

# 'INHERENT BURDENS OF **DISABILITY** AND MOVING AHEAD OF IT'



Embassy of the  
Kingdom of the Netherlands



**BRAC** SCHOOL OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH  
JAMES P GRANT



Inspiring Excellence

**BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health,  
BRAC University conducted a mixed method study funded  
by the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands.  
The study was titled -'Sexual and Reproductive Health and  
Rights (SRHR) of Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh.  
The study included 5000 participants from 8 divisions of  
Bangladesh.**

**All the information used in this booklet is based on the  
findings of the study.**

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**We acknowledge the support received from the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands, Ministry of Social Welfare and Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Government of Bangladesh.**

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This Pictorial Booklet is an output of the research  
**A Study on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)  
of Persons with Disabilities**

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## NOTE FROM THE DEAN

We are delighted to publish this pictorial booklet from The Centre of Excellence for Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University. The Centre works to promote an in depth understanding of some of the critical but sensitive issues, with a focus on vulnerable communities. At the School, we explore public health issues from a holistic perspective and explore the physical, mental, spiritual and social dimensions of one's experiences of self and identity. We invest a lot of our resources in evidence generation, training/capacity building, advocacy and policy related activities, especially on gender and sexual and reproductive health and rights in Bangladesh and South Asia.



The study from which this booklet has been compiled is unique in many ways, as it not only examined the SRHR aspects in the lives of persons with disabilities but also explored their inner feelings using a focused ethnographic approach. The booklet is a tool for education and learning; it aims to provide its readers an opportunity to look at the different forms of stigma and discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities, and to identify ways to help prevent these experiences. This mini booklet compiled by my colleague Adity Shayontony Das, outlines some of the deeply rooted myths and prejudices around disability, with an effort to debunk them.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands and the Ministry of Health and Family Planning and Ministry of Social Welfare for their support. Thank you Dr. Tanvir Hasan, PI, of the national study and the wonderful team of dedicated researchers who worked extremely hard to make this research study possible. I hope this booklet will allow for clearer and better insight into the lives of individuals living with disabilities, and lead to an awareness and a shift in public policies and interventions in the future.

**Sabina Faiz Rashid, PhD,  
Dean & Professor  
BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University**

## NOTE FROM THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

At BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, we try to facilitate research to understand some of the untapped areas among the vulnerable communities. This time, we looked at the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of persons with disabilities.



The very first thing we discovered in the process of conceptualizing and executing this research was the importance of being sensitive towards persons with disabilities. We use this booklet as such a medium, by which we are trying to convey some of the important messages we have gathered from our field research.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands, for funding the study. Also, it must be mentioned that without the support from the Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Ministry of Social Welfare and our Advocacy Group this research would not have been possible.

My research team and I felt the need to use a medium of dissemination that would be able to break down the complicated issues like stigma, neglect, discrimination into some small layers for the ease of understanding. My colleague, Ms Adity Shayontony Das touched upon these different dimensions in this booklet, with example cases stories to make some clear messaging for our readers.

I hope her efforts in bringing out the experiences of persons with disabilities are well cascaded in the readers of this booklet and the society as a whole.

**Md. Tanvir Hasan, PhD**  
**Associate Professor,**  
**BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University.**







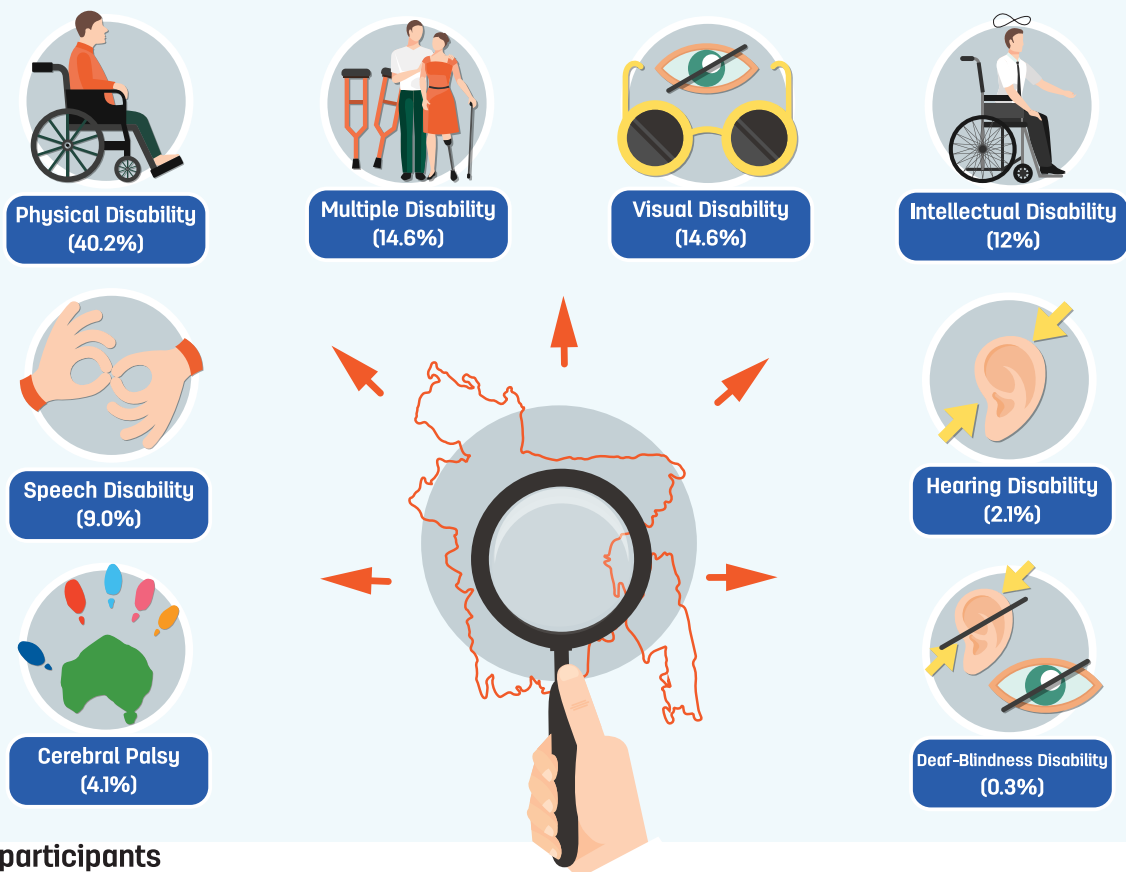
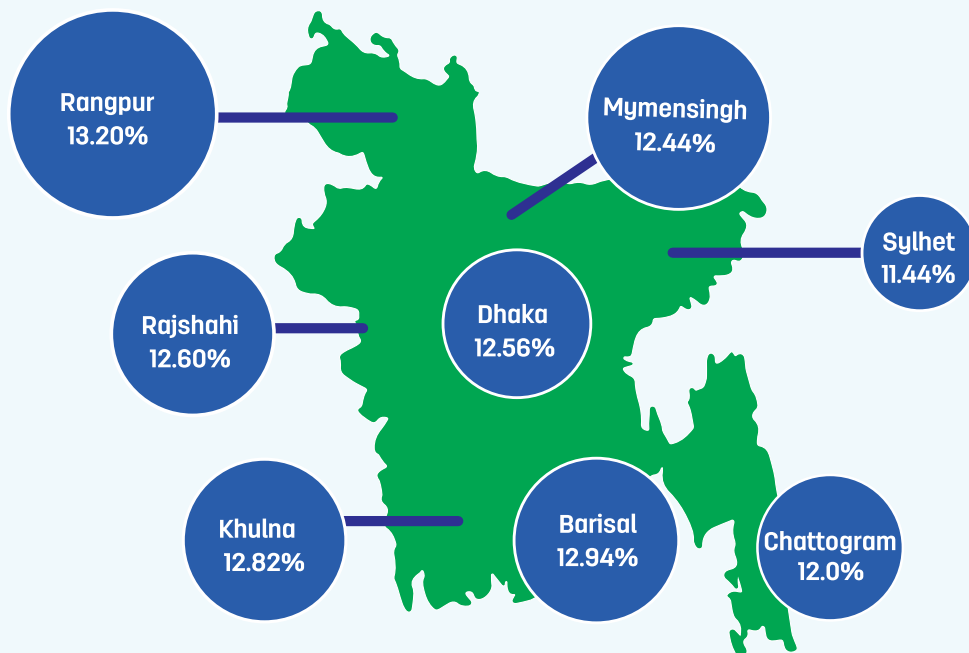
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# BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The data presented below is based on the findings of the study 'Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of Persons with Disabilities in Bangladesh.' The total participant of the study was 5000, from across 8 divisions of Bangladesh



\*out of 5000 participants

## STATUS QUO: EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Had an opportunity to  
access education

**53.4% YES** **46.6% NO**

Had an opportunity to access  
any vocational training\*

**YES**  
8.7%

**NO**  
91.3%

Has interest to participate in  
any skill development training

**YES**  
47.7%

**NO**  
52.3%

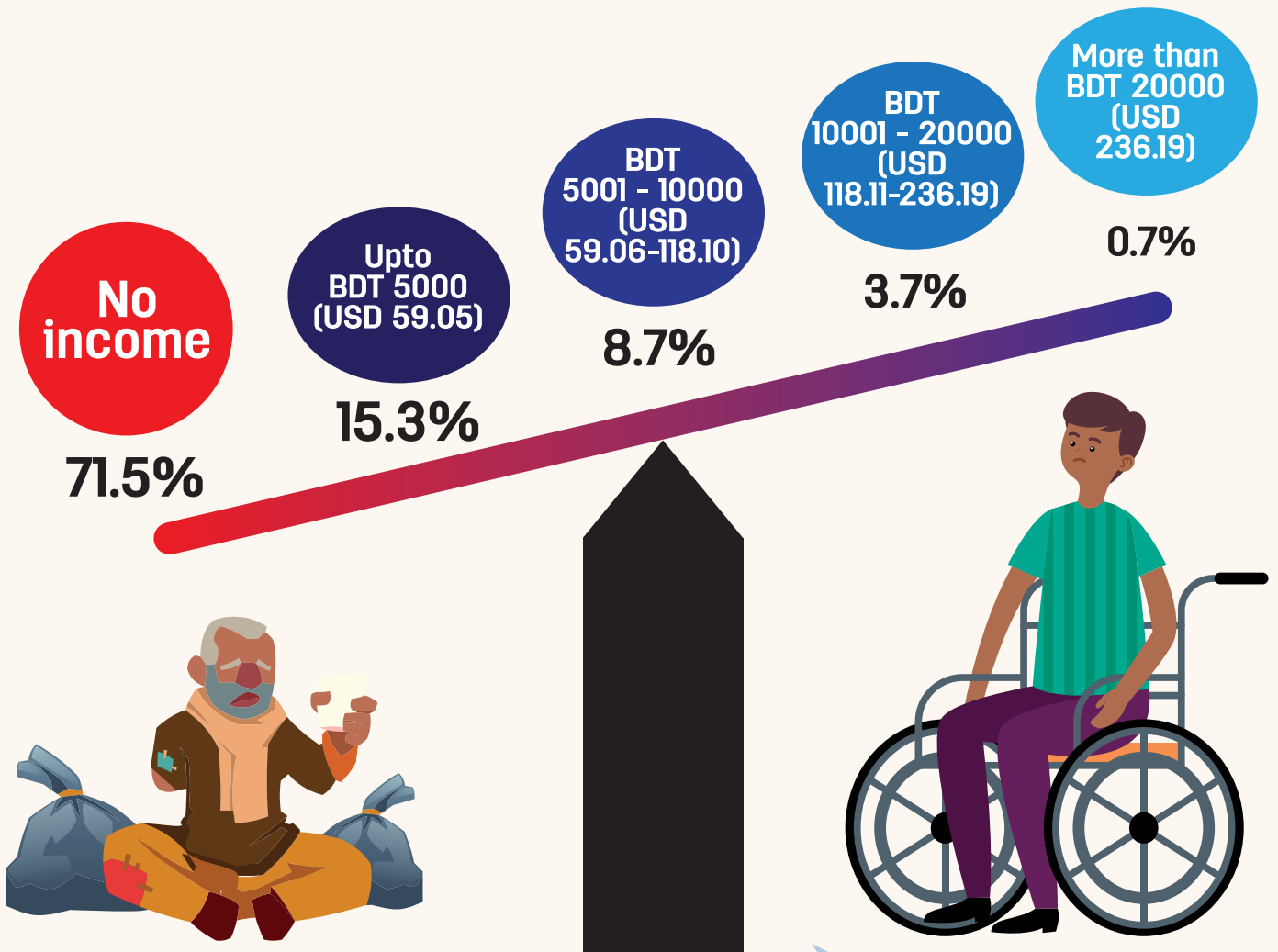
Currently employed or not?

**24.9% YES** **49.8% NO**

Other 25.3% include Students & Housewives



## STATUS QUO: EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME



" I wanted to know when the allowance is given. When will we get it? Sometimes it comes after 2 months, sometimes 3, sometimes 4, and sometimes we don't get it at all! If we call them to ask, they get angry!"

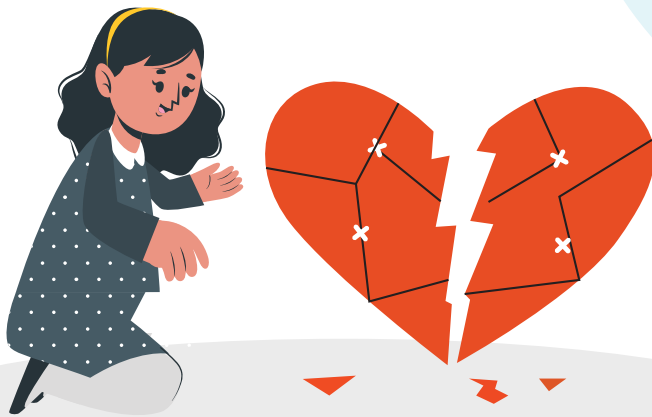
**- MOTHER OF A 32-YEAR-OLD WOMAN  
WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES.**

# Story of Jasmine: not a fairytale.

Jasmine is a young, jolly girl, she loves to study and is a very creative girl. She paints and likes to imagine different happy situations in her mind. she imagines herself walking to school, making friends, playing in the field, jumping in the water puddles.



But in reality she can't because she doesn't have fully formed limbs. Jasmine feels that her parents are also sad about it, so she gets more upset.



Jasmine is now a few years older. She stopped going to school because it is very difficult for her to climb the stairs at school.

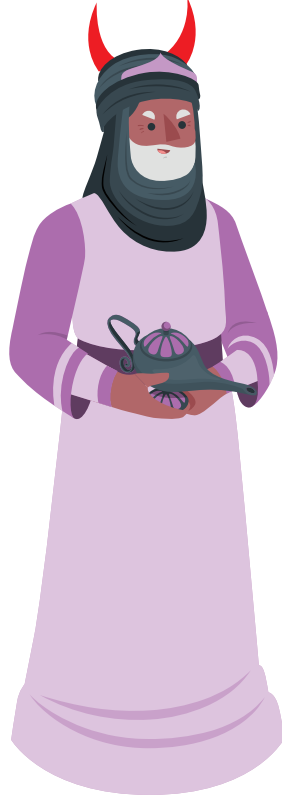
Not that she wanted to stop going to school, but she had to. Her siblings go to school but she cannot. Every morning she makes snacks for her siblings and imagines going to school but then the bubble dissolves and she gets back to frying the vegetables.



Jasmine grows up to be a beautiful girl but weird behaviour keeps pouring in from her family and neighbours nowadays. Everyone treats her like an object, taunts her and ridicules her impairments.



One of her uncles take her to a traditional healer with a promise of recovery. The healer explains to her how she has been affected by a jinn and how only he can recover her.



The healer asks for sexual favours in return and whenever Jasmine denies, he threatens her.

Jasmine is a young, sad girl now. Despite her love for painting, she has stopped paint. Instead of imagining happy things, she always thinks of a girl with impaired limbs sitting in a cage all day.



She thinks of herself in a cage all day.

## STIGMA & DISCRIMINATION

**STIGMA and DISCRIMINATION** faced by persons with disabilities can have various forms and affects different sectors of life including education, health, access to public facilities and many more as documented in this study.

“ While travelling to Malibag through bus, one gentleman said rudely: 'Why did you take her out? You should stay at home!' ”

**MOTHER OF SHAKILA,  
24-YEAR-OLD, FEMALE,  
INTELLECTUAL  
DISABILITY.**



“ I went to the doctors for treatment during pregnancy and they told me, you are a disabled person, why did you get pregnant again!? ”

**SELIMA, 23 YEARS  
OLD-FEMALE, WITH  
PHYSICAL  
DISABILITY.**





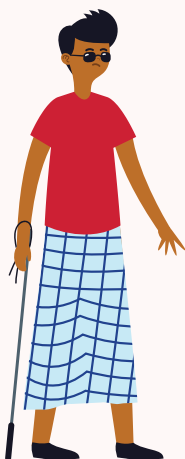
## DIFFERENT FORMS OF SUFFERINGS FACED BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Findings show that - Dowry is almost mandatory for women with disabilities. Parents have to pay dowry to enhance marriage

**“It is a hassle for my family members when I menstruate, so they give me some medicines to stop it”**

**-SAHENA, 20 YEARS OLD WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITY**



**“I was divorced because of my disability, because who wants a disabled partner?”**  
**- MANIK MIA, 35 YEARS OLD, WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT.**

**ALL THESE EXPERIENCES SHOW HOW PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES' FEELINGS ARE DISREGARDED. THERE IS A TENDENCY TO DE-HUMANIZE THEM. SORT OF A 'THEM' AND 'US'. BUT WHERE DOES IT STEM FROM?**

# DISABILITY

## MYTHS AND FACTS

Misconceptions regarding  
Persons with Disabilities

### MYTH

Disability is a curse



Disability is not a curse, like any other health condition, is a medical problem and requires care and cure.

### FACT

### MYTH

A child with disability is a burden for life!



A child is a child with or without disability, whether to consider it as a burden depends on the mentality and certain decisions of the family and/community.

### FACT

### MYTH

Any form of disability = intellectual impairment



No, all forms of disabilities do not indicate intellectual impairment, some form of disabilities which do, also produce intellectual impairment to varying degrees. Only an expert in the field of disability and/ Medical Profession can identify the degree of intellectual development in a person.

### FACT

### MYTH

A person with disability doesn't/ shouldn't have sexual desires

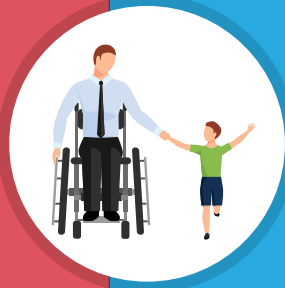


Sexual Desire is something they would feel. Sexual pleasure or sexual relationships are something they are entitled to experience based on their desire. Isn't it!

### FACT

## MYTH

A disabled person will always have a disabled child



This is a wrong information.

## FACT

## MYTH

A person with disability doesn't require any sexual and reproductive health service other than maternity care



A person with disability, like any other individual is entitled to receiving all sorts of healthcare services including sexual and reproductive health services.

## FACT

## MYTH

A disabled person shouldn't aspire to have higher education



Again, a wrong information. Education is the basic right of an individual regardless of their disability condition.

## FACT

## MYTH

A disabled person doesn't have any decision making right

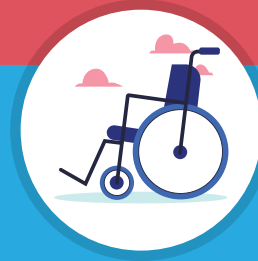


Not accurate. A person who is of age, and at a stable state to think and make decisions, should be given the right to make decisions.

## FACT

## MYTH

It is not important to seek consent from a disabled person



Absolutely inaccurate. A person who is of age, and at a condition to give or disapprove consent, should be allowed to state their consent.

## FACT

# NEGLECT

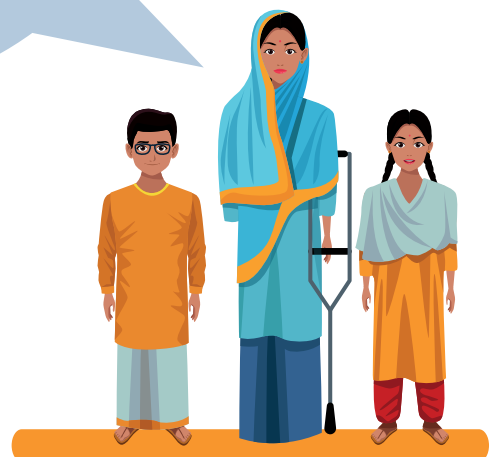
**NEGLECT** at familial, societal and institutional levels aggregates the trauma experienced by persons with disabilities further. A few examples of neglect in the words of our research participants:

“I did not know about any extra time during my JSC exam, I could not pass the exam”



**OUR STUDY REPORTS THAT FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – ‘58.3% TRANSPORTS ARE NOT DISABLED FRIENDLY’ AND ‘16.0% ROAD CROSSINGS ARE NOT DISABILITY FRIENDLY’**

“The fear of getting up the stairs in that condition made me deliver 2 of my children at home”



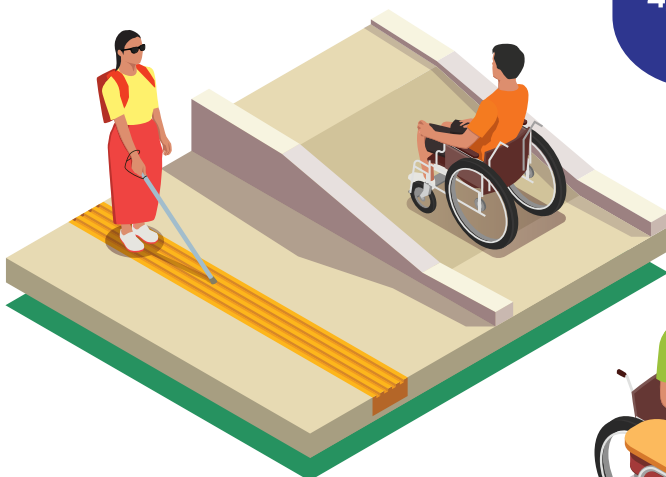
"I came home one day to see her burned hand with hot tea and she was left unattended. Maybe she had spilled it on her own, maybe someone else did, I don't know. She cried and cried but could not say anything. Since that day, I have never left her alone for one second, I will not as long as I am alive, I don't know what will happen to her when I die!"

**-MOTHER OF SULTANA, 26 YEARS OLD, FEMALE WITH SPEECH AND HEARING IMPAIRMENT.**



### **NEGLECTING EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OPPURTUNITIES: CREATING BARRIERS**

- 1) Infrastructures not disability friendly,
- 2) Special facilities (eg. washrooms, audio visual facilities, disability-friendly reading and writing methods) not available.
- 3) Extra Cost for availing SPECIAL facilities.
- 4) Not enough special provisions for job security.



# ABU: ANGRY YOUNG MAN.

Abu is a 30 years old man, he lives with his wife, brothers and child. Abu did not complete his education after Class 6. Abu lost his vision due to an accident. Since then, his life had changed.

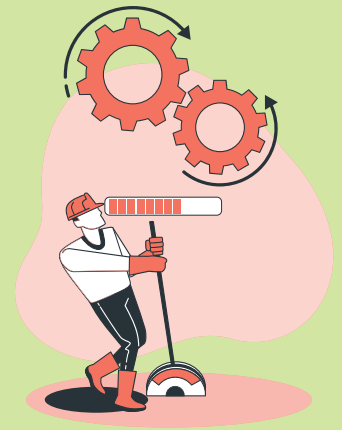


Now, that Abu is a grown man with his own family, life is getting harder for Abu everyday. His wife is not interested to continue the marriage despite his efforts. He tries to impress her by bringing her favorite cosmetics, speaking nicely to her and even singing for her sometimes, but she ridicules him.

This makes Abu very angry. His family members also ridicule him due to his disability and lack of employment. Abu tries his best to bring money in his family but struggles a lot.

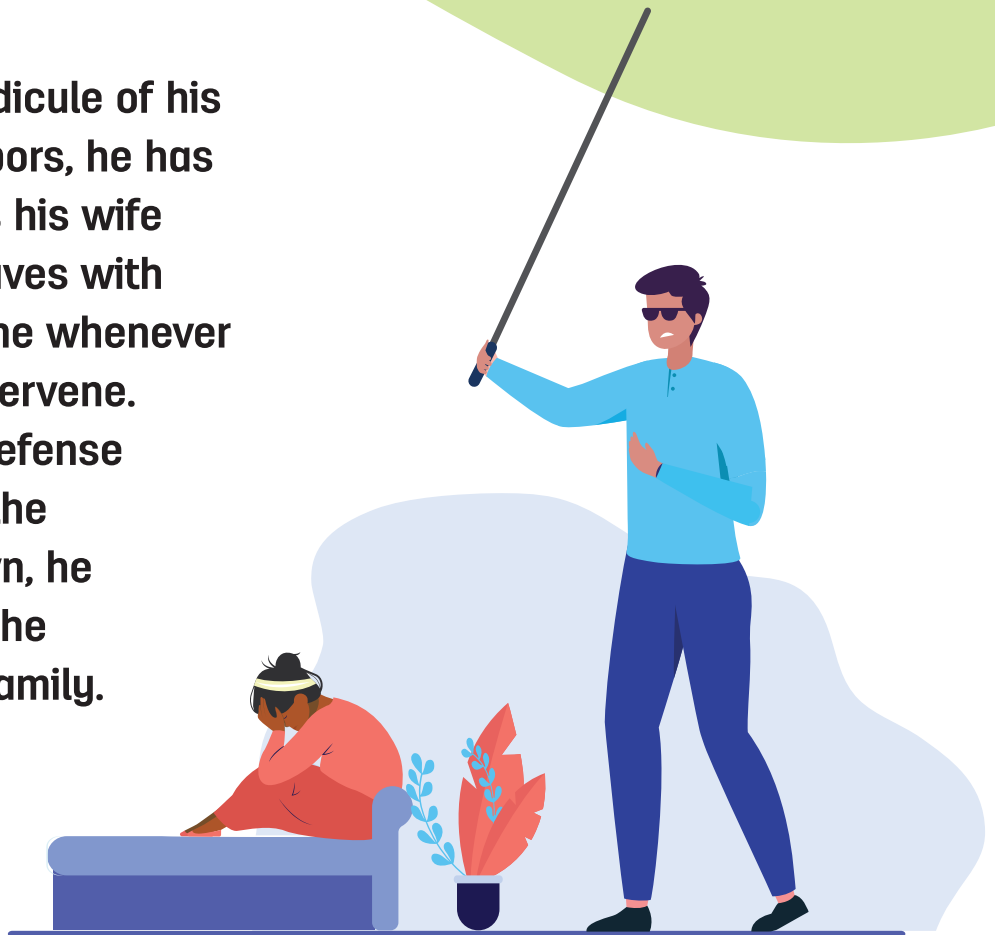


DISABLED  
LOSER



He often thinks that, if he had received some vocational training life would have been so different.

Abu cannot bear the ridicule of his wife, family and neighbors, he has given up now. He beats his wife whenever she misbehaves with him and creates a scene whenever his family members intervene. His anger, is the only defense mechanism he has at the moment. But deep down, he is very scared to lose the only thing he has..his family.



**ABU EXPERIENCES STIGMA AND NEGLECT FROM HIS FAMILY AND WIFE, DUE TO HIS LACK OF EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT FACILITIES HE IS MORE DEPRESSED. ABU GETS VIOLENT WITH HIS WIFE, BECAUSE HE FEELS STRONGER BY MAKING HIS WIFE FEEL WEAKER. THIS IS HIS COPING MECHANISM.**

## VIOLENCE & ABUSE

Violence and abuse in any form causes both physical and emotional trauma to the person, hindering the persons' self-worth and overall wellbeing. Persons with disabilities, as reported in our studies, experiences different forms of violence and abuse throughout their lives which has negative impacts on them.



"I got pregnant a few years back, they took me to a local healer to fix it (!) I told my father and my step mother that it was my brother who did this. They did not do anything about it, they just asked my brother to make a house a bit far from ours, they are still in touch. I get blamed for this till now, I don't know what I have done to deserve this"

**- NIGAR, 20 YEARS OLD,  
CEREBRAL PALSY**

**NIGAR HAS CEREBRAL PALSY AND STILL LIVES WITH THE HORROR OF THIS EXPERIENCE, AND SHE IS OFTEN BLAMED FOR THIS. ALONG WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE, NIGAR HAD TO ALSO UNDERGO ABORTION WITHOUT PROPER MEDICAL SUPPORT. THIS COULD HAVE BEEN A LIFE THREATENING SITUATION FOR NIGAR, FORTUNATELY SHE SURVIVED.**



## VIOLENCE & ABUSE

"My husband beats me almost every night, he knows I have nowhere to go, nothing to do, so he keeps treating me like this"

**- AYESHA, 34 YEARS OLD, PHYSICAL DISABILITY**

**AYESHA HAS PHYSICAL DISABILITY AND COULD NOT ACCESS EDUCATION AND NEITHER COULD ACCESS ANY SOCIAL NETWORKS, SHE USED TO STAY WITHIN THE CLOSED DOORS OF HER HOME AND GOT MARRIED WHEN HER PARENTS DECIDED. SHE LIVES WITH CONSTANT TORTURE AND HUMILIATION AS HER HUSBAND BEATS HER EVEN IN FRONT OF HER OWN PARENTS.**



**DOES DISABILITY ALWAYS MEAN A FATE LIKE NIGAR AND AYESHA'S?**



# Moli: Reaching for the stars. ★



Moli lives with her mother. Her father abandoned her mother because Moli was born with a disability and he thinks it is her mother's fault. Her mother was determined to send her daughter to school no matter what. She felt that being able or disabled lies in the mind and not in the body.

Moli received education until HSC without any major complications, because her family and teachers always supported her. She felt motivated to pursue higher studies but could not due to her financial constraints. She took a break for two years, in those two years she decided to go for vocational training and got hands on training on tailoring.

Both Moli and her mother used to tailor clothes for the people in their area and this helped them financially.



# ★ Moli: Reaching for the stars. ★

Many people tried to convince her mother to marry Moli off, or else young men will tease her. Moli's mother consulted with Moli's teachers, and they suggested otherwise. She decided not to marry Moli off until she is of age and finds a good suitor. She is also informed that underage pregnancy can cause different types of illness and even death.



After two years break finally Moli got herself enrolled in a Degree program at a nearby college and is now studying. When asked about the ridicules and taunts she hears from her surrounding Moli responds by saying: **“ It doesn't bother me, because I know what I am capable of, and I know I can achieve so much, only by not giving up ”**. Everyone has some sort of limitations, some visible some are not so visible. I look at it that way. I think the biggest support I have is from my family (especially my mother), my teachers and the people in my area..they make life a bit easier for me.

SIMILAR TO MOLI'S STORY, IN ORDER TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE WORLD AND TO PUT THE DUE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN PLACE, A COLLECTIVE MEASURE IS REQUIRED.

## STEPS TO MOVE FORWARD

- **ENSURING DISABILITY FRIENDLY EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FACILITIES.**
- **ENSURING DISABILITY FRIENDLY INFRASTRUCTURES IN ALL PUBLIC FACILITIES.**
- **CONSIDERING THE CONTEXT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WHILE DRAFTING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICIES.**
- **UTILIZING COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS TO DESIGN MYBUSTING CAMPAIGNS.**
- **BRINGING IN MULTISECTORAL (EG.HEALTH, TRANSPORTATION, EDUCATION, LAW) EFFORTS TO LIMIT THE STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION FACED BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.**
- **IMPROVING THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET PROGRAMS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO SECURE THEIR SOCIAL SECURITY.**
- **DRAFTING POLICIES TO PROVIDE LEGAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TO VICTIMS OF ABUSE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE.**
- **LEARNING TO STOP DE-HUMANIZING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.**





*We extend our gratitude to all our participants  
who invested their time and emotion with this study  
and we dedicate this booklet to them.*



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