'Enabling the Disabled’ – Perspectives on the Role of Traditional Medicine in Disability

Srihari Sheshagiri*

* Associate Professor, Department of Kaumarabhritya, Mahatma Gandhi Ayurved College, Hospital & Research Centre, Datta Meghe Institute of Medical Sciences (DU), Salod, Wardha, Maharashtra, India

It is a controversial statistic to note that, although the overall life expectancy of humans was considerably low few centuries ago (owing to lack of sophisticated and emergency medical facilities), the disability/disease-free state of people was high (owing to a healthy lifestyle, diet, and stress-free life). However, in recent years the overall life expectancy has increased whereas the disease/disability-free population has decreased. [1] This situation is of significant concern to all health care providers and specially to the nations with high disability index, as the outcome of this situation is a huge economic burden and increase in the less productive population. This augurs immediate attention in the context of prevention, management, and rehabilitation of people with disability which will also enable them to perform at least their day-to-day works independently.

3rd December is identified as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities by WHO since 1992. Each year a new theme is being highlighted with the specific areas to be focused upon, based on which the efforts are directed. [2] The main objectives of observing this day is to ‘encourage the well-being of the persons with disabilities and provide them with an equal opportunity to perform with others where disability does not stand as an excuse’. The other important objective is to highlight the alarming increase in the disabled population and their situations to policymakers by which social, economic and cultural outlooks are improved. [2]

Why disability is a cause of concern?
The recent WHO World report on Disability (2011) estimates that more than One Billion people all over the world are disabled in one or another form, [3] which accounts for 15% of total world’s population. The foremost cause with regards to the rise in this figure is due to an increase in the aged population worldwide and is a significant cause of concern in developing countries. [4]

Disability not only affects the elderly population; but also, the paediatric age group too at both physical and psychological levels. While the world is busy fighting new diseases and combating new viruses, a silent form of the killer is incessantly on the rise in this form.

**QR Code**

**Citation**

Srihari Sheshagiri. 'Enabling the Disabled’ – Perspectives on the Role of Traditional Medicine in Disability. J. res. tradit. med. 2018;4(5-6):103-105

DOI: 10.5455/JRTM.2018/60166

ISSN: 2455-3166

Access free download of this article on: [www.tmjournal.org](http://www.tmjournal.org)
The nature of disability afflicting the masses
Even though it is extremely difficult to define ‘disability’ precisely as it varies significantly among the people and their geographical location, the nature/types of disability can be grouped majorly into the following.

a) Physical disability
b) Psychological disability
c) Psycho-Physical disability

The above types of disability may be due to accidental, environmental (natural calamity), diet, medical negligence, etc. Hearing loss, refractive errors, and depression are the three major disabilities affecting the people worldwide. [5]

What Traditional Medicine (TM) can offer for the Disabled?
All most all the TM worldwide have a long history of practice with some even dating back to 5000 year BC. These systems of medicine have a strong coherent bond with nature. The principles and practices of TM are aimed at creating harmony between human and his surrounding environment. [6] Hence, there is no clutter in proclaiming the fact that TM can significantly contribute to developing a society with a minimal number of disabled population by managing, rejuvenating or rehabilitating them.

Most of the TM practiced have a long history and is closely bound with the cultural and religious background. [7] These practices are time tested and have a traditional value which uses locally available materials as medicines. Even though there is no exact statistical data on the acceptance rate of TM as the primary health provider, there are shreds of evidence which suggests that people of developing and underdeveloped countries rely on these systems of medicine for their health needs.

The available references and data regarding disability suggest that no age group, no gender, and no place is free from incidences of disabilities. The approach towards managing disabilities can be broadly divided into,

a. Prevention
b. Management
c. Rehabilitation

Disabilities through above said causes like accidental, natural calamity, etc. require management and rehabilitation (which go hand in hand) whereas those arising out of a faulty diet, lifestyle disorders and medical negligence can be prevented as well as managed.

Prevention is aimed at
- Avoidance of consumption of/interaction with the factors which may cause disability
- Practice of daily and seasonal regimen as per the various techniques prescribed in different types of TM to maintain health and improve immunity and strength
- Socio-environmental provisions for improving basic facilities

Rehabilitation is aimed at preventing, improving, complementing and slowing down the loss of body functions (PICS strategy).

The management principles of most of the TM are at the grass-root level of illness. They intend to correct the basic pathology of the condition which is leading to the disability and thereby improving the condition and the time taken for this process is comparatively more. The management strategy consists of utilising both internal medications as well as external therapies. Most of the TM are well known for physical manipulation therapies such as massages, acupuncture, cupping, exercises, etc. which have a definitive role in rehabilitating the physical disabilities. [8-9]


Personalised medicinal strategy [24] is the strength of almost all TM, where every patient is treated differently by addressing the concerns and needs of that individual in particular. Hence these methods add up to the benefits for managing patients with disabilities, where tailor-made therapies are administered and desired effects are reaped off.

Accessibility and affordability of TM are the major concerns all over the world. However, social and cultural similarities and holistic approach of these TM makes it easier for people with disability to be accepted. TM can be relatively affordable when the area-specific TM is practiced. But finding a trained and experienced practitioner remains a challenge. Affordability to these services is also a matter of concern as most of the people with disability have financial strain. Hence suitable government policies for providing access to affordable rehabilitative care through the TM therapies should be implemented for the benefit of human wellbeing. [25]
References


Source of Support: None declared

Conflict of Interest: NIL

Disclaimer: Journal of Research in Traditional Medicine, its publisher, editorial board members or anyone involved in producing and delivering the online materials, does not assume any responsibility or liability for any consequences arising out of the usage of the contents in the published articles. The contents presented in the articles are purely the opinion of the contributing authors and not necessarily of the Journal.