

Inclusion in the job market

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Abstract

The philosophy of equal employment opportunities gives all people a right to be considered for all jobs for which they are skilled and qualified. Lahore Businessmen Association for Rehabilitation of Disabled (LABARD) an NGO is offering various services including advocacy and procurement of employment for persons with disabilities. The main objectives of this study are to: Unfold the best strategy applied by LABARD to rehabilitate persons with disabilities by generating employment opportunities in the industry; find out the attitudes of disabled employees towards the services of LABARD and industrial employers; and to find out the attitudes of employers towards the inclusion of disabled employees in their industries. An unstructured interview was used to collect the data from the placement officers of LABARD. After the qualitative analysis of the data the findings of the study are discussed.

Introduction

Attitudes and behaviors in society often lead to the exclusion of disabled persons from social and cultural life. People avoid contact and personal relationships with the disabled. The pervasiveness of prejudice and discrimination affecting disabled persons and their exclusion from normal social intercourse produces psychological and social problems for them. In this situation, disabled persons have no motivation to work there own way towards rehabilitation. Effective third party intermediation that includes services such as counseling, preparation and procurement of jobs is a must for their rehabilitation. Accordingly, the role of the public sector organizations and NGOs in their rehabilitation holds immense value.

Incidence of Disability in Pakistan

According to the United Nation Report “World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled” about 10% of all populations in the world are comprised of disabled persons. Like the failure of many of our systems, the 1998 National Census failed us too, by setting the disability rate in Pakistan at 2.49%, leaving the impression that the incidence of disability in Pakistan was four times lower than the most advanced nations of the world. Even if the Government aimed to cater to the figure of 2.49% (which it could not) it would still be ignoring well over 75% of the disabled population. This underestimation by the census has been instrumental in destroying planning and support for the welfare of persons with disabilities. In Pakistan, about 80 percent of all disabled persons live in isolated rural areas. In certain areas, the percentage of disabled population is estimated to be as high as 20%. The problem is made complex by the fact that these disabled persons are also usually extremely poor people. They often live in areas where medical and other related services are scarce if not totally absent and where disabilities are not and cannot be detected in a timely manner. When people with disabilities finally receive medical attention, if they receive at all, the impairment may have become irreversible. The disability problem is further compounded by the population explosion which pushes up the number of disabled persons in both proportional and absolute terms. There is, therefore an urgent need, as the first priority, to prevent and increase in the disabled population and to provide rehabilitation to those already disabled. In Pakistan, assessment of

disability is left to the districts boards whose work does not use the parameters on disabilities as defined by the United Nations. As a result, there is discrimination in assessment of disability on that account alone.

Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons

Rehabilitation means a goal-orientated and time-limited process aimed at enabling a disabled person to reach an optimum mental, physical and /or social functional level, thus providing him or her with the tools to change his or her own life. It also involves measures intended to compensate for a loss of function or a functional limitation (by for example, the use of technical aids) and other measures intended to facilitate social adjustment or readjustment. Many persons with disabilities are denied employment or given only menial and poorly remunerated jobs, even though it can be demonstrated that with proper assessment, training and placement, the great majority of disabled persons can perform a large range of tasks in accordance with the prevailing work norms. In times of unemployment and economic recession, disabled persons are usually the first to be discharged and the last to be hired. Even in industrialized countries experiencing the effects of economic recession, the rate of un-employment among disabled job-seekers is double that of able-bodied applicant for jobs.

In Pakistan, many disabled persons live in rural areas. When the family economy is based on agriculture or other rural occupation, and when the traditional extended family exists, it may be possible for disabled persons to be given some useful tasks to perform. The family lends support. But when these families move to urban areas, the family support disintegrates. For those living in urban slums, competition for employment is acute and other economically productive activity is scarce. Many disabled persons suffer from enforced inactivity and become dependent; others must resort to begging. In many countries various programmes have been developed and measures taken to create jobs for disabled persons including sheltered and production workshops, sheltered enclaves, designated positions, quota schemes, subsidies for employers who train and subsequently engage disabled workers, and cooperatives of and for the disabled etc. Pakistan needs to take a leaf out of this book and incorporate effective schemes and laws using this pattern. Many employers, particularly the multinationals, do not deliberately hire the disabled since they prefer to pay pennies in fines for not employing persons with disabilities. The rate of penalties needs to be prohibitive because the disabled need access to career jobs and payment of paltry sums to the government cannot be a replacement for them or their gainful employment.

World Trends

The United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons, in 1981, marked the beginning of a decade of serious attention to issues of disablement by the global community. This has been consolidated in the 1990s, with disability clearly placed on the United Nations social agenda, along with other minority group equity issues such as ethnicity, gender and poverty. Also held in 1983 were the International Labour Organization (ILO) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Convention on Disabled Persons, promoting equal training and employment opportunities.

The first statement of rights, the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which was passed in 1989, was legally binding and requires signatories to review and modify national legislation. In 1994 three other significant initiatives were taken, that were to rehabilitate the disabled. One of them is the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. This international instrument was designed to guide and facilitate

change to achieve human rights, so that persons with disabilities may exercise the same rights and obligations as focusing on education. In 1994 the Salamanca Statement and

Framework for Action on Special Needs Education was declared at a UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, held in Spain. The Salamanca Statement proclaimed the necessity for Government commitment to the 'Education of All Children', in inclusive systems of education which cater for the special needs of children with disabilities. The third additional initiative was a joint collaborative interagency document sponsored by the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization. (Radio and Toga, 1999).

The Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 decided that the inclusion of all people with disabilities to mainstream society is necessary. The ADA includes five titles and under the title III prohibits private establishments and places open to the public from discriminating against people with disabilities in the full and equal enjoyment of goods, services, and facilities. The EFA 2000 Assessment demonstrates that youth and adults are denied access to the skills and knowledge necessary for gainful employment and full participation in their societies. Without accelerated progress towards education for all, national and internationally agreed targets for poverty reduction will be missed, and inequalities between countries and within societies will widen. (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000).

The Role of LABARD in Rehabilitation of the Disabled

The following rehabilitation services for the disabled are provided completely free of any charge whatsoever by the Lahore Businessmen Association for Rehabilitation of the Disabled (LABARD), an NGO sponsored by the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Counseling

The disabled visiting LABARD first meet with the Psychologist who personally notes down on a special form designed for the purpose the particulars and history, information on his/her parents, siblings, peers, family circumstances, attitude and psychological barriers, previous medical and work history, strengths/weaknesses/ opportunities/threats etc. In doing so, the psychologist evaluates the specific needs of each disabled person including counseling and medical needs and starts the initial counseling. The disabled person is referred to other officials and volunteers within the office depending on the particular needs of each person. The psychologist also books appointment of the disabled person with the visiting doctor, or hospital or placement officer depending on the specific need of each person. The psychologist remains the main contact with the disabled. Signs of coping through counseling are noted by:

- a) The individual's values enlarging to encompass more than his personal disability.
- b) The effects of disability are contained and the individual is open to learning new skills to help overcome limitations.
- c) The disability is seen as an inconvenience and not as devaluing the person's worth.
- d) Other values are seen as more important than physical perfection. Kindnesses, wisdom, effort to forge ahead are seen as important.
- e) The individual realizes that not all of life is determined by disability.
- f) The individual stops comparing him/herself with outside sources and looks to inward assets and begins to develop them.

Counselors who deal with the disabled are sensitive to persons not coping positively. Some individuals may be completely overcome by the feeling of not being able to cope. In

these cases, specialized counseling service including the counseling of parents, siblings is called for.

The individuals who are ready for further preparation after conclusion of the counseling programme are referred directly for career planning procedures. While those with chances of improvement with surgery, medication, cornea replacement, prosthesis etc., are referred to the Assessment Committee. Thousands of disabled persons have benefited from the counseling facility offered by LABARD and its vocational institute.

Assessment and Treatment

Assessment is primarily aimed at evaluating ways and means by which the disability of a person could be countered in order to enhance functionality. Highly experienced and qualified specialist doctors offer their volunteer services and visit LABARD to undertake assessment of disabled persons. In selected cases, disabled persons are also referred to external specialists paid by for LABARD. These doctors consider and recommend any or more of the following:

- a) Medical Treatment
- b) Surgery
- c) Physiotherapy
- d) Provision of prosthesis
- e) Cornea Replacement etc.

The back office immediately takes the actions necessary to implement the findings of the assessing doctors. For provision of medicines, disabled persons are given prescriptions addressed to a selected pharmacy that issues the prescribed medicines without charging the disabled. The pharmacy bills are paid by LABARD upon presentation, on monthly basis. In addition, LABARD volunteer specialist surgeons carry out operations. Hundreds have benefited from these facilities. Under LABARD's free cornea replacement programme established earlier this year, and in close cooperation with Sardar Trust Eye Hospital, 75 blind persons have had their eyesight restored. The programme continues at the rate of about 10 corneas a month imported from Sri Lanka. However, it is dependent on the supply.

Career Planning

The next stage is through close consultation with the individual is the preparation of a career plan for each disabled person registered with LABARD. Planning depends on physical and mental ability, health, education and the mobility of each individual. It is aimed at optimizing the potential of each disabled person. Once a career plan is established, the individual is referred to the Training Committee for execution of the plan.

Preparation

After the individual has gone through counseling, assessment/treatment and career planning programmes, he or she is subjected to orchestrated preparatory programmes established by the Career Planning process. At present, the students funded by LABARD are studying medicine, biochemistry, management studies, general education at various levels, and vocational training and studies. Thousands have benefited from LABARD's educational and vocational training programme and additional funds have been provided in next year's budget to enlarge this programme.

Placement in Jobs

As soon as disabled persons have completed their targeted training, educational and vocational programmes, they are offered to employers for hiring. Over a thousand disabled persons have been placed in jobs by LABARD while hundreds more were able to find jobs on

their own on the basis of the preparatory programmes provided by LABARD. In addition an employment Committee maintains contains with employers in order to create jobs for the disabled. The Committee also undertakes monitoring of those employed. Two full-time paid Placement Officers work under the directions of the Committee. The most difficult issues in employment of disabled persons is their inability to commute longer distances. The blind are also extremely difficult to place in jobs; which is why LABARD had to start a cornea replacement programme even though the operations are cost-intensive.

Self-employment

LABARD has also initiated a programme of interest-free loans from its own resources for self-employment by disabled persons unable to commute to workplaces because of the severity of their disability. LABARD also accommodates persons with skill who are otherwise not able to be placed for various reasons.

In Pakistan only one ordinance has been approved yet as a legal protection for disabled employees. It is entitled *The Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance, 1981* as cited by (NCRDP): Under this ordinance, a 1% employment quota for disabled persons has been established for all establishments employing 100 or more people. In lieu of employment, the employer has to credit a specified amount each month to the Council's fund. Since its inception, the Council has made it possible to provide employment to over 7,478 disabled persons in the public sector and over 10,457 in the private sector. Financial contributions made by employers, has enabled the council to provide financial assistance to such disabled persons as are unable to undertake employment due to infirmity, age or other reasons. As part of rehabilitation measures, the Council is able to provide artificial limbs, surgical therapy and medical treatment to persons with disabilities.

Thomas and Thomas (1998) reported that in many developing countries, 'individual rights' as expressed in industrialized nations, do not exist. Traditionally in these countries, an individual is born in a kinship group, with a network of relationships that involve mutual obligations with regard to religious and economic factors. People look towards their immediate kin for welfare and help, rather than at the traditional western types of formal services. Because of this kind of relationship, the process of 'empowerment' of an individual in this society is more complex, irrespective of whether he is a disabled person or otherwise.

The role of NGOs in the rehabilitation of disabled persons with regard to their placement in the market can not be ignored. This research paper is an effort to highlight the inclusion of disabled persons in the job market by highlighting the efforts of LABARD, an NGO working for the placement of disabled persons in the market.

The Study

The major purposes of the study were to:

1. Unfold the best strategy used by the LABARD placement officers to place persons with disabilities in the job market;
2. Find out the attitudes of disabled employees towards the services of LABARD and Employer of the industries; and
3. Find out the attitudes of employers towards the inclusion of disabled employees in their industries.

Methodology

A semi structured open ended questionnaire was developed to conduct the interviews with different personnel at LABARD. Three personnel including one psychologist and two placement officers were interviewed. To evaluate the services provided by the LABARD ten disabled employees were selected on a convenience basis and their four employers/supervisors were also interviewed to analyze the amount of inclusion in the workplace. Similarly interviews were conducted disabled employees and employers.

Conclusion

On the basis of this small research data analysis it is found that the services provided by LABARD are exceptionally good. Their work was not only appreciated by the disabled employees but the employers or supervisors of these disabled employees also rate the work of LABARD as excellent. Employer's attitudes towards the inclusion of the persons with disabilities were found positive and they were welcoming in the job placement.

On the basis of the findings of the study it is concluded that the inclusion of disabled employees in the job market is neither difficult nor impossible. Some recommendations for the smooth job inclusion of the persons with disabilities are given below.

1. All chambers of commerce of the state should develop a strong networking to strengthen the job inclusion of persons with disabilities in the job market.
2. Government should form monitoring committees to check the implementation of the United Nations declaration in terms of a special quota for the disabled and not a single NGO or Public sector should be allowed to be registered until they follow the specific quota of placement for the disabled in their industries.
3. A strong work plan should be developed to rehabilitate the un-accessed disabled or those who are still not registered with any NGO.
4. As it is necessary to get a disability certificate from the district assessment board the process should be made easier for persons with disabilities. In particular, the time taken to the issue this certificate should be reduced.

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