



Covid-19 And Its Effect On People With Disabilities On Urban Life

Covid-19'un Engelli Bireylerin Kent Yaşamına Etkisi

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ÖZET

Bu araştırma, Covid-19 ile bu hastalığın engellilerin kent yaşamını ne şekilde etkilendiğine odaklanıyor. Covid-19 her bireyi farklı şekilde etkiledi. Ancak en çokta, iyi yaşam olanaklarına sahip olmayan/olamayan engellileri etkilemiş ve etkilemektedir. Koronavirüs dünyayı ve içindeki herkesi etkilediğinde, engelli bireyler herkesten daha kötü koşullarla ve daha fazla zorlukla karşı karşıya kalmaktadır. Bakımlarına gösterilen ilginin azalması ve kamusal hayatın bir süreliğine durması ve kısıtlanması bu bireylere kendilerini terk edilmiş hissettirmektedir. Bütün bunlarla birlikte, özellikle engelliler için temel malzemeleri ve yiyecekleri kendi başlarına alma zorluğu daha da ortaya çıkmaktadır (Lucy Webster, BBC News, 2020). Her bir engelli birey, sağlıklı bireylerden daha yüksek risk altında olduğundan daha büyük zorluklar yaşamaktadır. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma, bu zor ve ölümcül zamanlarda topluluğun en dezavantajlı grubu olan engelli bireylerin karşılaştığı sorunları vurgulamayı amaçlamakta, bu bireylerin kentsel yaşamda yaşadığı zorlukların ne olduğuna odaklanmaktadır. Aynı zamanda kentsel bir yaşam süren engelli bireylerin karşılaştığı sorunları değerlendirerek Covid-19'un engelli bireylerin yaşamına etkilerini tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Covid-19, Koronavirüs, engelliler, kent yaşamı

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on Covid-19 and the way it has impacted the lives of disabled people, majorly negative. Covid-19 hasn't been kind to anyone; everyone is affected because of it. But the disabled people who didn't already have the best amenities of life were affected the most. As the coronavirus took the world and everyone in it by surprise, the disabled people faced the worse than all. They felt abandoned since the attention to their care took a fall and became even less than it was before. With all this, came the trouble to get the essentials and groceries by themselves, especially for the disabled women (Lucy Webster, BBC News, 2020). All of them are living in a greater fear since they are at a higher risk than all others. With the help of this essay, I aim to highlight the problems faced by the least fortunate of the community in these deadly times. And this essay will mainly focus on the lifestyle of disabled people in the current times and the design and planning of urban areas to bring to light the fact that the urban areas aren't effective in terms of the proper care of the disabled people.

Keywords: Covid-19, Coronavirus, disable people, urban life

1.Introduction

The pandemic has put the lives of the disabled people at a higher risk; they are more vulnerable than anyone else. Some of them need the care staff at all times, and some of them can't live in isolation because of psychosocial disabilities. The pandemic added a lot to the sufferings of the less privileged. Such as waking up from bed to go to the toilet to handling all the household chores since the care staff was narrowed down.

In countries like the UK, the acts were passed to face the pandemic and handle it effectively, which affected the lives of the disabled people. That act entirely made the health staff focused upon the people who were affected by the disease at the hospitals, distracting their attention from the disabled people who were more vulnerable to the virus. The measures haven't been effective to look

after the more vulnerable section of the community (Balasopoulou et al., 2017). And this puts both disabled people and the medical staff taking care of them at risk.

The current coronavirus has forced the businesses to shut down; this affected the disabled people in economic. Lack of resources makes them unable to buy the equipment or follow the health code implemented during the pandemic (Goggin & Ellis, 2020).

Lack of people protective equipment (PPE) in the countries is also causing much distress in such people since if you look at the numbers, it shows that a significant number of deaths were of the disabled people (Lucy Webster, BBC News, 2020). And the unavailability of the PPE to them makes them more susceptible to catch the disease. Hence the disabled people are facing the worst time of their life at this time of the pandemic.

And besides all these government-level issues; the urban area isn't appropriate for the disabled people to survive in the pandemic. The cities provide better living standards, but to avail those facilities and high-end lifestyles, money plays an important role. And most of the disabled, being financially less stable, can't hope to get a proper lifestyle even in cities (Klest, Smith, May, McCall-Hosenfeld, & Tamaian, 2020). And, since then things have taken a wrong turn, and it's become difficult to sustain a healthy, manageable lifestyle for everyone, the disabled people have been unable even to have their necessities met.

The essay has been divided into the following sections:

- Problems faced by disabled people
- The impact of COVID-19 on their lives
- Urban life and disabled people
- People with disabilities in public places
- Urban design and planning for disabled people

2. Problems faced by disabled people

There are many problems faced by people with disabilities in public life. Some issues are:

- **Accessibility** – Their accessibility to various facilities is reduced, for example, to the public places. They can't move around as an average person can. They are usually seen the special support equipment, people who can't walk use wheelchairs, those with hearing problems use the hearing aid devices. The blind is often seen walking with a cane and wearing dark glasses. Now a disabled person can't really go to a park and sit there while the children are playing around, they can be hit and maybe injured too. Most of the time, at public places, they are ignored and are left sitting in isolation (Van den Broucke, 2020). Further, access to transport for people with disabilities is just the same as that for people with no disabilities. There is no extra support available to them. The same goes for access to the buildings; a wheelchair can move around in a building or maybe even access different floors of a building, too, using the inclined straight paths available to transport the goods across varying levels of a building using carriage equipment (Mesa Vieira, Franco, Gómez Restrepo, & Abel, 2020).
- **Access to Health Services and Medical Care** – There is high medical care available for the people, both the non-disabled and the disabled. But the disabled ones can't have it the same way the non-disabled one's can. They are required to wait in queues just like other people, and sometimes they can't wait. They have problems unique to others' issues. Some of them suffer from psychosocial disabilities, and they need human support all the time. Their access

to availing that is mostly hindered since not much staff is available to cater to their needs. Such care can only be bought with money, which is one thing, most of the time, the disabled lack (Safta-Zecheria, 2020).

- Job Opportunity and Unemployment – The disabled are prejudiced for employment. According to an estimate (World Bank, ‘Disability and inclusive development: Latin America and the Caribbean’, 2019), 91% of disabled people are unemployed. They are deprived of jobs, money, and facilities. So, disabled people are the most disadvantaged in all cases.
- Lack of Social Aspect – It’s been observed that the disabled people aren’t taken much care of by surrounding people, they are mocked, disgusted, and discouraged in every way (Wb et al., 2020).

And with the coronavirus in the wake, their lives have become even worse. They have been deprived from health care or necessary facilities they were having pre-coronavirus.

3.The impact of COVID-19 on disabled people’s life

The pandemic affects the lives of all of humanity. When the epidemic hit the world at the beginning of 2020, the support systems failed everywhere, eventually. The medical support, no matter what country, wasn’t enough for dealing with the pandemic and the fatalities (Andrews, Ayers, Brown, Dunn, & Pilarski, 2020).

Another area where it affected the lives was the financial position of people. In the US, all the jobs that were creating since the last recession was wiped out in six weeks. So, the unemployment rate leaped in just a matter of a few weeks, which not only collapsed the economy of the US but also made it difficult for everyone to take the measures during the pandemic. Human contact was reduced, and people were forced to stay in their houses as one of the health measures in dealing with the coronavirus spread. And this caused people a lot of anxiety and distress (Chaturvedi, 2020).

Lack of awareness was another factor that made life worse for all humanity. People were asked to take the safety measures, but they weren’t allowed full access to them, and as a result, they didn’t know what to do. This promoted panic in them; they knew that their lives are at risk but weren’t aware of what to do about it (Gulati, Fistein, Dunne, Kelly, & Murphy, 2020).

COVID-19 has claimed more than 700k deaths all across the world so far. And this has caused people to live in terror and fear of facing their demise every day. This situation has made them call for help repeatedly, and they are afraid as the governments can’t handle a pandemic of such magnitude. This is the effect that it’s been having on the public. The impact is even severe upon disabled people. They are more vulnerable than anyone else since they were already living at the mercy of other people, and now those people are worried about their own lives. So, that help has been taken away from them, leaving them in the most miserable state ever (Annaswamy, Verduzco-Gutierrez, & Frieden, 2020).

According to interviews (Lucy Webster, BBC News, 2020) with Lucy Webster on BBC UK, people with disabilities believe that they have been abandoned since they cannot avail of the safety equipment such as PPE because of its unavailability in the market. The absence of a proper system to get them available to the people actually in need of them (Safta-Zecheria, 2020). Those interviews also highlight that most of them do not have the care and support to help them get through the day, and those who have, do not have medical help. Those people with disabilities are also concerned about the fact that what would happen if they or the people taking care of them catch the disease since they cannot avail of the medical support.

People with disabilities are living in constant fear since they cannot take proper measures, which puts them at higher risk than everybody else. Their compromised immunity systems make them even more likely to get the disease and die from it. The fear is deadly, and it is affecting their mental health.

The people with disabilities include the blind, the deaf, the mentally retard, and the mentally ill and the people diagnosed with leprosy-cured or locomotor disabilities. According to an interview (Lucy Webster, BBC News, 2020) in the UK, two-thirds of the deaths for the COVID-19 have been disabled people. Across the globe, most people with disabilities identify their health as inferior, and hence they are more likely to be diagnosed with the novel disease.

All the steps that have been taken to stop the spread of the virus; social distancing is one having the most effect on the mental health of the people. The feeling of loneliness is frightening people, especially the ones at higher risk of catching the disease. The psychological problems are seeing a rise because of the people staying in isolation. They couldn't talk to other people, and the constant fear of death is making things worse for them.

A report by National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine says that the social distancing measures have given rise to heart diseases, dementia, and other health problems. Now, this makes it clear as crystal that people have not only been suffering from the disease itself but by the safety measures taken too. Hence, it is essential to go over the safety measures advised by the health authorities to ensure the highest efficiency with the disabled people in particular, and the public (Andrews et al., 2020).

According to the situations mentioned above, it clarifies that people with disabilities are being affected the most. They could not respond to the pandemic positively because much has not been done in terms of care support or medical support for them.

4. Urban Life and The Disabled People

Urban life is not inclusive of the needs of all the people, especially the ones with disabilities. The people with disabilities who live in the urban regions are often held back from contributing to society. According to the WHO and the World Bank, over 1 billion people live in cities with disabilities. There has been observed a lack of accessibility tools in urban environments for disabled people. In urban areas, more than often, people with disabilities have experienced a barrier that stops them from being a part of the environment fully and taking part in social development in societies (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

There are no special tools or procedures designed for them that would help them access the environment and its facilities in a better manner. From roads and housing to public buildings and spaces, and essential urban services such as sanitation and water, health education, transportation, and emergency response, and resilience programs, could not be organized for their disadvantages to access any of this.

This lack of accessibility tools is contributing significantly to their situation during pandemic all over the world. The urban areas are not designed such that the people can be inclusive of its structure and design. There are way fewer jobs available for the disabled in the cities and hence contributing to poverty.

There have been many development goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are supposed to promote universal education across the globe. However, even these programs exclude people with disabilities because, for the absence of accessible transportation options, they cannot receive education and hence are removed from the program's area of focus (Klest, Smith, May, McCall-Hosenfeld, & Tamaian, 2020).

However, the General Assembly has been seen highlighting the need to include people with disabilities in such programs because they believe that these development goals can never be indeed achieved without taking one billion disabled people along with them (Bank, 2020). Hence, the urban cities are not fully livable for the disabled people since they can not to provide them the basic amenities of life, thus leaving them more susceptible to the risks the cities offer.

It is common knowledge that there is a prejudice in all the places against people with disabilities. They are denied equality in different aspects of life. There are none to a few opportunities for them, and with less medical care, it is difficult for them to avail those. As far as the education opportunities are concerned, there are only a few seats available for them. With no accessible transportation options, they cannot avail of those either.

On the one end, the cities offer many opportunities and provide a grand lifestyle to the residents, and on the other hand, it makes life worse for people who cannot have those facilities. Because to avail of those facilities and have the advantages of living in a city, much money is needed. Since the disabled are mostly unemployed, so they cannot have a pleasant lifestyle in the urban areas (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Those areas are built for progress-yearning people and also for helping the country make more significant progress at a faster rate. Mostly while building them, it is taken into account that what people can do the most for the country, and that is where the disabled people are cut off (Safta-Zecheria, 2020).

The pandemic has just made the situation clearer that how cities are not doing any efforts to help the disabled people. Because of the current urban structure, persons with disabilities are facing the most significant toll all over the world. In developed countries, there are some necessary facilities available for disabled people to get through this time, but in developing countries, they are not even being attended to.

5. People with Disabilities in Public Places

Besides all the problems that urban life has to offer to people with disabilities, the pandemic had made it worse for them in the public areas. Social distancing has put restrictions on people to go in public areas, and hence the disabled people have lost one of their significant means to get information about the environment. In regular times, disabled people were not treated with a lot of regard and love in those public places. However, since the health conditions have got worse, people have contacted with people with disabilities even more since they are at a higher risk of catching the coronavirus (Jalali, Shahabi, Bagheri Lankarani, Kamali, & Mojgani, 2020).

The facilities in such places have always been not the best in such places. Many people with disabilities will avail of these facilities for their lack of resources. Now, with all this going on, their access has been restricted. Because of their disabilities, they cannot interact with the environment and the objects in it the same way an average person can. They need to touch things, to access information from the environment or to get support directly. They may face a higher difficulty in obtaining public health information (Gostin, Friedman, & Wetter, 2020).

Since the health measures have asked of people to keep their outside visits at minimal, the disabled people cannot go out at all times. They have a proper schedule to do things since they rely on other people for their needs. So, putting restrictions on their outside visits has had a significant impact on their lives amid the novel virus. The protection measures pulled up by WHO requires the disabled people to go out only outside of peak hours, and this causes them problems because they cannot make an outside visit whenever it is convenient for them. They need to have human support with them that which is not likely for them to have in the current times (Schariti, 2020).

Children with disabilities have also been impacted. Those who were in schools have suffered from a great deal of stigma and anxiety for the closure of schools and public places for recreation. Since now they have to stay at home with the adults, they are more susceptible to the increased risk of anxiety, fear, and of their needs not being identified and met. This makes them also vulnerable to domestic abuse by adults out of anxiety and depression. This can take a toll on their mental health and their psychological condition (Berger, Evans, Phelan, & Silverman, 2020).

This pandemic also puts women and girls with disabilities that the same risk of having to face abuse and violence at home. Since women are more emotionally vulnerable, so it is more likely for them to be more anxious about the pandemic and be more fearful. Thus, the need for proper medical support for them is even higher. Along with the lack of access to the PPE equipment and the implementing social distancing measures, the absence of protective measures against domestic abuse and sexual exploitation puts these community groups at a higher risk of suffering from mental illness and other psychological issues in the pandemic (Yang et al., 2020).

The Coronavirus has left no one unaffected. People with disabilities have taken a toll because of this novel disease. Some of them have suffered from constant denial of the public facilities, and the others have been denied access to medical care.

The world's economies have collapsed, and hence the resources to deal with the pandemic have fallen short. This has made it immensely difficult for the governments to make the necessary facilities available to the public, especially the ones with disabilities (Safta-Zecheria, 2020).

6. Urban Design and Planning for Disabled People

Today, the urban areas are developed for the creation of sustainable communities in terms of three factors, which are economic, social, and environmental. Now, the economic factor accounts for the provision of well-paid jobs for the residents, and the social factor means high education opportunities with high quality and sports facilities for physical growth and mental health. Third, the environmental factor accounts for the better sanitation conditions and living standards, so the lifestyle of the people can be improved. So, this means that the cities are built to add beautification to the environment of a country.

The major problem is the approach that's followed along the way to achieve these goals. The approach is top-down, which neglects the ground people. Designing the urban area from the perspective of an architect or a planner is important considering all the people living in the city, so the residents are fully met, and their needs are entirely catered for. Such inadequate urban planning does not seem to bother anyone, as the people who can afford the urban lifestyle are living in it. It affects the lives of the bottom-line people who cannot even have access to the basic amenities of life. That is where creating sustainable environments for all fails.

Cities have long been built on the same concept, and hence the developers have always been unable to deliver to the community entirely. The criticism on the approach usually says (Dias, Curwell, & Bichard, 2014) that the experts involved in the development of such areas usually comply with the funding agencies. Hence, the needs of the community members are simply neglected.

The critics demand to be built upon the bottom-up approach. That way, the needs of all the people have a better chance to be taken care of. It would also help explore the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional top-down approach. They believe that with the help bottom-up approach, the involvement of all the relevant groups can be made sure. Hence, the developers would have a better understanding of their needs and the requirements since they will be the ones living in it once the development is finished (Peters, 2020).

When the situation that the pandemic has caused is considered, if the cities were built on the bottom-up approach since the start, the cities would have been more prepared to face an epidemic

such as this. Proper systems would have been present there to make sure that everyone receives the proper care when they need it the most. However, since the urban areas only focused on a specific community group, this was never accomplished (Berger et al., 2020).

Now the systems have collapsed, and the residents have been affected by this situation. Lack of proper sustainable living models for all has made it difficult for the community members to fight the pandemic. The only people who are receiving proper care and all the essentials are the ones who were still living the exceptional lifestyles when the pandemic was nowhere to be seen or the ones with enough resources to survive the time.

The poor and the disabled people have been left wondering if they will live another day. This situation presents a proper insight into how terribly the systems are made in the countries. The pandemic has shown the world how important it is to redevelop all the systems, keeping in mind all the community and not just a few top sections of the community. Every individual deserves the same access to the facilities provided in a city (Schiariti, 2020).

7. Conclusion

This essay highlights the problems that disabled people are facing in times of pandemic. The city-systems are not adequately designed for people with disabilities, and the governments need to come up with more efficient policies to cater to the needs of persons with disabilities in these desperate times. People with disabilities never had a life full of comforts. However, the pandemic has shown this to the world, and now the people responsible for providing sustainable environments should take them into account, too, while developing new projects. The local authorities and the governments should take more responsibility and take steps towards making the lives of the disabled people less miserable in the times since it has already been established that the disabled people are more vulnerable to contracting the disease than anyone else. If they are not given proper protective measures, their physical and mental health can deteriorate because of being at a higher risk of contracting the disease.

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