



# AN ANALYSIS AND TAXONOMY OF DISABILITIES: REVIEWED OF RPWD ACT 2016

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of disability refers to a physical, sensory, cognitive, or mental impairment that may limit an individual's ability to participate fully in society or perform certain tasks. It's important to recognize that disability is not solely a medical issue but also influenced by social, cultural, and environmental factors. Disability can vary in severity and impact, and it's crucial to promote inclusion, accessibility, and respect for the rights and dignity of people with disabilities. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD Act) was passed in India in 2016 with the aim of safeguarding and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. The act replaced the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995. Key features of the RPWD Act include expanding the scope of disabilities covered, recognizing new categories of disabilities, ensuring accessibility, promoting inclusive education, employment, and social security, and establishing mechanisms for the implementation and enforcement of disability rights. The act seeks to create an inclusive and barrier-free society where persons with disabilities can fully participate and contribute.

**Keywords: Physical Disabilities, Sensory Disabilities, Cognitive Disabilities, Psychiatric Disabilities, Communication Disabilities, Neurological Disabilities, Chronic Health Conditions.**

**Disabilities can be broadly categorized into several types:**

- 1. Physical Disabilities:** These include impairments that affect mobility, dexterity, or physical functioning, such as amputation, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, and muscular dystrophy.
- 2. Sensory Disabilities:** These involve impairments related to the senses, including vision (blindness or low vision) and hearing (deafness or hard of hearing).
- 3. Cognitive Disabilities:** These affect cognitive functioning, including intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and developmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder.
- 4. Psychiatric Disabilities:** These encompass mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia.
- 5. Communication Disabilities:** These involve impairments in speech or language, such as stuttering, aphasia, or other speech disorders.

**6. Neurological Disabilities:** These include conditions affecting the nervous system, such as epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, and traumatic brain injury.

**7. Chronic Health Conditions:** These refer to long-term health conditions that may not fit neatly into other categories, such as diabetes, asthma, chronic pain, or autoimmune disorders.

It's important to note that many individuals may have multiple disabilities or intersecting identities, and each person's experience of disability is unique. Additionally, the impact of a disability can vary widely depending on factors such as access to resources, support systems, and societal attitudes.

## PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Physical disabilities encompass a wide range of conditions that affect mobility, dexterity, or physical functioning. Some common types of physical disabilities include:

**1. Mobility Impairments:** These include conditions that affect a person's ability to move freely, such as paralysis due to spinal cord injury, amputation, or conditions like cerebral palsy and muscular dystrophy.

**2. Orthopaedics Disabilities:** These involve impairments related to the skeletal system, muscles, or joints, such as arthritis, osteoporosis, or limb deformities.

**3. Neurological Disabilities:** Conditions affecting the nervous system can lead to physical disabilities, such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, or stroke-related impairments.

**4. Spinal Cord Injuries:** Injuries to the spinal cord can result in paralysis or loss of sensation below the injury site, impacting mobility and physical function.

**5. Amputations:** Loss of one or more limbs due to injury, illness, or congenital conditions like congenital limb deficiency can significantly impact mobility and require assistive devices such as prosthetics or wheelchairs.

**6. Musculoskeletal Disorders:** Conditions affecting the muscles, tendons, ligaments, or other musculoskeletal structures can cause pain, limited mobility, or difficulty performing certain tasks, such as fibromyalgia, tendinitis, or scoliosis.

**7. Cerebral Palsy:** A group of neurological disorders that affect movement, muscle tone, and motor skills, often resulting from damage to the developing brain before, during, or shortly after birth.

**8. Muscular Dystrophy:** A group of genetic disorders characterized by progressive muscle weakness and loss of muscle mass, leading to mobility impairments and other physical challenges.

These are just some examples, and there are many other types of physical disabilities, each with its own characteristics and impact on an individual's life. It's essential to recognize the diversity within the category of physical disabilities and to provide appropriate support and accommodations to ensure inclusion and accessibility for all.

## SENSORY DISABILITIES

Sensory disabilities involve impairments related to the senses, including vision and hearing. Here are the main types:

**1. Visual Impairments:** Visual impairments include blindness, which is the complete absence of vision, and low vision, which refers to significant vision loss but some remaining sight. Conditions such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and congenital conditions like retinitis pigmentosa can cause visual impairments.

**2. Hearing Impairments:** Hearing impairments range from mild to profound hearing loss. Deafness refers to the inability to hear sounds, while being hard of hearing signifies some level of hearing loss. Causes of hearing impairments include genetic factors, noise exposure, infections, aging, and certain medications.

**3. Deaf blindness:** Deaf blindness refers to the combined loss of vision and hearing, which significantly impacts communication, mobility, and access to information. Individuals who are deafblind may have some

residual vision or hearing, but they typically rely on tactile communication methods such as sign language or braille.

These sensory disabilities can have a profound impact on an individual's daily life, communication, education, employment, and social interactions. Access to appropriate assistive technologies, accommodations, and support services is crucial to ensure inclusion and equal participation in society for individuals with sensory disabilities.

## COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

Cognitive disabilities encompass a range of conditions that affect cognitive functioning, including thinking, learning, memory, and problem-solving abilities. Here are some common types:

- 1. Intellectual Disabilities:** Intellectual disabilities, also known as intellectual developmental disorders, are characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviours. These disabilities typically manifest before the age of 18 and can vary in severity. Causes may include genetic conditions, prenatal exposure to toxins, or brain injuries.
- 2. Learning Disabilities:** Learning disabilities refer to specific difficulties with acquiring and using academic skills, such as reading, writing, or math. Common learning disabilities include dyslexia (difficulty with reading), dysgraphia (difficulty with writing), and dyscalculia (difficulty with math).
- 3. Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties with attention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. It can impact academic performance, social interactions, and daily functioning.
- 4. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** ASD is a complex developmental disorder that affects social communication and behaviour. It encompasses a wide range of symptoms and levels of impairment, from mild to severe. Individuals with ASD may have difficulties with social interactions, communication, and repetitive behaviours.
- 5. Developmental Disorders:** Other developmental disorders, such as Down syndrome, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs), and Rett syndrome, can also result in cognitive disabilities. These conditions typically involve delays or abnormalities in physical, cognitive, and/or emotional development.
- 6. Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):** TBI occurs when there is damage to the brain from an external force, such as a blow to the head. Depending on the severity and location of the injury, TBI can result in cognitive impairments affecting memory, attention, executive functioning, and other cognitive skills.

Each of these cognitive disabilities can vary widely in their characteristics and impact on an individual's life. It's essential to provide appropriate support, accommodations, and interventions to help individuals with cognitive disabilities reach their full potential and participate fully in society.

## PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES

Psychiatric disabilities, also known as mental health disabilities, encompass a wide range of conditions that affect mood, behaviour, and thinking. Here are some common types:

- 1. Depression:** Depression is a mood disorder characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest or pleasure in activities. It can affect sleep, appetite, energy levels, and concentration, leading to significant impairments in daily functioning.
- 2. Anxiety disorders:** Anxiety disorders involve excessive worry, fear, or apprehension that can be debilitating and interfere with daily life. Examples include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and specific phobias.
- 3. Bipolar Disorder:** Bipolar disorder, formerly known as manic-depressive illness, is characterized by fluctuations between periods of elevated mood (mania or hypomania) and periods of depression. It can impact energy levels, judgment, behaviour, and relationships.

**4. Schizophrenia:** Schizophrenia is a severe mental disorder characterized by disturbances in thinking, perception, emotions, and behaviour. Symptoms may include hallucinations, delusions, disorganized thinking, and impaired social functioning.

**5. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** PTSD can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Symptoms may include intrusive memories, nightmares, and flashbacks, avoidance of triggers, hyper vigilance, and emotional numbness.

**6. Obsessive-Compulsive-Disorder (OCD):** OCD is characterized by recurring intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviours or mental rituals (compulsions) performed to alleviate anxiety. It can significantly disrupt daily life and relationships.

**7. Eating Disorders:** Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder involve unhealthy attitudes and behaviours related to food, body image, and weight. They can have serious physical and psychological consequences.

**8. Personality Disorders:** Personality disorders are enduring patterns of behaviour, cognition, and inner experience that deviate from cultural expectations and cause distress or impairment. Examples include borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, and antisocial personality disorder.

**9. Substance Use Disorders:** Substance use disorders involve the misuse of alcohol, drugs, or other substances, leading to significant impairment or distress. They can co-occur with other mental health disorders and have serious health and social consequences.

These are just some examples of psychiatric disabilities, and there are many other conditions that can impact mental health and well-being. It's important to recognize that psychiatric disabilities are medical conditions that require treatment, support, and understanding, just like physical health conditions. Access to mental health services, therapy, medication, and community support can help individuals with psychiatric disabilities manage their symptoms and lead fulfilling lives.

## COMMUNICATION DISABILITIES

Communication disabilities encompass a range of conditions that affect a person's ability to communicate effectively. Here are some common types:

- 1. Speech Disorders:** Speech disorders involve difficulties with producing speech sounds accurately, fluently, or coherently. Examples include:
  - Articulation Disorders:** Difficulty pronouncing certain sounds or words correctly due to problems with the lips, tongue, or palate.
  - Apraxia of Speech:** Difficulty planning and coordinating the movements required for speech production, leading to inconsistent or distorted speech.
  - Dysarthria:** Weakness, slowness, or lack of coordination in the muscles used for speech, often resulting from neurological conditions or injuries.
- 2. Language Disorders:** Language disorders affect a person's ability to understand or use language effectively. They can involve difficulties with:
  - Receptive Language:** Understanding spoken or written language.
  - Expressive Language:** Using words, sentences, or gestures to convey meaning.
  - Pragmatic Language:** Using language in social contexts, such as understanding social cues, taking turns in conversation, and following conversational rules.
- 3. Fluency Disorders:** Fluency disorders involve disruptions in the flow of speech, such as:
  - Stuttering:** Repetitions, prolongations, or blocks in speech sounds, syllables, or words, along with associated tension or struggle.
  - Cluttering:** Rapid or disorganized speech with frequent pauses, repetitions, or revisions, making it difficult for others to understand.
- 4. Voice Disorders:** Voice disorders affect the quality, pitch, or volume of the voice, resulting in:
  - Hoarseness:** Abnormal or rough vocal quality due to vocal cord nodules, polyps, or other structural issues.
  - Vocal Cord Paralysis:** Weakness or immobility of the vocal cords, leading to breathiness, reduced volume, or changes in pitch.



**Voice Misuse or Abuse:** Excessive strain or misuse of the vocal mechanism, leading to vocal fatigue, hoarseness, or loss of voice.

- 5. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC):** AAC involves using communication aids or strategies to supplement or replace speech for individuals with severe communication impairments. This can include:

**Picture Communication Symbols (PCS):** Graphic symbols representing words, phrases, or concepts.

**Communication Boards:** Visual displays containing pictures, symbols, or words that users can point to or select to communicate.

**Speech-generating Devices (SGDs):** Electronic devices that generate speech output based on user input, such as text or symbol selection.

These are just some examples of communication disabilities, and individuals may experience combinations of these challenges to varying degrees. Effective assessment, intervention, and support from speech-language pathologists and other professionals can help individuals with communication disabilities improve their communication skills and participate more fully in social, educational, and vocational settings.

## NEUROLOGICAL DISABILITIES

Neurological disabilities encompass a wide range of conditions that affect the nervous system, including the brain, spinal cord, and nerves. Here are some common types:

**1. Epilepsy:** Epilepsy is a neurological disorder characterized by recurrent seizures, which are sudden, uncontrolled electrical disturbances in the brain. Seizure types and severity can vary widely among individuals.

**2. Multiple Sclerosis (MS):** MS is an autoimmune disease that affects the central nervous system, causing inflammation, demyelination (damage to the protective myelin sheath), and impaired nerve function. Symptoms can include fatigue, muscle weakness, coordination problems, and cognitive impairment.

**3. Parkinson's Disease:** Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurological disorder that primarily affects movement, causing tremors, rigidity, bradykinesia (slowness of movement), and postural instability. It can also lead to non-motor symptoms such as cognitive impairment, depression, and sleep disturbances.

**4. Cerebral Palsy (CP):** CP is a group of permanent movement disorders that appear in early childhood, resulting from abnormal development or damage to the parts of the brain that control movement and posture. Symptoms can include muscle stiffness, involuntary movements, and difficulties with coordination and balance.

**5. Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):** TBI occurs when there is sudden trauma to the brain, often resulting from a blow or jolt to the head. TBI can cause a range of physical, cognitive, and emotional impairments, depending on the severity and location of the injury.

**6. Stroke:** Stroke occurs when blood flow to part of the brain is interrupted or reduced, leading to oxygen deprivation and brain damage. Symptoms can vary depending on the affected area of the brain but may include weakness or paralysis on one side of the body, speech difficulties, and cognitive deficits.

**7. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS):** ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. It leads to muscle weakness, paralysis, and eventually respiratory failure.

**8. Neuromuscular Disorders:** Neuromuscular disorders affect the nerves that control voluntary muscles, leading to weakness, muscle wasting, and impaired movement. Examples include muscular dystrophy, Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, and myasthenia gravis.

**9. Huntington's Disease:** Huntington's disease is a genetic neurological disorder characterized by progressive deterioration of cognitive, motor, and psychiatric functions. Symptoms typically appear in adulthood and worsen over time, leading to significant disability.

These are just some examples of neurological disabilities, and there are many other conditions that can affect the nervous system. Each condition has its own unique characteristics, symptoms, and impact on an individual's life. Access to appropriate medical care, rehabilitation services, and support can help individuals with neurological disabilities manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life.

## CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS:

Chronic health conditions are long-term medical conditions that require ongoing management and treatment. They can affect various organ systems and have a significant impact on a person's quality of life. Here are some common types of chronic health conditions:

**1. Cardiovascular Diseases:** These include conditions that affect the heart and blood vessels, such as:

- Coronary artery disease
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Heart failure
- Stroke
- Peripheral artery disease

**2. Respiratory Diseases:** Respiratory conditions affect the lungs and breathing, including:

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Asthma
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Cystic fibrosis

**3. Diabetes:** Diabetes is a metabolic disorder characterized by high blood sugar levels. Types include:

- Type 1 diabetes (autoimmune condition)
- Type 2 diabetes (insulin resistance)
- Gestational diabetes (during pregnancy)

**4. Autoimmune Diseases:** Autoimmune diseases occur when the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy cells and tissues. Examples include:

- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)
- Multiple sclerosis (MS)
- Crohn's disease
- Psoriasis

**5. Chronic Pain Conditions:** Chronic pain can result from various underlying causes and may affect different parts of the body. Examples include:

- Fibromyalgia
- Chronic back pain
- Migraines and other types of chronic headaches

Neuropathic pain (e.g., from diabetic neuropathy or nerve injuries)

**6. Neurological Disorders:** Neurological conditions affect the brain, spinal cord, and nerves. Examples include:

Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia

Parkinson's disease

Epilepsy

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)

Huntington's disease

**7. Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD):** CKD is a progressive condition characterized by reduced kidney function over time, leading to complications such as:

Hypertension

Fluid and electrolyte imbalances

Anemia

Bone disease

**8. Digestive Disorders:** Chronic digestive conditions affect the gastrointestinal tract and can include:

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

Inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis)

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)

Celiac disease

These are just some examples of chronic health conditions, and there are many others that can impact different aspects of physical and mental health. Effective management often involves a combination of medication, lifestyle modifications, therapy, and ongoing medical monitoring.

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