

Perspectives on Disability



Report

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This report is less of a technical research report than a compilation of stories which reflect the perspective that different people have on disabilities. A proper perspective matters to people with disabilities. This report is dedicated to address the problems related to wrong attitudes and perspectives towards people with disabilities. I hope this report leads to changes from which you all will benefit directly.

A note on terms: throughout this report we use the phrase “people with disabilities” as much as possible. I believe that a person’s disability is not what defines them, but rather it is their personhood that comes first. We understand that while some people may object to the use of this, we would like to prioritise the individuality of a person over their disability. We want to avoid objectifying people who have disabilities by making remarks such as “the disabled”; it strays away from the idea of equity and the treatment of people with disabilities as people first. However it is important not to be ignorant about someone’s disabilities; they do have special challenges and experiences that cannot just be disregarded and we have to accept the fact that people have their differences. Eventually, the point of replacing “disabled people” with “people with disabilities”, is to keep people first, while also recognising the key factors that make them unique. As to using the term “disabilities” as opposed to “special needs” or “special abilities”, many people with disabilities themselves prefer the term and it makes it easier to distinguish them from people without disabilities.

Note: The names of the interviewees in this report are authentic. This report has been written with their informed consent.

1. Introduction

“A person with a disability” is an umbrella term that refers to any person who has a physical, psychological, and/or mental disability due to social, environmental or genetic factors. According to various surveys, from 6% to 16% of people in Bangladesh have disabilities such as vision, hearing, psychological and physical disabilities. Bangladeshi people with disabilities face a multitude of barriers due to discriminatory attitudes perpetuated by people without disabilities in the country. Usually, these barriers lie on a spectrum between an inaccessible physical environment and a lack of relevant assistive technology, but it is often clear that there is one intangible barrier that is equally obstructive: perspective.

In Bangladesh, there are a lot of people with disabilities of a working age who are actively seeking a job, but finding one requires great effort. Most employers presume that a worker with a disability will not be productive in comparison to a worker without a disability. Consequently, a lot of people with disabilities are left unemployed and pushed towards poverty.

Most public and private educational institutes in Bangladesh refuse to accept students with significant or even minor disabilities even though people with disabilities have the legitimate right to study in such institutes. However, till date, it still remains as a dream for most. One identifiable reason is the wrong perspective which school authorities and some parents of children without disabilities have about people with disabilities. The importance of inclusion is still not understood by many in our contemporary society. Unfortunately, due to this many people with disabilities are withheld from the mainstream and are not given a chance to contribute. They are restrained primarily by wrong perspectives and negative attitudes.

In order to further understand, analyze and verify the common perceptions that people have about disability and to understand the perspective of people with disabilities, a qualitative survey was carried in the form of interviews. People from different backgrounds, occupations, ages, and gender were interviewed. For example, a principal of a renowned school in Dhaka was interviewed regarding this issue from an educational institute’s point of view. A few employees with disabilities were interviewed; they shared their stories from which I could analyze how the perception of others matters to them. Parents of both children with and without disabilities were interviewed because predominantly parents are the main influencers of their child’s development and perceptions. Parents of children with disabilities have to face unique challenges while raising their children with special needs. While having to go through the emotional turmoil and shock of discovering that their child has a disability, parents also have to deal with the guilt and blame that is pointed at them because of the belief that perhaps their past sins or lack of faith were the reason that such a thing happened. Eventually, this

further perpetuates the stigmatisation of people with disabilities by treating them as though they are unholy or believing that people are deserving of their disabilities because of unfaithfulness or past sins.

2. The Research Question

Questions to people with disabilities

- Would you like to share an incident in your life that made you feel happy?
- Who is your most favorite person and why?
- Did you ever get the opportunity to study in a school? If not, why?
- Did you ever want to study at an English medium school?
- Are you currently employed? If yes, are there any struggles that you face at your workplace?
- Is there any specific skill you're good at that you can use to earn a living? (Question to a person with a disability who is currently unemployed)
- What are the things which distress you the most?

Questions to parents of children with a disability

- What things have you found to enjoy having a child with special needs?
- What are the challenges you face as a parent to a child with special needs?
- What are your child's strengths? What does your child enjoy doing?
- What concerns do you have for your child's future?

Questions to teachers (Sir John Wilson School)

- How important is it for schools to be inclusive?
- How is SJWS working towards ensuring inclusivity?
- What incentives does SJWS have for the admission of students with disabilities?
- What incentives does SJWS have for present and future employees with disabilities to work in this institution?
- According to you, what are the barriers that exist in your school for people with disabilities?

Questions to people without disabilities

- When you go outside and come across someone who is disabled, what are your first thoughts?
- Do you have any family member, friend, or colleague who has a disability? If yes, did you ever help them in any way?

- What do you think are the benefits/problem of having a person with a disability as your friend, colleague, or classmate?
- If you want to support a person with a disability, in what way would that be?
- Do you think that a person with a disability can achieve their full potential as easily as a person without disability? If not, why?
- Are there any laws that make sure people with disabilities have equal rights like everyone else?

The questions to parents of children without disabilities

1. Have you ever discussed “disability” with your child/ren?
2. Would you like to see your child study with a disabled child in school? Is inclusion necessary in school?
3. Do you think a disabled child has the same right as your child to go to school?
4. What advantages/disadvantages will your child face if where he studies there are disabled children in his class?
5. How much do you know about the Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act in Bangladesh?

3. Methodology

From 7 till 24 January 2021, 20 individuals were interviewed who fall under the categories: people with disabilities, parents of children with disability, parents of children without disability, people without disabilities and teachers. The interviews were carried out both in person and over the internet.

In order to understand and analyze each individual’s perceptions, the interview was carried out in a conversational format, making sure the set of questions mentioned above was clearly answered. During each interview, all the points stated by the interviewee were noted down and the analysis is given below.

4. Results

Observation

MSPUS has a school for children with special needs located in Badda, Dhaka. During one of the interviews with the parents at MSPUS, Peyalshe’s mother was asked the following question- ‘What concerns do you have for your child’s future?’

Even before she could answer this question, she broke down into tears and then replied: “What I’m worried about is mostly regarding his future. If something unfortunate happens to me, who will take care of Peyalshe? How will he be able to live without anyone’s help? Will anyone ever give Peyalshe the opportunity to work and earn a living? I keep stressing about it as I can’t find a solution.”

“Your daughter has this disease just because you must have committed a big sin,” Mim’s mother continues with a heavy heart. “A few people keep attacking me with these terrible comments no matter how much I try to avoid them. They have always been successful at saying such things and hurting, not only me but most of the parents of children with disabilities I know.”

Most of the parents also shared stories regarding their struggles of admitting their children into public and private schools. “All schools rejected my child, referring to my child’s speech impairment as a major problem,” Fahim’s mother shares. The parents said that if their children were given the opportunity to study in a general school, the increased interaction with typically developing children could have helped their special needs child with her social and communication skills. They also believe it would have positive implications for their families, other students, and teachers.

“Why will a disabled child study in the same class as my child? Miss, please don’t admit them into the school, I don’t want them disturbing my child.” On many occasions Ms. Sabrina Shaheed, the Principal of Sir John Wilson School (SJWS), has to face such objections from parents of children without disabilities. She says there are many such parents who don’t want children with disabilities to study in the school and want to take away the rights from children with disabilities. Every time a parent tells her this, she strongly responds by saying, “If your child was disabled you would never say this, and if anyone said something like this regarding your child, you would be infuriated.”

Ms. Sabrina Shaheed believes in the importance of schools being inclusive. She says that it is easier for a person to develop or alter a perception from a young age than at an older age, and in doing so schools can play a huge role. Inclusivity will enable students with and without disabilities to talk and be friends with each other. Furthermore, this allows children without disabilities to know (in a deeper sense) that children with disabilities have equal rights and to develop a positive perception and a sense of understanding, which is neither sympathy or empathy. When asked regarding how Sir John Wilson School is ensuring inclusivity, she explained that currently SJWS has 18 children with disabilities (physical and intellectual disabilities). With clarity, she told us that SJWS is open to all, students with or without a

disability. The school tries its best to involve students with disabilities. Even though, as of yet, SJWS does not have sufficient resources for the blind, the school tries to take in students based on the capability of the school itself to serve them with the resources it has. She gives an example of a child with Asperger syndrome who was admitted to SJWS. The school tried its best to support the child in doing his classes. During class, even small things around him would distract him hence the school built a whiteboard surrounding his seat so that he can concentrate. Sir John Wilson School has the motive to take such students in. Ms. Shaheed explained that as they don't have many resources for children with disabilities, her school has partnered with United Group who are planning to build a new school for children with special needs. After the admission interview, if the school thinks it might not have the resources, the school will transfer the student to United Group's new special needs school.

Next Ms. Shaheed talked about the barriers that exist in her school for people with disabilities; some students with disabilities get bullied and in order to tackle this problem, the school is implementing new strategies.

Regarding the employment of people with disabilities in the institution, Ms. Sabrina says that anyone can apply to her school as long as they can perform the job well. Even though they are not given any extra benefits, their salaries are given on time. The school employed one staff member with a disability, Mr. Osman. In an interview with Mr. Osman, he shares his side of the story of working at SJWS. Mr. Osman lost his arm at a young age. He said that he had to struggle in every stage of his life, but today he is happy that he is employed and able to earn and feed his family. He never received any complaints from his employers or colleagues regarding him not being able to do his work properly.

"As a disabled person, people often doubted my ability to work and be productive in a work environment." Ms. Sanjida shares her story about working previously for a multinational company as a distribution manager. Her employer didn't believe in her when she first joined. She was also not given the same resources to work as her colleagues without disabilities, however, she still managed. No matter how well she performed at her job, there were always complaints about her. She had to switch jobs frequently until one day, she finally found an employer who trusted her. As she kept working for that firm, the employer was impressed by her ability at managing resources. She became popular within her office and her employer recognised her as an example for other employees. She had to fight in every stage of her life to prove that she is capable of doing the same work at the office that a person can do. She had to go through much more mental stress than an employee without disability. She says, "Yes, I had to go through a lot but I'm happy that employers who acknowledged me for who I am will never again undermine the abilities of a disabled person."

A teacher of an English medium school with twenty years' experience believes that employees with disabilities get sick frequently; this is why employers tend to avoid them. He also adds that there is a social norm that people with disabilities tend to hide their disability. He feels insecure as to what to say or not to say, hence avoiding any interaction with them. He thinks most people with disabilities are victims of parental and familial neglect due to which they are left isolated. This affects their mental state and makes them feel embarrassed in front of people without disabilities.

In response to the question "Who is your favourite person and why?" each of the people with disabilities considered their parents to be their favourite person. Ms. Sanjida is a person with a disability who credits her mother for her academic success. She says every time after a major exam she felt like giving up her studies, however, her mother always remained patient and motivated her to sit for the next exam. At the end, she did give her exams and today, Ms. Sanjida has successfully completed her post-graduation.

Mr. Shujon Mia has been working as a security guard in Baridhara DOHS for nearly a decade. He says, "I can do anything related to housekeeping; starting from watering the plant to keeping the building clean."

Kamal Hossain, aged 32, met an unfortunate road accident that resulted in the loss of his left arm. He was given treatment and taken care of in his village. When he returned to Dhaka, the Baridhara DOHS Society helped him get a job at Ananya shopping complex as a delivery man. He is overwhelmed by the people at DOHS as they have always been very supportive of him; he never faced any sort of humiliation or violence. Even though both Shujon Mia and Mr. Kamal wished to study in an English medium school, it never happened due to their financial limitations.

The next interviews were with two people without disabilities, Mohammad Mahir Islam and Sarim Zulkifl, who are both students of Class-11. Both Mahir and Sarim shared that they feel sympathetic whenever they come across someone with a disability. Mahir feels lucky to be born "better than they are" and he is grateful that he was born "normal". Sarim also says that while it does sound selfish, he feels grateful that he doesn't have a disability.

According to Mahir, there are certain benefits of having a person with a disability as his friend, colleague or classmate. He says that a person with a disability can offer us companionship and vice versa. He shares that a friendship between two people is always a good thing. However, due to the mobility problems of many with a physical disability, he refers to people with

disabilities as being slow and due to this many people without a disability naturally feel disconnected from them.

Sarim shares his view on how having a person with a disability as his colleague, relative or friend can be a benefit. He says it helps us to feel empathy towards them. He stresses on the significance of empathy; that it's important because it helps us to understand how others are feeling, and this will further enable us to change our behavior positively and be more helpful.

What both students had in common was their shared interest in supporting someone with a disability. Sarim would like to do that by minimizing the frequency of inconveniences that they face on a daily basis, by supporting them when they need to move to places or by buying them groceries if they require us to. He says, if possible, for a blind person, we should be their eyes and help them. We could pay for the medical costs for someone who is not financially stable enough to do so. He says that we can also be personally involved in organizations that help them. If we know a person with a disability who is seeking a job, we should help them find one. Mahir on the other hand suggests supporting people with physical disabilities by providing them with prosthetic limbs. We could also provide them with hand-related works so that they can earn a living for themselves.

Generally, both Mahir and Sarim accept that life is harder for a person with a disability than for a person without a disability. Mahir says that it's difficult for example for a person with a visual impairment to use their ability to speak and pursue a career by making use of it. Mahir shares the hard truth that our society tends to remove people with disabilities from the social narrative.

Returning to Shujon Mia's interview, when asked what distresses him the most, he answers, "the ignorance." He continues, "There are many incidents in my life where I have been deliberately ignored. It is not just me but most of the people with disabilities face this, it breaks my heart."

Sarim accepts the fact that people with disabilities are ignored at times by people without disabilities. He says that institutions should not disregard them, they should rather be welcoming. This will help bring people with disabilities into the mainstream.

Ms. Sabina Shaheed shared her own way of supporting people with disabilities. She told us that she has been helping to financially empower two people with disabilities. She bought two *thela gari* (vegetable carts) which they use to sell vegetables in Dhaka city and earn an income. To keep them motivated, she makes sure that it isn't completely charity. The two people are to

return a modicum of money per month to Ms. Sabrina. In this way, they don't lose the incentive to earn money and do not depend completely on charity. This also helps them maintain self-respect.

Mr. Delawar Hossain is the Imam of DOHS Baridhara Mosque. He is also a father to three children. He says that when he goes outside and comes across someone with a disability, he feels that they require a lot of love and affection. He continues by saying that people with disabilities have a lot of personal demands which remain unmet. At times it is hard for them to express their feelings hence people without disabilities should be the ones putting greater effort into understanding their wants and desires. He said if he had the financial ability to support the disabled people in need, he would support them with whatever they needed in life. He says from the religious point of view, it is indeed the responsibility of people without disabilities to support a person with a disability and by doing so the Almighty will be satisfied and bring prosperity in life here and after.

Even though Mr. Delawar doesn't have any relatives or friends who are disabled, he said he would find himself lucky if he got the opportunity to have them in his life and do something which would make them smile. Mr. Delawar admits that it is not as easy for a person with disability to achieve their full potential as a person without disability. He says instead of pointing at their disability as a huge problem or referring to them as a burden, we should rather be accepting of them at all aspects of life; only then can a person with disability get to live a life which we, people without disability, label as "normal".

Mr. Delawar Hossain said that as of yet he has not discussed disability with his (non-disabled) children as they are still very small, but he assured the interviewer that he will discuss it as soon as they mature. Regarding non-disabled children studying with his children, Mr. Delawar says that he has no problem at all; he believes it is a disabled child's right to go to any school of their wish. A more inclusive class will be beneficial for all students as it will help to break the stigma and develop a more positive perspective in the future. Mr. Delawar Hossain adds from his religious knowledge that all humans are made equal and a disability is not a disease that requires a cure, rather it is just how God has created them. Based on this belief, if we refer to a person with a disability as weak, it would signify that we are all weak. We should involve them more in our society so that they can contribute in their own ways. By doing so we could minimize the problems people with disabilities face and they can have a better life.

According to Mr. Mithun, a person with a disability who works for the nonprofit organization Work for a Better Bangladesh Trust, "There are two important things which play a huge role in a Bangladeshi disabled person's life: a good family and the availability of finance." Mr. Mithun

had a message to share with other people with disabilities: “You will always face problems, but you should never give up.” He adds that the office or employer will not always provide you with a lot of things, but you should have the mindset to manage as well as you can by yourself. Generally, employers don’t want to give jobs to people with disabilities, so often such people are required to give their best to prove themselves. Nevertheless, he believes it is important for people with disabilities to develop a particular skill so that they can use it to empower themselves in the future,

In 2013 the law for the rights of people with disabilities was introduced by the Government of Bangladesh. All of our interviewees were asked whether or not they are aware of the law. Ms. Sabrina was one of the few interviewees who was aware of the law to a great extent. She was also able to accurately state five or six points from the law. The rest of the interviewees were totally unaware of this law.

5. Discussion

According to my research, in most cases when people without disabilities come across people with disabilities, they feel sympathy and also empathy. The main reason they feel like this is because most people with a disability in Bangladesh are in a terrible state; many of them are out on the street, begging for money. As a temporary help, people give them small amounts of money but hardly anyone thinks of a permanent solution for them. Many people without disabilities also undermine people with disabilities so much that it makes people with disabilities feel even more detached from our society.

In order to further understand the sentiments of sympathy intertwined with a sense of superiority over people with disabilities that people without disabilities express, we need to realise that we live in an ableist society where capitalism is the sole decision-maker and money the sole marker of worth. Since we live in a system that favours people without disabilities mainly because of their productive potential and their physical ability to contribute to the economy, people with disabilities are isolated and pushed out of the society. Bangladesh is an extremely class-divided country, and the gap between the rich and the poor further aggravates the ideology that people with disabilities are in some way lesser than people without disabilities. The reason such high levels of discrimination against people with disabilities exist is mainly due to the stigma surrounding disabilities as well as the sheer misunderstandings people have about them. It also stems from the fact that people with disabilities do not live in an accessible environment in the way people without disabilities do, simply because we fail to recognise and accommodate their special needs.

As reported by the people with disabilities who were interviewed for this report, what substantially hurts them the most is ignorance, at almost every stage of their life. One person without a disability who was interviewed admitted that he tends to avoid interacting with people with disabilities because he fears that the person's family might think his interaction with the person with a disability indicates interference in their family. Many of us think that someone's disability is what defines them. Some of us directly ask what disability they have without even being properly introduced to them. At times asking direct questions about one's disability can make the person questioned feel uncomfortable. Someone with a disability, like any other person, has their own privacy, so before asking any unsolicited questions we should consider whether or not the question is appropriate.

As mentioned above, most people with disabilities are looked at with sympathy or empathy. According to our interviewees Mahir and Sarim, they both feel sympathetic and empathetic when they first come across someone who is disabled. This feeling can be justified because in most instances we come across people with disabilities who are homeless, poverty-stricken and underprivileged. In Bangladesh, most people with disabilities are financially challenged; therefore they are out on the streets, begging. Even though most people believe it is their responsibility to support destitute people with disabilities, the help that is provided to them is almost always just temporary and insufficient. During the interviews, I got to know about Ms. Sabrina's initiative to support a couple by purchasing a *thela gari* for them, which they can use to sell vegetables and earn a living.

While interviewing both people with and without disabilities, I noticed a gap that exists between them. The English teacher whom I interviewed says he feels insecure in front of people with disabilities; he feels confused as to what to say and what not to say. As a result, he avoids socializing with people with disabilities. It is not just him but many other people without disabilities who feel the same hesitation when they come across a person with a disability. The English teacher also discussed a social norm that has been brought up which is that people tend to hide their disabilities, but the raw fact is that not all people with disabilities are the same or have the same attitude. A common myth which most people believe is that someone's disability is what defines them. People often label individuals with a disability according to their condition or limitations. It is common in our daily lives to hear references such as "the disabled". When talking to a person with a disability for the first time, we don't necessarily have to talk about their disability. There are many other topics they would like to talk about, perhaps related to their hobbies, passions, etc. Referring to someone as their disability shows our failure to recognise someone as a person first. We shouldn't expect people with disabilities to answer every question that we ask regarding their disability, because everyone has their personal space, likes and dislikes, and we should learn to respect them.

The parents of children with disabilities face similar challenges when raising their child. Since the day their child was born till their last breath, they love their children unconditionally and always try to give the best to their child. Not only do parents have to deal with hurtful comments regarding having a child with special needs, but they also have to struggle to get their child admitted to a public or private school. Even though it's a basic right of any child to go to school, social barriers exist which are clearly reflected during the admission process. Most children with disabilities who apply to their local schools are rejected by school authorities. One of the reasons why schools do this is because the majority of their students do not have a disability and because they are not equipped or psychologically ready to handle children who have special needs, even if only minor ones. During my interview with Ms. Sabrina commented on how many parents of children without disabilities pressurise school authorities to not admit children with disabilities. These parents simply do not want to see children with disabilities studying alongside their children. "But who gives them this right?" said Ms. Sabrina. SJWS is still working towards increasing inclusivity; they stand as out of the ordinary compared to other schools which do not accept children with disabilities.

Primarily, is a problem because children are developing their perceptions at a young age. Inclusion will enable students with and without disabilities to talk together and be friends with each other. Children without disabilities will know that children different from them still have equal rights, and they will develop a positive understanding of them, which is neither related to sympathy or empathy. In other words, this will bridge the gap existing between the next generation of children with disabilities and those without.

A problem similar to the admission of people with disabilities is the employment of people with disabilities. Based on Ms. Sanjida's story, people with disabilities have to struggle more to find a job. Most employers have a mindset that people with disabilities are unproductive, they require more support than a worker without disabilities and they often get sick. Disability is not a sickness. People often possess these wrong ideas which multiply the struggle of a person with a disability to earn a living. Employers don't even risk giving them a job, even if the person meets all the requirements for the job and can complete the assigned task just as well as someone else. Ms. Sanjida had to switch jobs many times before settling with a job she has continued for a long period of time. Unlike most other employers, this employer didn't undermine her at first and gave her the opportunity to prove herself, which she did over time. At one point, her employer shared that Ms. Sanjida, being a woman with disabilities, performed much better than most of the non-disabled workers in that office. It is likely that the employer will recruit both employees with and without disabilities. Hence people with disabilities should at least be given an equal opportunity to prove themselves and not just be pushed aside due to their disability.

Many employers who were not willing to employ people with disabilities tend to keep these employees under so much pressure that they leave the job on their own. This has to be eliminated from workplaces.

Furthermore, I got to know about a few other myths about people with disabilities. Disability is often viewed as an unending burden. People often believe that disability is a personal tragedy and that people with disabilities deserve pity. It is often the negative attitudes of society and the lack of accessibility within the community that are the real tragedies. Another myth most people without disabilities believe in is that people with disabilities cannot lead a full and productive life. People with disabilities are fully capable of living a complete life. As people without disabilities, we have to focus on a person's ability, not their limitations. People without disabilities have a very capitalistic idea of what someone's "full potential" means. Someone's potential is not only derived from their physical and mental capabilities and their ability to contribute to the economy; it comes from one's personal qualities, personality, and unique skills and talents. The only reason a person with a disability may not be able to live a "full life" is because we as a society limit their ability to fulfill their personal wishes or to share with us their special gifts.

The Members of Parliament and the President of Bangladesh passed the Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act 2013 on 9 October 2013. Every person without a disability interviewed for this report was asked whether or not they were aware of this law. Unfortunately, only one person knew about it. Briefly, the key features of the law are shown in the following table:

General Rights	Fundamental Rights
1. Fully alive and developed	1. Accessibility
2. Equal lawful recognition and justice	2. In all levels of education, favorable facilities in the institution and participation in general and co-education
3. Rights of inheritance	3. Employment at Government and Non-Government Organizations
4. Freedom of expression, opinion and information	4. Getting compensation for disability during employment or getting back the position
5. Parent, legitimate or lawful guardian, marriage life, children and leading family life	5. Getting health care
6. Active participation in social, economic and national levels according to the types of disability	6. Legal facilities and necessary environment for education as well as place of employment
7. Well protection and facilities of safe and healthy environment free from suppression	7. Participation in culture, entertainment, tourism, leisure and sports
8. Access to all social facilities (e.g. assisting services and rehabilitation) for persons with disabilities including physical, psychosocial and artistic skills	8. Dependents who are persons with disabilities have safe residence or rehabilitation after being separated from family
9. Receiving Bengali Sign Language when requested by persons who are Deaf and hearing	
10. Secrecy of personal information	
11. Creation of autonomous organizations and welfare council or association and administer	
12. Getting national Identification, enrollment into election, and being able to vote and participate in elections	
13. Any other rights given by the Government according to the ordinance	

Source -

<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/95795/118013/F51789448/BGD95795%20Booklet.pdf>

In theory, there are a lot of laws for people with disabilities that can be exercised at any time. However, these laws are not actively accessed and people with disabilities are often unclear about what rights they have and how to ensure them. In our country they are given the right to education, employment, health care and so on. Sadly, the implementation of these laws fails when people without disabilities do not recognise people with disabilities; it's almost as if these laws exist in a vacuum.

6. Recommendations

People with disabilities frequently find their opportunities limited because of social rejection, discriminatory employment practices, architectural barriers and inaccessibility to transport. In this context, therefore, societal attitudes are significant since they largely determine the extent to which the personal, social, educational and psychological needs of persons with disabilities will be met. Perceptions will also change if the following strategies are applied:

Schools should be more inclusive and ease the admission process for children with disabilities. Simultaneously schools should also work on accumulating the resources required to provide education to children with disabilities. Teachers have to be trained so that they can educate children with special needs. Various technologies can be used to help students access a wider range of educational programs. During this pandemic there has been a huge rise in e-learning, which means students can continue their education from the comfort of their home. A similar platform can be used extensively for all levels of education for people with disabilities. Resource centres can further be developed in government colleges like the one in St. Xavier's college, which has an excellent resource centre for the visually challenged. Private universities in Bangladesh should have incentives for students with disabilities, for example having 1-2% of seats reserved for them.

Businesses and firms should employ more workers with disabilities. Statistically, it is known that workers with disabilities are more reliable: they take fewer days off and take less sick leave, staying in their jobs longer than people without disabilities. Researchers have also found that people with disabilities boost staff morale and enhance a sense of teamwork also help to create a diverse workforce.¹ As people without disabilities get to know and work with people with disabilities, they develop positive perceptions which they will share with friends and families, eradicating negative attitudes towards people with disabilities.

¹ [Graffam, J, Shinkfield, A, Smith, K, and Polzin, U 2002, 'Employer benefits and costs of employing a person with a disability', Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, vol. 17, pp. 251-263.](#)

There are multiple laws that exist for people with disabilities, but in order to implement them on a large scale, a lot of change has to be brought. It requires a joint effort from people without disabilities and institutions to use their privilege as a tool to make change. We need to improve the way our culture and society perceives people with disabilities, and be willing to bring forth reform. The way a law is implemented is heavily dependent on the way privileged people exist in our society and the way lawmakers apply these laws. Determination and hard work is required from people without disabilities, institutions and the government in order to end this longstanding oppression and discrimination that people with disabilities continue to face.

7. Conclusion

To make positive changes in our society and live in harmony we need to reconsider the way we look at disabilities and improve our perceptual skills. For people who have a disability, whether visible or not, technological integration is now breaking physical barriers and enabling them to work, learn and take care of themselves and their families. In order to revoke the invisible barriers, we need to bridge the gap between our changing mindsets and how we treat people with disabilities. Moreover, we need to encourage schools and businesses to be more inclusive. Inclusiveness can foster hope, inspiration and acceptance.

We need to acknowledge the fact that people with disabilities are human too. We tend to only see a person in one dimension and ignore their full humanity and complexity. We often forget that their life is an accumulation of their experiences and not just how we see them in an isolated way. People with disabilities also have desires, talents and skills, just like anyone else. The basis of every person is similarities we all share as human beings, and this includes people with disabilities. I hope this report will help to elucidate the issue and raise awareness about the need to address it. Addressing the problems related to people's perception of disability is vital to ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for people with disabilities. A more accepting, inclusive, diverse society will in turn benefit us all.



A group photo after the interview with the students, parents and teacher of MSPUS School, Dhaka.