violence** takes place against women with disability in India? Or What are the types of violence against women with disability in India?
2. What is the **magnitude** of violence against women with disability in India?
3. What are **the reasons or causes of violence** against women with disability in India?
4. From the perspective of **Human Rights Violation**, what is the analysis of the situation of women with disability in India?
5. What are the **present and possible interventions** that address this issue?

The analysis of the newspaper reports on violence against women with disability was done based on the parameters such as type of violence, nature or form of violence, extent of violence, characteristics of the survivor, characteristics of the perpetrator, location of the violence, action taken and causes and risk factors for violence on women with disability.

Though there were news reports also on the discriminatory practices and negative attitude of people towards persons with disability, only those newspaper reports

were taken where either serious physical or psychological harm has taken place. If one widens the concept of violence to include violation of any right of person (or in the case of this article) woman with disability, the number of newspaper reports would increase. As the process of literature review on this topic started in November, 2019; a period from October 2018 till January, 2020 was taken to study the incidences of violence against women with disability reported in the newspapers. Though the e-archives of the newspapers The Hindu, The Diplomat and the Guardian were also examined along with Times of India, The Indian Express and DNA for any news reports on violence against women with disability, e-archives of only three newspapers – Times of India, Indian Express and DNA included news reports of violence against women with disability. A total of 15 cases of violence were reported during the period mentioned.

Findings and Discussion

Out of these 15 cases, 2 cases were reported in all the three newspapers – Times of India, Indian Express and DNA. So, the following analysis is of 13 different incidences. One case was of attempted suicide and the report did not provide any information about what might have prompted the suicide attempt. Though this case was not of violence by others, it was taken for this study as it is an instance of self-harm or violence directed at self. Another case is of accident where the survivor fell down the rail tracks and was severely wounded. Though this was not a case of violence by any one per se, it was taken in the study because it showed severe lack of amenities and services for women with disability due to which the woman was homeless and without food for two days.

Types of violence

The analysis of the newspaper reports showed that the women with disability had to face physical as well as psychological violence. Out of the 13 cases reported in the e-newspapers, 10 cases were about physical violence. One newspaper report was about a study in 12 districts of Odisha covering a sample of 729 women with disabilities. The study showed both physical and psychological violence against women with disability. There were two cases where the woman with disability had suffered psychologically.

Based on the duration, in one of the reported cases, the violence was chronic and severe where as in three cases it happened multiple times and over a period of time against the victim – woman or girl with disability. One of the victims had suffered violence two times and in eight cases the victims faced violence once.

Among the 729 respondents interviewed during the study in Odisha, 12.6% reported that they were raped. In some cases, the women were repeated assaulted sexually.

In case of the woman who attempted to commit suicide, though the newspaper report is of one incident, it did not give information whether there were any prior attempts or possible causes for the woman wanting to commit suicide. The reported duration of violence ranged from life-time to one-time incident. The word 'reported' needs to be highlighted as behind one incident which is reported; there might be many which go un-detected.

Forms of violence

Violence against women with disability takes many forms. The violence reported in the newspaper reports took different forms such as being neglected, abandoned, and denied of the fulfilment of their basic needs such as food, shelter and medical treatment. The other forms of violence were sexual abuse including rape, physical abuse and psychological harassment such as constant insults, humiliation and ignoring their very existence – this last form of violence leads to invisibilisation of a woman with disability that is discussed later. The literature review showed cases where the women with disability were restrained physically or their mobility was restricted by force. The extreme forms of violence included attempted suicide – violence towards self and murder – killing a women/girl with disability.

Giving numbers to these forms in terms of how many of the women reported in the newspapers faced one or more of these forms would be misleading as what was reported was the last incident that was violent enough to be reported. Physical trauma is rarely without psychological harassment and psychological harassment over a long period of time leads to physical harm. For instance, in the

four cases of sexual assault and rape of women with disability in the newspapers and many more such instances that surfaced during the study done in Odisha, the women were physically and psychologically tortured. The psychological trauma after the sexual assault and rape is severe and lifelong. In two cases, where the women suffered psychologically due to humiliation and taunting, there was physical side-effects as well. A case of torture and murder of a girl with disability by her stepmother brought to light the severe neglect and abandonment she as well as her sister, who also had speech impairment, suffered throughout the time both were with their stepmother.

What was surprising in the above case was the husband of the woman filed an appeal at the court for early release of his wife saying that they had a younger son (4 years old) and he wanted to put the incident behind. The question that arises at such times is how much we value the life of women with disability?

Devaluation of women with disability was done in different ways – not providing them services even when they have paid for them, not seeing them capable enough to live independently and blaming them for the trauma they went through. Denial of services or accessibility by the taxi service or airlines has been reported several times in the newspapers; but there was also a case of denial of medical treatment to a woman who was suffering from dengue on the account of her disability – she was epileptic. In another case, the police cop denied help to a woman who was denied by an Uber taxi driver due to her disability. The justification the cop gave for not helping her was she should have brought someone with her. She was a wheelchair user.

Invisibilisation of women with disability was also evident while analyzing the newspaper reports. Firstly, the treatment meted out by people – government and non-government service providers showed the voicelessness of women with disability in all the cases except the cases where the survivors were women activists. The analysis of the newspaper reports also showed the barriers to reporting the violence meted out to the women with disability. Women and girls with disability were threatened not to report the violence or they were harmed by those who were supposed to be their caregivers. Thus, it is very strongly possible that there are many cases of violence which are not reported. Lastly, even the

reports themselves gave very little information about the woman with disability and even lesser of the perpetrator and with a few exceptions, no information on the action that was taken and what would happen to the survivor and perpetrator both. There was no follow up report on any of the cases reported. In a way, after the incident, the women became invisible. Before the incident, they were invisible, after the incident again they went behind the curtains.

The extent of violence can be life threatening, life altering or life affecting. In two cases, violence resulted in the death. In one case, a woman with disability who was a wheel chair user was pushed down the running train by a robber and it resulted in her leg being amputated. This would alter her life – her work, her family life – permanently. The life of women who were sexually assaulted and raped did not remain the same after the incident.

Characteristics of the perpetrator and the survivor (or victim in cases where violence led to death):

The age of survivors ranged from 6 years to 35 years. Four newspaper reports did not give the age of the survivor. The type of disability was not related to risk of violence. In other words, the reports narrated the incidences of violence against women with different types and extent of disability. Among the 13 cases of violence, four were against women with intellectual impairment, four were against women with physical disability, two were against women with hearing and speech impairment, one was against a woman who had epilepsy and two were against women with multiple disabilities. The incidences reported occurred in different states of India – Maharashtra, Odisha, Delhi, Kolkata, Tamilnadu and Chattisgarh.

The perpetrators of violence against women with disability were all adults. In two cases, they were related to the survivor. One was cousin of the woman and the other was the stepmother of the woman. In five cases, the perpetrators were service providers. In rest of the cases, they were strangers.

Location of the incident

The locations of the incident – where the woman/girl with disability was harmed – were public as well as private. Two of the incidences happened at the residence of the woman with disability. In one case, it happened at the rehabilitation centre where she was staying. The other locations were roads, hospital, airports and secluded places. This raises the question of safety and safe places for women with disability. Violence could happen anywhere, by anyone either known or unknown to them.

Causes and risk factors for the Violence against Women with Disability

The preliminary analysis showed that there are various factors which pose threat or increase risk of violence against women with disability. Extreme negative attitude and discrimination against women with disability is the root cause that leads to violence against women with disability. More than one case reflected the belief that woman with disability is unproductive and therefore is less worthy of living than a non-disabled woman.

Women and girls with disability experience apathy from those who are supposed to protect – family, spouse, police, medical staff, staff at rehabilitation centers; as well as there is societal apathy at a larger level that also contributes to the process of ‘invisibilization’.

Victim blaming and lack of effective and efficient redressal system makes it difficult for cases of violence against the women with disability to come to light as well as obtain justice for the victims. Lack of reporting or delayed reporting is seen of the cases of violence against women and girls with disability. Justice is difficult at every stage of the judicial process – from reporting incidences of violence to the police to getting medical care and navigating the court system. Even in cases of ‘extreme violence’, survivors with disabilities had difficulties in securing compensation with no set standards for the amount.

At the structural level, lack of accessibility in transport puts women with disability more at risk of accidents. There is also a deplorable lack of safety measures for

women and girls with disability at public places as well as lack of training in self-protection for the girls and women.

At the individual level, dependency for self-care or daily tasks and co-morbidity as well as low status of health make the women and girls with disability more vulnerable to risk of violence.

Thus the causes and risk factors for violence against women with disability lie at multiple levels highlighting the need for interventions at these different levels.

Besides the newspaper reports, other literature (reports and previous studies) gave following account or aspects of violence against women with disability:

Types of violence against women

Women with disabilities experience violence in different forms from physical abuse to sexual assault and from financial abuse to sexual harassment or trafficking. Daruwalla et al. (2013) in their study showed that women with disabilities faced violence in the form of neglect, control, restricted mobility, forced marriages, and lack of autonomy. Women with disabilities experienced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination which increased their vulnerability to many different forms of violence.

According to Pacific Disability Forum (PDF)(2014), the violence against women with disabilities includes sexual violence, emotional and psychological violence, physical violence and socio-economic violence. Sexual violence includes rape, sexual abuse, incest, sexual harassment, forcing the woman into commercial sex trade, forcing the woman to become pregnant and displaying pornographic material. Emotional and psychological violence includes insulting, degrading, threatening to hurt or kill her or her children/people she cares about, giving her a feeling of being worthless and verbal abuse. Beating, kicking, biting, slapping, pulling hair, hitting with a heavy or sharp object, burning and acid attacks are some of the forms of physical violence that have been reported by women with disability. They also suffer from socio-economic violence including discrimination, social exclusion, denial of access to education, health care, financial resources and denial of their social as well as political rights.

In addition to physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence and abuse, women and girls with disabilities also face unnecessary institutionalisation, denial of control over their bodies, lack of financial control, denial of social contact, employment and community participation, and denial of the right to decision-making (INWWD 2011, WWDA 2010, Cattalini 1993, as cited in Frohmader et al. 2015).

These different forms of violence can have lasting emotional and social consequences for the women with disabilities such as emotional numbness, mental state of denial, sleep disturbances, generalized anxiety, withdrawal, low self-esteem and depression. The incidences of self harm and risky behaviours are also frequent among them (ibid).

Magnitude of the problem

Violence is a serious violation of the human rights of women and girls, and it takes a heavy toll on their physical and mental health. Women with disabilities have in general been silenced within society, denied their rights and equal economic and social opportunities due to prejudice, stigma and poverty (Badjena 2014).

Women with disabilities make up roughly 5% of the world's female population, yet many are not considered "woman enough". Their capability is questioned – can she cook? Can she raise children? – along with their sexuality and entitlement to equity or rights. If they fail to meet idealised expectations about how a woman's body should look, they are deemed incapable of providing care (Goyal 2016).

Daruwalla et al. (2013) in "A qualitative study of women with disabilities in Mumbai", revealed that women with disabilities' experiences of domestic violence included emotional and verbal insults, withholding money, threats of abandonment or physical violence, and actual physical violence. Other forms of family violence included abandonment and exclusion. Women perceived the stigma associated with their impairments and the resulting social exclusion as acts and impacts of violence, as they caused them to be and feel excluded. Similarly, women who were deprived of agency experienced a reinforced sense of "being" disabled and feelings of isolation and helplessness.

The study further revealed that the violence in the public spaces included: Physical challenges and perceptions of women with disability as defenceless making them easy targets. Verbal and physical sexual harassment by strangers occurred in public spaces, trains, and buses. Women were vulnerable to exploitation because of their dependence on others for support and, possibly, as a result of men perceiving them as sexually available.

Violence from the society included: Discrimination targeted specifically at disability was inherent in many of the respondents' narratives. Structural forms of violence included inequalities in access to work opportunities in private or public institutions, and some respondents had been denied jobs and social support.

In a Human Rights Watch report published in 2014, gang rape is cited as just one example highlighting the additional challenges women and girls with disabilities face in India. If they survive sexual violence, they face barriers when trying to pursue justice (Thomas 2018).

Women with disabilities lack the decision-making power where their caregivers are more responsible for their final decision especially those living with developmental disabilities in which they may abuse this role (Nam 2016).

Reina et al. (2007) in their study revealed that women with disabilities were more likely to experience emotional abuse by attendants, strangers, or health care providers in both private and public settings. A study on 'Status of Blind Women in India' carried out by National Association for Blind (NAB) and Asian Blind (n.d) brought to light the deeper vulnerabilities and the state of deprivation for blind women residing across the country. Dawn (2013) in his article addresses the problem of sexual assault of women with disabilities in the Indian context, highlighting on some of the loopholes in the Indian legal system.

Women and girls with disabilities are at higher risk of violence due to misconceptions, negative attitudes, isolation and social exclusion, they are more isolated than most underrepresented groups, and therefore, their plight has not been addressed. Women with disabilities therefore warrant attention from the society and the government. Women with disability who live in institutions

are often victims of violence and sexual abuse. Women with visual and hearing impairments, psycho-social disability or mental illness are twice as likely as women and girls without disabilities to experience violence and abuse throughout their lives.

Older women with disabilities are at particularly high risk of violence and abuse (Pacific Disability Forum 2014). Muralidharan and Sengupta, (2017) in their paper on, "Success in Advocacy: Positive Changes in Law in India" discusses how girls and women with disabilities are considered soft targets and are more vulnerable to exploitation compared to their non-disabled counterparts. They state that most such incidents go unreported to the police, with victims already stigmatised because of their disability. They refrain from doing so for fear of further stigmatisation. Besides, society at large, including law enforcement agencies, does not take such crimes against women with disabilities seriously.

The justice delivery system has also failed the women with disabilities in many cases. A study of judicial decisions indicates that in most cases women with disabilities who are survivors of sexual abuse are either not examined in court or their testimony is not recorded. Even when recorded, they often do not meet legal requirements, thus making them redundant. There have also been cases earlier where testimonies given through sign language have been devalued (Muralidharan and Sengupta 2017).

Reasons for Violence against Women with Disability

The review of other literature such as previous studies and reports also highlighted various reasons for the violence against women with disability. Women with disabilities around the world experience much higher levels of physical, sexual, and psychological violence, for longer periods of time than women without disabilities. The main factors for the additional vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities are:

- Patriarchal attitudes: Patriarchal attitudes towards women in the societies increase the vulnerability of the women with disabilities.

- Powerlessness: There is a perceived powerlessness of women and girls with disabilities who are less able to defend themselves or seek support because of their isolation and vulnerable status
- Lack of access to services: Their inability to access legal protection and redress because services are not accessible, because there is lack of awareness of the issues that women and girls with disabilities face in regard to their vulnerability (Andrae, n.d).

Invisibilization of the women with disabilities

This paper also tries to analyse how the invisibilization of the women with disabilities occur in different spheres. The process of "invisibilization" starts early. It is further strengthened by a lack of inclusive education in schools and restricted access to public spaces due to inaccessible infrastructure. The stigma of having a child with disability also keeps people with disabilities segregated (Thomas 2018). When it comes to reporting incidents of sexual violence, women with disabilities are not seen as sexual beings, and assaults on them are more likely to get buried (ibid). Women with disabilities are almost always invisible in the laws, policies, and the programs of the States to ensure the rights of both women and persons with disabilities (McRae 2019).

States, society, community, and family invisibilize women with disabilities as though they don't exist. Families of women living with disabilities seclude them from the society due to shame. Many of these families also may give consent to medical practitioners to do caesarean on the women with disabilities since they see it as double burden on them as care givers if they give birth. The problem with society is that it views disability in a family as a curse which the parent must have had a hand in it to bring such a curse. This may bring up the fear of the family which sees it fit to hide the children especially girls living with disabilities (Nam 2016).

They are not part of mainstream discourse in the media too. Women with disabilities suffer from double discrimination, but they are also often alienated at the social and legal levels. Women with disabilities have remained invisible in

legislative and policy efforts at national and international levels, without inclusion in the disability discourse or the women's rights arena (Reina et al. 2007).

Women with disability often felt excluded from mainstream activities. Growing up with impairment, many had been left out of family functions, religious festivals, sports, and extracurricular school activities. They had also been teased and had limited numbers of friends. One of the outcomes of a marginalized existence was invisibility, silence being an epistemic form of violence. Women with disability described experiences in which family members had negated their identity or existence. This negation extends to all levels, up to the Government, which responded only after nationwide protests from disability groups that they should be included in a census and counted as citizens of India (Ghai 2000a, as cited in Daruwalla, et al. 2013).

It is therefore, very important to visibilise these invisible population by providing the visibility to the issues of the women with disabilities.

Under addressed human rights violation

A Human rights approach to conceptualising violence against women recognises that violence is a form of discrimination. 'Discrimination' in this context is understood as having multiple forms that combine to significantly heighten the risk of some women and girls to violence. Embedding a human rights perspective into conceptualising violence against women and girls with disabilities is therefore critical in any and all efforts to preventing and addressing such violence. This requires expanding the present way of thinking and what violence against women encompasses (Frohman et al. 2015).

Violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations. It is rooted in gendered social structures rather than individual and random acts; it cuts across age, socio-economic, educational and geographic boundaries; affects all societies; and is a major obstacle to ending gender inequality and discrimination globally (UN General Assembly 2006). Unfortunately, women with disabilities are often unable to exercise their bodily, reproductive and childcare rights (Goyal 2016).

Human Rights Instruments

There are different human rights instruments which protect the fundamental rights of persons living with disabilities. Universal Declaration on the Human Rights (UDHR) outlines that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' Women living with disabilities have their rights granted by UDHR where it also states, 'All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and any incitement to such discrimination' (Nam 2016).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) outlines 'No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his/her free consent to medical or scientific experimentation' (ibid).

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) protects women living with disabilities who may be victims of violence by stating that, 'The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. 'In the event the women living with disabilities are violated through violence, the ICESCR provides that 'The creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness' (ibid).

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) plainly outlines the plight of women living with disabilities by stating that:

1. States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention.

The Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW) obligates states parties to eliminate discrimination against women through initiatives like legislative measures, legal protections, advocate for appropriate measures and condemn discrimination against women among others. Women living with disabilities are stereotyped in the education sphere where CEDAW provides for their equality (ibid).

India's constitution manifests gender equality and dignity. The State of India is mandated not to deny anyone equality before the law and also equal protection. It should be noted that the India Constitution on the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, does not entwine disability in the list of discrimination. People with Disabilities (PWDs) are protected in the Directive Principles of State Policy where the constitution states that: "The State shall secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice, on a basis of equal opportunity, and shall, in particular, provide free legal aid, by suitable legislation or schemes or in any other way, to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities" (ibid).

Despite of the international and national measures available to ensure protection of human rights of women with disabilities, the analysis of newspaper reports and other literature shows that the violence against women with disability is a serious problem and needs urgent attention at the government and organisational level in India.

The possible intervention/recommendations to address the issues of the violence against women with disabilities:

The Verma Committee for the first time provided an opportunity for disability rights groups to place the issue of sexual assaults from the perspective of women with disabilities. The Committee recognised the problems faced by women with disabilities in accessing the judicial system and the need to have laws to make this possible.

While dealing with the adult victims of sexual assault, the rules must have the provision for making available the services of sign language interpreters, special

educators, translators, and experts, wherever needed, depending on the needs of the victim (National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled).

The need for training/sensitisation of police officers, and judicial and medical professionals, on issues concerning women with disabilities and the violence they face; the drawing up of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for investigating cases of sexual assault on women with disabilities; and the need to set up monitoring and regulatory mechanisms for institutions where women with disabilities are lodged, given the rampant neglect and abuse within these institutions.

There is a need to maintain disaggregated data of sexual assaults on women with disabilities by the National Crimes Records Bureau. Such data would help comprehend the scale of these crimes and support advocacy work (National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled).

There needs to be structural and systemic support, such as access to education, employment and public spaces, and reducing barriers for women with disabilities and their families (Goyal 2016).

For women in general, and particularly for women from marginalized communities, sustained efforts to promote independent living would go a long way in resisting family violence. Campaigns around violence and laws protecting women from it, education and career guidance, sexuality education, and housing schemes all need to be geared toward equipping women to make life choices that protect them from violence, live without fear of exclusion and discrimination, and resist oppressive norms (Daruwalla et al. 2013).

Disability rights activists stress the need for "reasonable accommodations" outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These accommodations require that justice systems make the appropriate changes to ensure that a person with a disability is able to "enjoy or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Thomas 2018).

The education system needs to be revised to focus on introducing gender-related matters especially on women living with disabilities. There should be Gender based violence topics in relations with human rights on women living with disabilities so as to create an informative perception among all students as they grow up. No religion, culture or tradition should be allowed to justify violence on women no matter the case. Disability studies should be included in the academia as a distinct subject both at the elementary level and higher education curriculum to develop awareness and understanding of disability, and disability rights.

The ministry, civil societies, and the private sectors need to enhance the level of awareness on women with disabilities. It is imperative that all the stake holders take the critical measures to combat the violence against women with disabilities.

Public awareness should be heightened on the issues of women living with disabilities to showcase violence as a human right violation in the process of awareness. The mass media should not be left behind in ensuring that they create awareness of people living with disabilities especially of women with disabilities(Nam 2016).

Women living with disabilities require ultimate medical care when they are survivors of violence. The government should ensure that they get improved health care through private and public facilities without being discriminated.

There should be a well-standardized form of diagnosis which should ensure there is early intervention of on cases of women living with disabilities who may suffer in silence because of fear to confide with health practitioners.

It is very important to shed the layers of inherent biases, prejudices ad negative stereotypes against the women with disabilities.

Help lines and hotlines should be provided for emergency information on any violence related matter on women living with disabilities on 24/7 basis. The government in conjunction with mobile network companies, the judiciary, the police, health providers, civil societies and NGOs should come up with a universal

framework which links all of them in one helpline with well-trained customer care services. Women living with disabilities should always be mandatorily involved in programming and implementation of policies and legislations (Nam 2016).

There is a need to identify inclusive practices that can be used to make services and information provision more accessible to women with disabilities.

Lastly, it is very important to shed the layers of inherent biases, prejudices and negative stereotypes against the women with disabilities.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the issues of violence against women with disabilities and the pervasive and under addressed human rights issues. It was a humble attempt to understand the review of the secondary sources reflecting the realities of the women with disabilities. It focused on the causes, magnitude, forms of violence, human rights perspective and the possible interventions to address the issue of violence against women with disabilities. It reflected how the invisibilization of the women with disabilities is a reality and how one must make a sincere effort to bring them to mainstream and visibilise them. The newspaper reports, though very limited in number, illuminated the seriousness and magnitude of the violence against women with disability. Most of the reports, except those where the woman was empowered human rights activist, showed that the incidence was not reported by the survivor. Either the incident came into light because it became a police enquiry following hospital checkup or the family members have reported after a gap of time. None of the reports have follow ups. Thus, there was no information about the cases which were filed against the perpetrators or what was the affirmative action taken to provide support to the survivor or whether any such supportive intervention was undertaken. This highlights the importance of the role of human rights professionals, including social workers, to initiate a change so the human rights of women with disability are protected in this country.

Unless and until there is an attitudinal change from the part of the government, society, community, families and the individuals, we will continue seeing the women with disability as non-existent human beings deprived of their basic human rights. The need of the hour is, therefore, the attitudinal shift and the conscious and concerted efforts from all.

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