

# Invisible Disabilities

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**In News:** Invisible Disability is an umbrella term that captures a whole spectrum of hidden disabilities or challenges that are primarily neurological in nature.

## What are Invisible Disabilities?

- **Invisible Disability, or hidden disability,** is an umbrella term that captures a whole spectrum of hidden disabilities or challenges that are primarily neurological in nature. Invisible disability, or hidden disability, are defined as disabilities that are not immediately apparent. Some people with visual or auditory disabilities who do not wear glasses or hearing aids, or discreet hearing aids, may not be obviously disabled.
- **A sitting disability is another category of invisible impairments;** sitting problems are usually caused by chronic back pain. Those with joint problems or chronic pain may not use mobility aids on some days, or at all. Although the disability creates a challenge for the person who has it, the reality of the disability can be difficult for others to recognize or acknowledge.

## Other Types of Invisible Disabilities

- **Chronic Pain:** A variety of conditions may cause chronic pain. A few of those reasons may be back problems, bone disease, physical injuries, and any number of other reasons. Chronic pain may not be noticeable to people who do not understand the victims specific medical condition.
- **Chronic Fatigue:** This type of disability refers to an individual who constantly feels tired. This can be extremely debilitating and affect every aspect of a person's day life.

- **Mental Illness:** There are many mental illnesses that do qualify for disability benefits. Some examples are depression, attention deficit disorder, schizophrenia, agoraphobia, and many others. These diseases can also be completely debilitating to the victim, and can make performing everyday tasks extremely difficult, if not impossible.
- **Chronic Dizziness:** Often associated with problems of the inner ear, chronic dizziness can lead to impairment when walking, driving, working, sleeping, and other common tasks.

### **Common Invisible Disabilities**

- Minimal Brain Injury and developmental cognitive disorders
- Learning Disabilities
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Chronic Diseases
- Depression and Mental Health
- Sensory Disorders

### **Detection and Diagnosis**

- Hidden disabilities are difficult to detect by parents, caregivers and teachers.
- Precious time during a critical developmental period is wasted in trying to discipline and correct the child's apparent errant behavior.
- Invisible conditions are also more difficult to detect by medical doctors.

### **Stigma**

- Research shows that the burden of concealing a disability creates strain in social and work situations that might negatively affect health and well-being.
- Concealing also results in low self-esteem and related psychological personality problems.

- In contrast, disclosure relieves the strain of hiding the condition and increases the likelihood that the person will find and develop a social support network with others who might have similar conditions or experiences.

## **U.S. Invisible Disability Statistics**

- About 10% of Americans have a medical condition which could be considered an invisible disability. 96% of people with chronic medical conditions live with a condition that is invisible.
- These people do not use a cane or any assistive device and act as if they didn't have a medical condition. About 25% of them have some type of activity limitation, ranging from mild to severe; the remaining 75% are not disabled by their chronic conditions.
- Although the disability creates a challenge for the person who has it, the reality of the disability can be difficult for others to recognize or acknowledge.
- Others may not understand the cause of the problem, if they cannot see evidence of it in a visible way.

## **Efforts toward Rehabilitation and Acceptance**

- Today, India has more than 10 million children with autism, 10 million people with epilepsy, more than 150 million people with a need of intervention for mental illness, and many more with varied physical disabilities; living in relatively large cities.
- Around 71% disabilities are living in rural areas, which make getting intervention an even more difficult process for them.

## **Creating Awareness and Infrastructure**

- The first step towards rehabilitation is to create awareness; that there indeed exist certain lifelong debilitating disorders which require special assistance

and provisions from the community.

- The Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 is a step toward such awareness. Apart from covering 21 categories of disabilities from the previous 7 categories under the 1995 Act, this new Act also includes some of the seemingly invisible conditions such as autism and learning disabilities within its ambit.
- **The Special Needs of Childhood Developmental Disabilities**
  - Early intervention can work wonders, when brain and body cells are most malleable and receptive to training and therapy.
  - Hence the need for early detection at the primary health centre level, and continuous monitoring through home visits by trained healthcare workers
- **Special Education and Vocational Training – Focus on the Strengths**
  - The person with disability can be trained and rehabilitated in many ways by following the golden rule of focusing on the person's strengths
- **Need for Innovation, Use of Technology and AI**
  - AI is changing the way therapy can be provided to certain disorders and disabilities.
  - Most used in the case of autistic children, apps and devices are being tailored to suit the special and unique needs of a young child.
  - Applications in handheld smart phones are assisting parents in providing, augmenting and assisting the communication requirements of a child by providing visuals, sounds and situations.
  - Not only that, such apps are reducing the expense and resource burden on the family to undergo expensive and exclusive therapies on a daily basis.
- **Inclusion and Social Acceptance**
  - People living with disorders and disabilities need

to be encouraged to share their story with those around them so that people can better understand how to support them.

- India has a great vibrant culture.