

A Social Philosophical Study on Gender and Vocational Training of Persons with Disability

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Abstract: The research focuses on the intersection of gender and disability within the context of vocational training, specifically examining the Department of Social Services and Vocational Training Centres in Sri Lanka. The study aims to understand the experiences and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, particularly regarding gender-related issues, in accessing vocational training programs. It also analyzes the policies and practices of the Department in addressing gender-specific needs and proposes recommendations for fostering inclusivity and equity. The methodology involves qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus group discussions. The findings highlight the vulnerabilities and insecurities faced by disabled persons and emphasize the importance of promoting gender inclusivity and equitable opportunities for both men and women with disabilities. The recommendations include developing gender-responsive policies, conducting awareness programs, and strengthening collaboration with stakeholders. Overall, the study aims to contribute to knowledge and policy improvements for creating an inclusive society.

Keywords: *Gender, Disability, Vocational Training, Rights to Persons with Disability, Equity*

I. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of gender and disability within the context of vocational training represents a critical area of study within social philosophy. In Sri Lanka, the Department of Social Services plays a significant role in providing vocational training opportunities for persons with disabilities according to the policies which was introduced by global national contexts. The Sri Lankan Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996 defines a person with a disability as “any person who, as a result of any deficiency in his physical or mental capabilities, whether congenital or not, is unable by himself to ensure for himself, wholly or partly, the necessities of life ([Sri-Lanka_1996-Protection-of-the-Rights-of-Persons-with-Disabilities-Act-No.-28.pdf](#)). Disability issues are primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Specific functions are undertaken by various government sections, including, the Department of Social Services, which has the primary responsibility for providing disability services including disability benefits, provision of assistive devices, vocational training and employment and grants to NGOs. Some of these services are decentralized to the Provincial Council level. Understanding how gender influences access to and experiences within vocational training programs is crucial for

promoting inclusivity and equitable opportunities without marginalization or discrimination. This study aims to explore the social and philosophical dimensions of gender and vocational training of persons with disabilities, specifically focusing on the Department of Social Services in Sri Lanka. By undertaking this research, we seek to deepen our understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, particularly concerning gender issues, and provide insights for policy improvements. According to the 2011 population and statistics reports of Sri Lanka, 8.6% of the population are disabled people, and according to the data of the Ministry of Social Empowerment and Welfare's Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program, that number is more than 03% of the population. Sri Lanka is taking actions according to the Millennium Goals for sustainable development as a developing country. The primary aspiration of development is to secure individual rights and make every person the pilot of sustainable development. People should be treated with equality in terms of gender as well as physical or mental.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objective of this study is to investigate the intersectionality of gender and vocational training for persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka. By examining the socio-cultural and institutional dynamics at play, this research aims to contribute to existing knowledge on the subject and provide recommendations for enhancing inclusivity and equitable opportunities in vocational training. Accordingly, examine the experiences and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities regarding gender-related issues in accessing vocational training programs provided by the Department of Social Services, analyze the policies and practices in addressing the gender-specific needs of persons with disabilities in vocational training and identify areas for improvement and explore the social and philosophical implications of the gender-disability intersection in vocational training and propose recommendations for fostering inclusivity and equity within the Department of Social Services as authorized government body of Sri Lanka investigate as specific objectives of the research.

III. IMPORTANCE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The census provides adequate evidence that most rather than females, males are vulnerable in the context of disability. Vocational training is a crucial avenue for empowering individuals with disabilities and facilitating their integration into the workforce. However, gender-related barriers and biases can significantly affect the access and experiences of persons with disabilities in vocational training programs. In Sri Lanka, the Department of Social Services plays a pivotal role in providing vocational training opportunities and support for persons with disabilities. Understanding the specific challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, particularly regarding gender issues, within the vocational training programs offered by the Department is essential for promoting inclusive practices and ensuring equitable opportunities.

By undertaking this study, we aim to shed light on the unique experiences of persons with disabilities in accessing vocational training, with a specific focus on the gender-related challenges they encounter within the Sri Lankan context. Additionally, this research seeks to identify gaps in the policies and practices of the Department of Social Services to provide recommendations for improving support services and fostering greater inclusivity.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on social justice theory, the capabilities approach, structural functionalism, and feminist disability theory to explore the intersection of gender, disability, and vocational training. Each theoretical framework contributes a unique perspective on how societal norms, institutional structures and gendered expectations affect the vocational training experiences of disabled individuals.

Social justice theory, which emphasizes fairness, equity and respect for all individuals, provides a lens to analyze access to vocational training for disabled individuals. According to Rawls (1971), social justice requires that social and institutional arrangements be organized in a way that guarantees equality of opportunity. This theory is instrumental in critiquing existing vocational training policies and practices to assess whether they genuinely offer equal access for disabled men and women or if they inadvertently uphold traditional gender norms and able-bodied ideals. According to Sen (1999) and further expanded by Nussbaum (2000), focuses on what individuals are able to *do* and *be*, emphasizing personal agency and the opportunity to pursue a fulfilling life. This theory challenges vocational training programs to support the diverse capabilities of disabled individuals by addressing their unique gender-specific and disability-related needs, thus empowering them to reach their full potential.

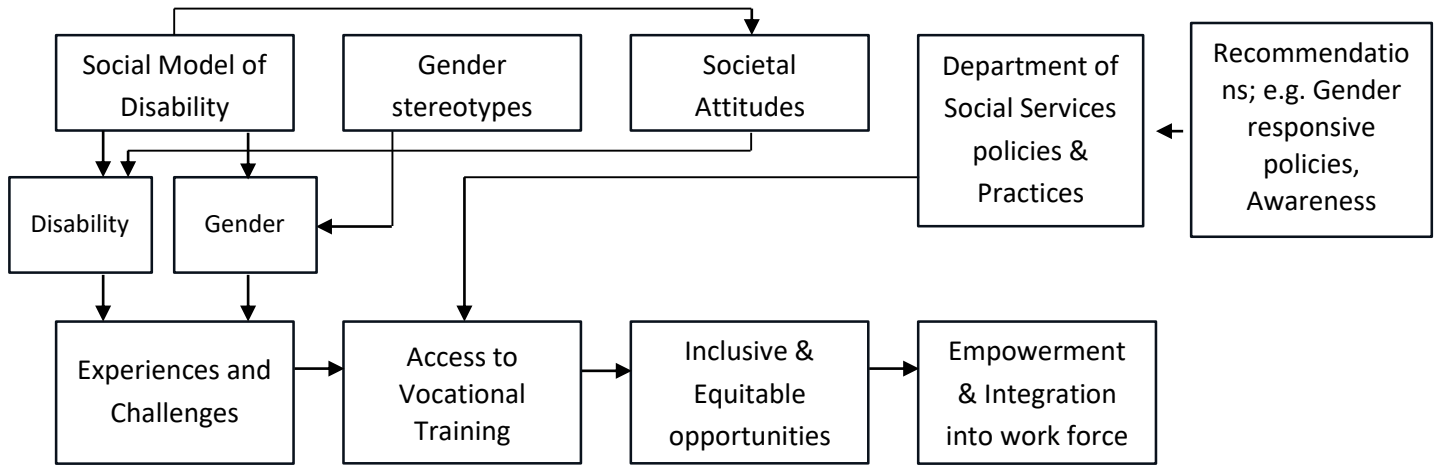
Structural functionalism, as articulated by Parsons (1951), examines the interdependent roles within a societal structure and how they contribute to stability and continuity. This framework helps in analyzing how vocational training centres and societal expectations assign roles to disabled individuals based on gender norms. It is relevant in identifying how structural norms influence gendered expectations and vocational training opportunities for disabled individuals, potentially limiting their employment options and social mobility. The feminist theory (hooks, 1984) and disability theory (Garland-Thomson, 1997) together provide a critical perspective on how gender and disability intersect to shape vocational training experiences. Feminist theory challenges gender biases that limit opportunities for disabled women, while disability theory focuses on promoting accessibility and inclusivity. This combined framework is essential in understanding how stereotypes and ableism create additional barriers in vocational training environments, advocating for gender- and disability-sensitive approaches.

According to the theoretical perspectives, the study provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the social and institutional factors affecting vocational training for disabled individuals. These frameworks inform recommendations aimed at fostering an inclusive and equitable environment that respects the rights and dignity of all individuals, ultimately contributing to social justice and inclusivity in vocational training.

In additionally, this study draws on two key theoretical frameworks: Social Model of Disability which views disability as a social construct resulting from the interaction between impairments and environmental barriers. It emphasizes that societal attitudes and physical barriers disable individuals rather than the impairment itself. Intersectionality theory recognizes that people experience oppression based on the complex interplay of their social identities (e.g., gender,

disability, ethnicity). In this study, it highlights how gender and disability intersect to create unique challenges for persons with disabilities in accessing vocational training.

The following graph depicts the key elements of the study and their relationships:



This graph illustrates how various factors, including societal models, social identities, and institutional practices, work together to shape the experiences of persons with disabilities in vocational training.

V. METHODOLOGY

Social Science research methodology is indispensable in this study as it enables a rigorous exploration of the intersectional, structural, and philosophical dimensions of gender and disability in vocational training. This methodological rigor provides depth, contextual understanding, and actionable insights that are vital for fostering an inclusive, equitable vocational training environment.

Research Design

This study employed a mono-qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the intersection of gender and vocational training for persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups were used to gather rich and detailed data.

Sample Selection

The sample was purposefully selected to include individuals with disabilities who had participated in vocational training programs offered by the Department of Social Services, related government bodies, and non-governmental organizations in Sri Lanka. The sample included individuals of different genders and disability types to capture diverse perspectives. Additionally, key informants from the Department of Social Services and relevant stakeholders, such as vocational training instructors and disability advocates, were included in the sample.

Sample Matrix

Category	Sub-category	Description	Sample	Method of
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			Size	Data Collection
Persons with Disabilities	Gender (Male/Female)	Participants of different genders to explore gender-specific challenges in vocational training.	15-25 individuals	Semi-structured interviews, Focus groups
	Disability Type (Physical, Sensory, Intellectual)	Inclusion of participants with different disability types to capture diverse perspectives.	15-25 individuals	Semi-structured interviews, Focus groups
	Type of Vocational Training (Government, NGO, Mixed)	Participants who have received training from different sources (government bodies and NGOs).	15-25 individuals	Semi-structured interviews
Key Informants	Vocational Training Instructors	Instructors who provide vocational training to individuals with disabilities and can provide insights into inclusivity.	5-8 key informants	Focus groups, Interviews
	Policy Makers/Department Representatives	Officials from the Department of Social Services or related government bodies who influence vocational training policies.	5-8 key informants	Interviews, Focus groups
	Disability Advocates	Experts or advocates for persons with disabilities who can speak to the broader systemic challenges and advocacy issues.	5-8 key informants	Focus groups, Interviews
Inclusion Criteria	Experience in Vocational Training Programs	Individuals who have participated in vocational training programs offered by the Department, NGOs, or related bodies.	N/A	N/A
Exclusion Criteria	No Participation in Vocational Training	Individuals who have not been involved in vocational training programs will not be included.	N/A	N/A

This sample matrix provides a structured and purposeful selection of participants, including individuals with disabilities from various backgrounds and stakeholders involved in vocational

training. It ensures diversity in perspectives by considering different genders, disability types, and training sources, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced in vocational training. The inclusion of key informants further strengthens the study by providing insights into institutional and policy aspects of vocational training for persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

VI. DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals with disabilities who had experienced vocational training programs provided by the Department of Social Services and other vocational training centers. The interviews explored their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding gender-related issues in accessing and participating in vocational training. Focus group discussions were conducted with vocational training instructors and key informants from the Department to gain insights into the existing policies, practices, and challenges related to gender inclusivity in vocational training.

The qualitative data collected from interviews and focus group discussions was transcribed and analyzed thematically. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify patterns, themes, and categories related to the intersection of gender and vocational training for persons with disabilities. The data was coded and organized into themes, and relationships between themes were explored to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

XIV. LIMITATIONS

This study acknowledges certain limitations that may influence the findings and generalizability of the research. Firstly, the sample size may be limited due to the availability and accessibility of individuals willing to participate in the study. This could impact the representation of diverse perspectives within the disability community. Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases or limitations related to recall or social desirability. Furthermore, the research is constrained by time and resource limitations, which may impact the depth of analysis and the ability to explore all relevant dimensions of the topic.

XV. FINDINGS

The findings of this study were presented in detail, analyzing the experiences of individuals with disabilities regarding gender-related issues in accessing vocational training programs within the Department of Social Services. The examination of existing policies and practices identified areas for improvement and provided insights into the social and philosophical implications of the gender-disability intersection in vocational training. The findings contributed to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka and provided recommendations for enhancing inclusivity and equitable opportunities within the Department of Social Services.

The Department of Social Services in Sri Lanka operated Vocational Training Institutes (VTIs) that catered specifically to persons with disabilities. These VTIs provided specialized vocational training programs to empower individuals with disabilities and enhance their employability.

Vocational Training Centers under the Department of Social Services, Sri Lanka were identified

as follows:

1. Seeduwa Vocational Training Center
2. Amunukumbura Vocational Training Center
3. Ketawala Vocational Training Center
4. Wategama Vocational Training Center
5. Thelembuyaya Vocational Training Center
6. Ragama Vocational Training Center
7. Madampe Vocational Training Center
8. Kalawana Vocational Training Center

Visually impaired, speech impaired, physically disabled, intellectually disabled, hearing impaired, and multi-disabled individuals could take admission for the above vocational training institutes. It was also noteworthy that there was a limited age group (under 18) eligible to enter the courses.

According to the World Bank's World Development Indicators, in 2011, the estimated prevalence of disability in Sri Lanka was approximately 9.2% of the total population. In terms of gender and disability, according to Sri Lanka's 2001 statistical data (<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Resource/en/Population/PopHouStat/PDF/Disability/p11d2DisabledpersonsbyAgeandSex.pdf>), it appeared that men suffered from disabilities more than women. The findings revealed that several vocational training centers in Sri Lanka provided gender-based vocational training programs specifically targeted towards men. These centers aimed to address the specific needs and challenges faced by men in accessing skill development opportunities, such as the Vocational Training Authority (VTA), National Institute of Business Management (NIBM), Department of Technical Education and Training (DTET), Industrial Training Institute (ITI), Women's Bureau Vocational Training Centers (under the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs), and the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA), among others. Accordingly, the Department of Social Services was recommended to create a mechanism in connection with the above vocational training centers, with a focus on gender equity, to secure and protect the equal rights of both men and women with disabilities.

It was important to note that while these vocational training centers might attract more male participants, they were open to individuals of all genders. The goal was to provide equal opportunities for all interested individuals to acquire vocational skills and enhance their employability. According to the findings, the insecurity faced by disabled men compared to disabled women indicated that experiences varied significantly among individuals due to the intersection of disability and gender, as well as other factors such as societal norms, cultural context, and personal circumstances. However, certain broad observations were made regarding the challenges faced by disabled men, such as:

1. **Social Expectations:** Disabled men faced additional pressure to conform to traditional masculine stereotypes and societal expectations. Societal beliefs often associated masculinity with

physical strength, independence, and providing for others. This pressure led to feelings of inadequacy and a sense of insecurity when disabled men were unable to meet these expectations.

2. **Employment and Economic Factors:** Disabled men encountered difficulties in securing stable employment opportunities due to physical limitations or societal biases. This resulted in economic insecurity, affecting their financial independence and overall well-being. Limited employment prospects also impacted their self-esteem and contributed to a sense of vulnerability.

3. **Access to Support Networks:** Disabled men faced challenges in accessing support networks and resources designed to address their specific needs. Support systems often focused more on the needs of disabled women, leaving disabled men with fewer avenues for assistance and community engagement. This lack of support contributed to feelings of isolation and insecurity.

4. **Intersectionality and Multiple Marginalization:** Disabled men belonging to marginalized communities, such as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or ethnic minorities, faced compounded challenges and insecurities. The intersectionality of disability with other identities exacerbated the discrimination and barriers they encountered, making it more challenging to overcome their insecurities.

It was crucial to emphasize that while disabled men faced unique challenges, disabled women also experienced their own distinct set of insecurities and barriers. Both groups deserved equal recognition and support in addressing their specific needs and promoting inclusivity and empowerment. To foster a more inclusive society, it was important to promote awareness, challenge gender stereotypes, and ensure that disability-related support systems and resources were accessible and available to all individuals, regardless of gender. By addressing the insecurities and vulnerabilities faced by disabled men and women, progress could be made towards creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all members of society. The main factor identified in this study was that in the case of disability, both women and men should be equally given space and attention.

XVI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to enhance the gender inclusivity and equitable opportunities in vocational training for persons with disabilities within the Department of Social Services and other interconnected Institutions in Sri Lanka. These recommendations include:

1. Developing gender-responsive policies and guidelines that address the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in vocational training.
2. Conducting gender sensitization and awareness programs for vocational training staff to promote inclusive practices and challenge gender biases.
3. Strengthening collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including disability advocacy groups and employers, to foster gender-inclusive vocational training programs and create employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

These recommendations will consider the identified challenges and align with the principles of inclusivity and equity.

XVII. CONCLUSION

This social philosophical study on gender and vocational training of persons with disabilities, with a special focus on the Department of Social Services in Sri Lanka, aims to shed light on the experiences and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities regarding gender issues within vocational training programs. By exploring the intersectionality of gender and vocational training, this study seeks to contribute to knowledge and provide recommendations for policy improvements, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

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