

Prevalence and Magnitude of Disability in India

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Contrary to the general notion a spatial study of disability prevalence in India shows that it is not a geographically neutral phenomena; different regions because of their different physical and socio-economic conditions are prone to some specific disabilities. Regional variations in the prevalence of different disabilities demands for a state wise modification in any policy formed and enacted at the level of Central Government.

Introduction:

Handicapped, Disabled, Divyang or Differently Able Person, whatever one say, refers to a section of society at the bottom of the social ladder across the spectrums of caste, creed, religion and gender. The most excluded, deprived and neglected section of society, whose aspiration always stands last in the priorities of societies and governments. The degree of negligence towards Disabled People in India can be understood by the fact that even after the freedom, in first three decades, government didn't even feel any need to enumerate Persons with Disability.

But today we have an inclusive and comprehensive data (at least as it has been acclaimed) on disability according to census, which states that 26.8 million disabled are living in country (Census of India, 2011).

Literature Review:

Normally the word Disability refers to lack of ability in performing any act that is believed normal for a person, due to any type of morbidity or impairment. But defining disability and bringing it under premise of any specific and unanimous model is a hard nut to crack. Different Scholars and Experts have tried to define it differently, such as;

Roger and Singhal (2008), give more emphasis on social, cultural and infrastructural barriers causing for one's lack of ability rather than individual's own physical restriction in performing any task. They strongly argued that a person's ability to function properly depends to a considerable extent on her/his social and physical environment. While criticizing the Census criteria they draw our attention towards the fact that the major drawback of having a hard and fast definition is that some type of impairments got overlooked. Contrary to the views of Jeffery and Singhal, Addlakha and Mandal (2009), argued for a more elaborated and inclusive definition of disability, for the same problem of overlooking or under reporting. A K Mishra and Ruchika Gupta (2006), don't say much about definitions and models of disability of but give emphasized on need of a more elaborated and inclusive definition of disability, which is strictly needed to ensure the well being of PWDs and to bring all underdogs of disability under Rehabilitation schemes. We find the views of Zutshi (2004) very comprehensive, he states that, "while defining disability it's is difficult to accommodate the expectations of all disabled groups. There are hundreds of different disabilities and there are, as many causes for these disabilities. Some people are born with disabilities; others become disabled later on in their lives. Some disabilities exhibit themselves only periodically like fits and seizures; others are constant conditions and are life-long.

The difference of opinions among different Scholars and Experts of the field is not limited only till defining disability; it has also raised severe doubts about the real number of Persons with Disability in India. "As late as 1981, the NSSO data for the first time gave the demographic status of the disabled. There is no evidence based demographic study conducted at the national level to provide reliable and analytical information on the status of disabled in the country. The NSSO 58th round was indeed a big leap in that direction", Chaudhuri (2006). Debate accelerates and in this regard Mitra and Sambamoorthi (2006) states that the Visual disability prevalence is estimated at 10.6 million (48.6 per cent) and 2.8 million in the NSS (15.2 per cent). NSS rates were higher than the census rates for loco motor disability by about 30 per cent (57.5 per cent versus 27.9 per cent). While going deeper, Prasad and Prasad (2007) draw out attention towards

the fact that these differences emerged due to different definitions used by both giant organizations for different types of disabilities, meaning at some point of incident one's definition is more inclusive. If we consider the male female differences among PWDs, we find the argument of Ghai (2002), very interesting, she strongly argued the low number of women with disability than Men with disability is only due to under reporting of Women with Disability, that's root are deepened in the stereotypical mentality, where a girl wearing even glasses has to face difficulties in getting marry. Thus parents tend to hide the disability of their girl child. Das and Agnihotri (1998), adds that it is also the stark biological resistance among Indian women who save them from the risk of getting vulnerable to a disability in spite of her stereotypical nurturing and low level of nourishing. We find also an interesting view by Zutshi (2004), according him, "the gender specific vulnerability of loco motor impairment is more for males due to their nature of work activity, which increases their mobility over space and increases their chances of occupational and traffic accidents. Jeffery and Singal (2008), question such small number of disabled in India.

In the view of above, it appears that in India, Disability enumerating agencies need to be more careful about the Disability issues and their ground staff requires to be sensitized and trained properly to deal with it comprehensively.

Disability and Census:

The demographic study of disabled population has suffered severely due to adoption of arbitrary criteria for recognition of them. In very first census conducted in India in 1872 in Persons with Disability were included, and this process continued till 1931 (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India). But this enumeration was not much reliable, it's because in these seven consecutive census population of disabled never crossed the share of 0.5 per cent to total population. Since 1931 the enumeration of disabled in census had been stopped till 1980. Again after a gap of fifty years disabled were enumerated in Census of 1981, but only superficially, because in this census disabled were counted only 0.17 per cent of total population,

which was not satisfactory in any way. Thus in Census 1991 it was felt that the Census was not the appropriate medium to canvass the question on disability so once again disabled were not counted in population enumeration. The discontinuation of enumeration of disabled in Census was a glaring omission, the manner in which a chunk of population was done sideline that was vehemently criticized by several groups and agencies. A vibrant protest and lobbying was started by several disability right protecting NGOs, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment also made a request to Census Registrar. Thus this mounting pressure culminated in the form of Census of 2001 comprising disability and therefore again in Census of 2001 a question on disability was included, yet there were no expert team or training to recognize disability in any individual.

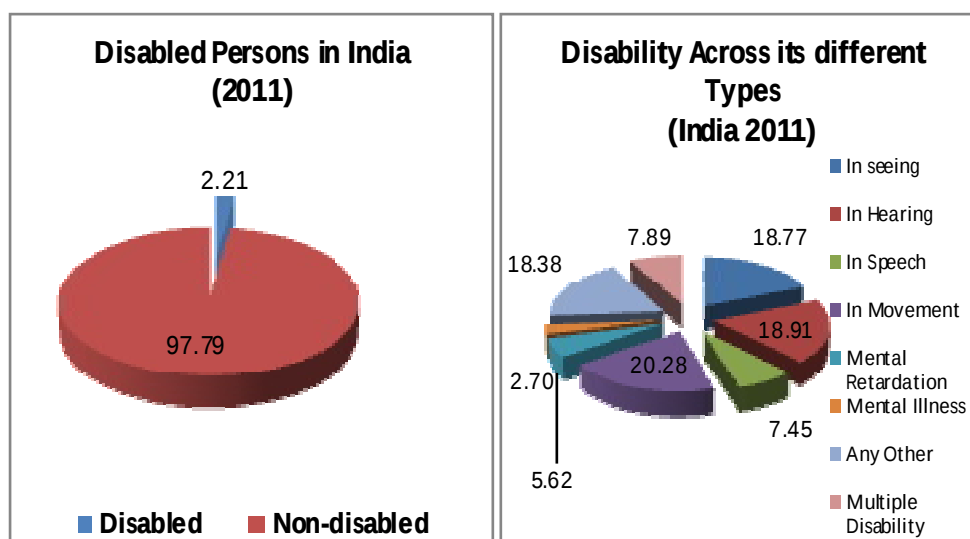
Henceforth disability became an integral part of Census and first time in 2011, the enumeration of disabled has been done with a high degree of precision in a scientific manner, having an extra question on disability to cover the aspiration of all those disability groups who were feeling cheated during earlier censuses.

Disabilities in India:

According to the Census of India 2011, PWDs constitutes the 2.21 per cent of total population of country. This 2.21 per cent includes people of all age groups, sex and sections. First time in the Census 2011 eight categories of disability have been introduced to cover all sorts of disability viz. disability in Seeing, in Hearing, in Speech, in Movement, Mental Retardation, Mental Illness, Multiple disability and one column for any other type of disability.

Figure: 1

Figure 2



Source: C-Series, Socio-Cultural Table, Census of India, 2011

The above picture depicts the proportion of different types of disability w.r.t to total disabled population. Here we find that disability in movement constitutes the lion's share by contributing one fifth of total disability in India, followed by Hearing, Seeing and other type of disability. Here other type of disability comprises several kinds of disability, not identified by any government agency till date. Only three among these all viz. Locomotor (in movement), visual (in seeing) and Hearing constitutes around 60 per cent of total disabled in India. Speech and Multiple disabilities separately share 7.45 and 7.89 per cent of total disabled. The column of any other type of disability must be elaborated and clarified as it constitutes such a large share of 18 per cent of total disabled population and remained undefined in analysis. It erodes the utility of this collected data by the point of view of planning and welfare measures.

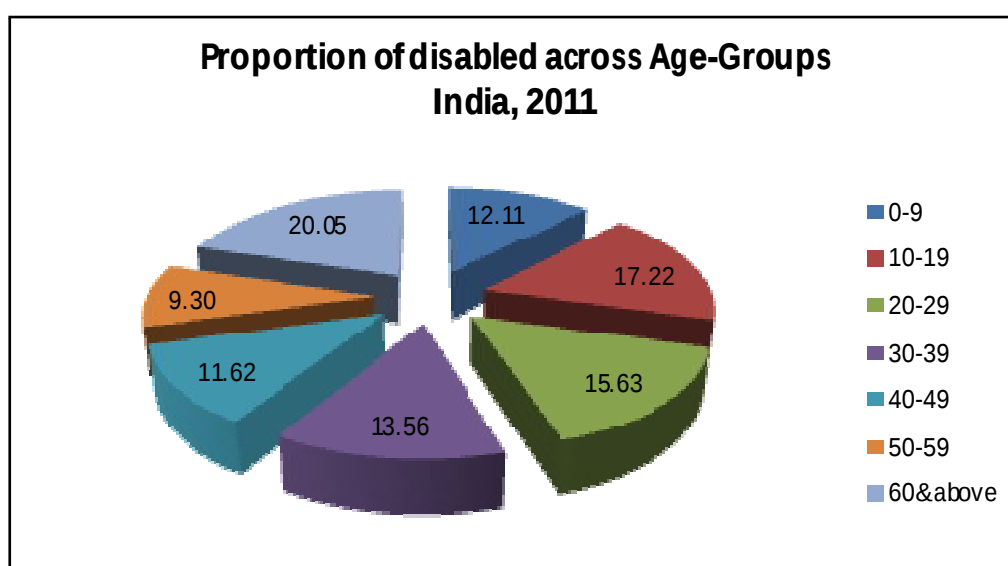
The comparatively higher share of Locomotor disability seems natural as a vast range of factors are responsible for such incidences like Polio, paralysis, road accidents, natural disaster and many others. The movement disability is followed by the disability in hearing and seeing. Similar like movement disability, these two are also inevitable in life and one has to bear these in old age. But such a large percentage in total disabled may

not only because of old age disability. Its roots have deepened in the mud of poverty, malnutrition, lack of medical infrastructure and prevalent backwardness. As the John Harrish (2006) narrates that one of the biggest cause of visual disability in Night Blindness, when it does not get proper treatment and required nutrition for its elimination in long run it becomes a cause of Permanent visual disability among millions of people. The prevalence of Mental retardation and illness share 5.60 and 2.71 per cent respectively in total disability, which is not very significant, but this is the worst kind of disability, so must be taken into account and paid immediate earnestness.

Disability across Age-Groups:

It is an axiomatic fact that as people age, their health deteriorates and they become more prone to diseases and disability. Thus some of disabilities are inevitable in order to getting older. And thus in those countries where age-expectancy is higher more peoples are disabled due to aging. Contrary to this in developing counties such as India the chunks of disabled are in working age-group or children. Around 80 per cent disabled of country are below 60 years of age, meaning these are in productive age group.

Figure: 3



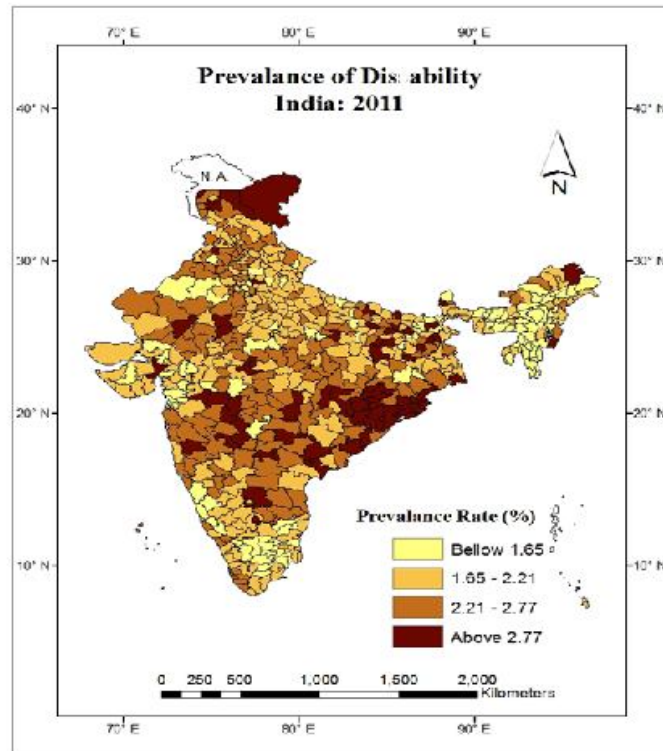
Source: C-Series, Socio-Cultural Table, Census of India, 2011

The picture depicts that the maximum number of disabled are in the age-group of 60& above, which gives a breath of relief. But sixty per cent of disabled are in working age group, which creates worrisome condition for country's development. Such a higher percentage of disabled among children 0-9 year age-group describes the criticality of problem, that the children those are called the future of country are caught in the trap of poverty, malnutrition, morbidity. The plans of vaccination like Polio eradication, distribution of tablets of Vitamin-A in health centers and similar steps taken to prevent child disability have shown their effect but there is a need to run these schemes more efficiently.

The further analysis has brought out that more than half of the disabled population is of age less than 30 years and only twenty-five per cent of disabled persons were of age 50 or more. This is an issue of serious concern as most of the disabled persons were found to be in working age-group and very young. Hence it clearly indicates that government policy and programmes should be focussed at early mainstreaming of these young persons with disability for a long-run solution to the problem. The adaptation of preventive measures is best solution of the problem, not only to ensure a healthy life for victims but also it would be economically beneficial for country.

Spatial Pattern of Prevalence of Disability in India:

One of the most important aspects of India's disabled population is its uneven distribution. On the one hand in few states such as Orissa, Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir has around three per cent of its total population as disabled and on another hand there are some of states/UTs where only about one and one and half per cent people of disabled like Daman and Diu, whole north-east India et cetera.

Map: 1

Source: C-Series, Socio-Cultural Table, Census of India, 2011

The issue of disability is very closely associated with the geography of any region, demographic condition, level of development, social infrastructure (health and education facilities) et cetera. In case of India it varies across different states remarkably. According to Census of India 2011, 2.21 per cent population is living with disability, which is more than total population of Australia.

The disability prevalence rate of India as a whole has remained 2.21 per cent, which varies drastically across several states. Oliver Mike, Colin Barnes (2010) states “there are many factors which influence the prevalence rate of disability, like level of development, government policies, health facilities, income levels, literacy and educational level etc”. In India disability varies from 1 to 3 per cent across states. When we plot this data on map of India, an interesting pattern emerges, where broadly three

types of region becomes visible Central India, Northern Plains region and North-East India.

In India Orissa has the maximum disability having districts, here out of every 1000 persons 30 people are suffering from disability, Orissa is followed by Kashmir and Laddakh region (29/000), northern Andhra Pradesh (27/000), Eastern Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, and Northern Karnataka etc. This whole belt is dominated by underdeveloped population and remains as a tribal belt. This forested region is suffering from problem of Maoist insurrection. High rate of disability can be attributed to underdevelopment and regular insurrection of region.

While considering above picture we find that disability prevalence rate is surprisingly low among northern region. The states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Haryana and Eastern Rajasthan have comparatively lower percentage of disability, similar conditions have been found with Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Such a low percentage of disability can be attributed to the works of NGOs and other related organizations. Which are more active in these plain regions.

The most surprising thing comes in mind in the form of the lowest disability prevalence rate among north-eastern states. Here in all states it is lower than 20 disabled per thousand and except few states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Tripura, it is lower than 15 per thousand. It might be due to under-reporting of disabled persons in these areas, Due to lack of accessibility and ignorance of people towards disability enumeration, these pictures must have been emerged. Otherwise there is no reason that such in a backward and deprived region, where health facilities are very poor, disability remains lowest in country.

Prevalence of Different Types of Disabilities:

There are eight types of disability, which has been mentioned in Census 2011. Several kinds of factors influences to different disabilities. Like areas having more road accidents or occupational accidents are more likely prone to locomotor disability. Poor or

deprived areas where living standard and nutritional level of people are very low, those are more prone to Mental Retardation and Mental Illness type disabilities. So every disability is different from other. Although there are few factors which are attributed to prevalence of all types of disability like lack of awareness, lack of health infrastructure, and income levels etcetera, nevertheless their distinctiveness must be accepted.

The present study focuses mainly on the prevalence of three major types of disabilities, which covers around 60 per cent of total disabled population of country viz in movement, in seeing and in hearing.

Disability in Movement:

Disability in Movement is known as Locomotor Disability. People suffering from it, has to face limitation or lack of ability movement like a normal man. In India around 0.40 per cent population is suffering from this disability. Earlier in 2001 it was around 0.60 per cent of total population. Decrease in prevalence of Locomotor disability can be attributed to government efforts of Polio eradication, which was a major cause of Locomotor disability. Here 0.40 per cent of Locomotor disabled meaning around 5 million people are suffering from this disability, which is such a huge number.

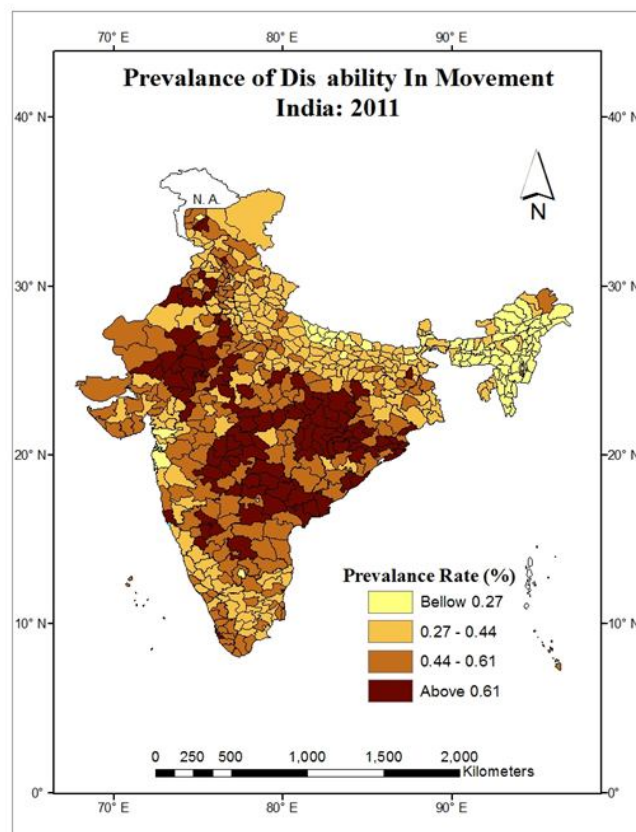
Locomotor disability is believed among one of the most prevalent disabilities in the world, there a range of factors caused for it. But these all can be summarized into three main reasons responsible for the prevalent of such disability. Those are Diseases (like Polio, Arthritis, Stroke, Cerebral Palsy etc), Accidents (like traffic accidents, industrial accidents, agricultural accident, , natural catastrophe etc), and Old Age.

A district level study of spatial distribution of locomotor disabled population depicts a core Pheriphery type distribution in India. Where this core seems fragmented into three major parts. The First part of this core is situated in Chhattisgarh and western Orissa, the second part is in Eastern Maharashtra and Northern Andhra Pradesh and the

third part is Eastern Rajasthan. So in a nutshell Central India has the highest concentration of locomotor disabled.

The another region of medium locomotor disability prevalence is spreaded around the core i.e. Central India. Both these regions are closely related and situated near to each other. In south India it is extended till northern ends of Tamil Nadu and southern portions of Karnataka. In northern India this region of medium locomotor disability having areas are extended till Madhya Pradesh but in a strip type region it has extended till Kashmir

Map: 2



Source: C-Series, Socio-Cultural Table, Census of India, 2011

The least locomotor disability having regions are in Northern Eastern States and northern states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. North-East region has less than 0.27 per

cent locomotor disability, except eastern districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Again such a low percentage of locomotor disability in North-Eastern states can be attributed to under-reporting of disability, as the people of these areas are not well aware with the significance of disability enumeration.

Disability in Seeing:

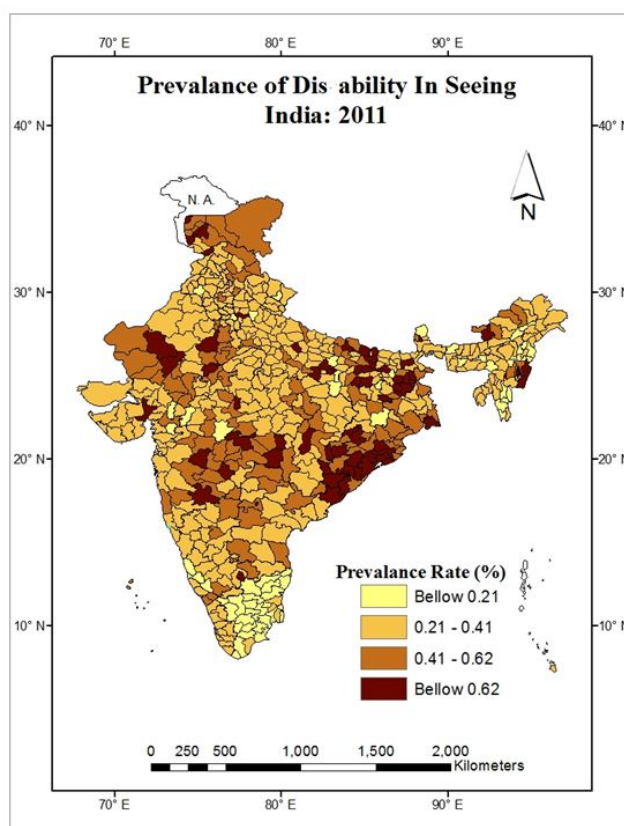
Disability in seeing, which is more commonly is also termed as the Visual Disability, refers to lack of seeing ability, it comprises from severe blindness to low vision of an individual. Around 0.40 per cent population of country is suffering from problem of visual disability, which constitutes a huge number of population i.e. around 6 million. Earlier in 2001, according to census the around 1 per cent of population of country was suffering from visual disability. This sharp decline in the proportion of disability in seeing has been felt because of conceptual and definitional changes done in the Census of India 2011. This decline has to take anything with preventive measures taken by government or not, it requires a deep study of subject.

The major reasons behind the prevalence of Disability in seeing are uncorrected refractive errors (myopia, hyperopia or astigmatism) 43 per cent, un-operated cataract 33 per cent and glaucoma, 2 per cent. 75 per cent of total visual disability is preventive or curative in nature.

In India the prevalence of visual disability has been depicted in the following map. It seems prevalent in all over country. But in certain pockets its density seems very high, here only few of regions are having high prevalence rate of visual disability than national average. These areas are (Where more than 0.50 per cent people are visual disabled) located in whole Orissa, northern Andhra Pradesh, some parts of eastern Chhattisgarh, Vidarbha, western Rajasthan, Bihar and Jammu. Thus again we find that a type of disability (disability in seeing) is maximum in the Central India.

This high concentration of visual disability reduces towards the northern plains, In Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Eastern Rajasthan, Uttarakhand. All these areas have less than 0.40 per cent visual disability.

Map: 3

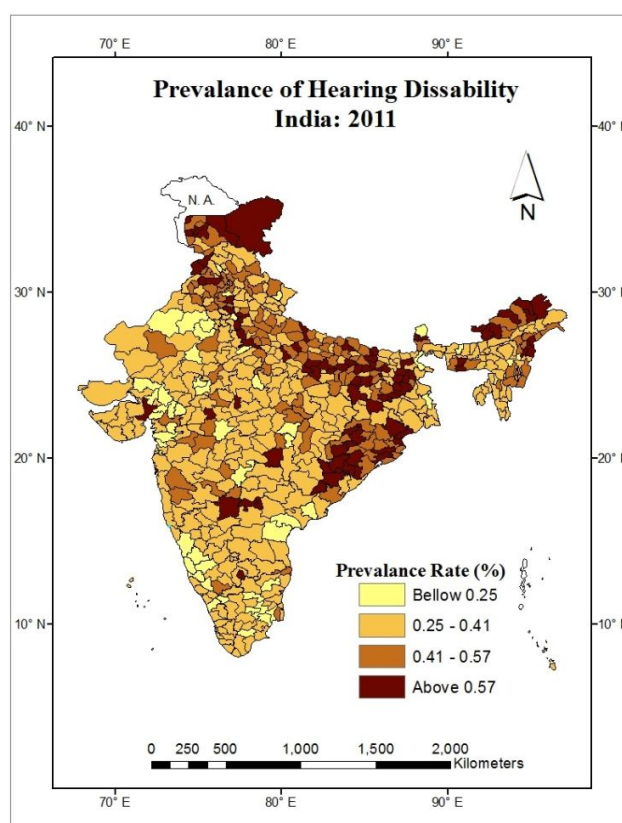


Source: C-Series, Socio-Cultural Table, Census of India, 2011

The least visual disability having regions are extended in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and north-eastern states. Few pockets of same in Western Maharashtra and Eastern Andhra Pradesh are having even less than 0.20 per cent disability in seeing. In north-eastern areas Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur have a bit high visual disability prevalence. Thus we have noticed remarkable variations in the prevalence of visual disability across different parts of country.

Hearing Disability:

In India around 0.41 per cent people are suffering from Hearing Disability, among these those who can hear only with one ear also have been included. In 2001 only 0.12 per cent people were hearing disabled, which has risen to 0.40 per cent in 2011. This sharp rise is attributed mainly to the definitional changes done by census in 2011.

Map: 4

Source: C-Series, Socio-Cultural Table, Census of India, 2011

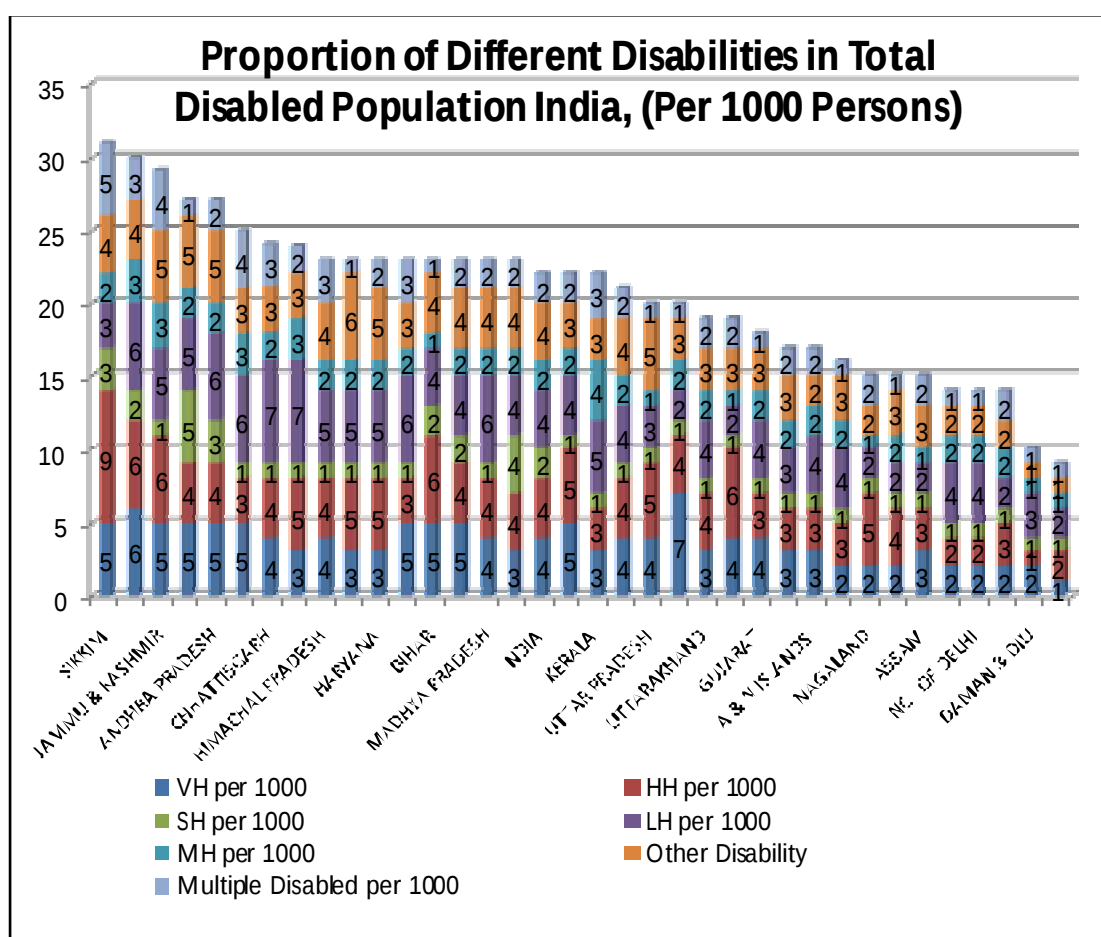
As the above map shows the distribution of Hearing disabled in India, while considering this spatial distributional pattern of hearing disability we find that by and large India can be divided into three regions on the basis of prevalence of hearing

disability. These three may be High hearing disability having areas, medium disability having areas and low disability having areas.

The High degree regions covers from Jammu and Kashmir to Bihar and north West Bengal in an arc shape. While showing a bend it has extended till Orissa and some of its parts are extended in northern Arunachal Pradesh. The Areas of medium density are extended around the above mentioned high hearing disability having areas. The all rest parts of country comes under low hearing disability having areas. Here hearing disability is lower than national average of 0.40 per cent. There are only few pockets where such disability is lower than 0.25 per cent.

Composition of Disability in India:

Figure: 4



Source: C-Series, Socio-Cultural Table, Census of India, 2011

According to Census of India 2011, there are eight types of disabilities in India, about which data has been collected in this census. So it was an interesting issue to inquiry that whether these types are equally distributed in all states or this also has a spatial characteristic.

Here a study of disability prevalence across all states of India is being produced for all disability types separately and this study is being done not in percentage, but instead of percentage disabled per thousand is being used to do away with the problem of showing calculation in points.

The present figure also depicts the level of disability among different states. Here Sikkim is the highest disability having state, 31/000 persons and Dadra Nagar Haveli stands last on the ladder with 8/000. In Sikkim we find that Hearing disability is most prevalent, in Orissa Locomotor, Visually and Hearing all disabilities are high (6/000). Jammu & Kashmir is the third highest disability having state, here hearing disability is maximum (6/000), followed by locomotor, Visual and other disability each 5/000 persons, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are fourth and fifth maximum disability having states. In both states locomotor, visual and other category of disability constitutes lion's share each of these having 5-6 disabled per thousand persons.

Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Goa all have almost similar share of disabled in their total population i.e., around 23 disabled per thousand. Among most of these states the composition of disability is somewhat same. Here in most of states Locomotor disability constitutes lion's share followed by category of Other disability, visual and Hearing disability.

Even in further study we don't find any remarkable difference in the composition of disability across different states of India, almost in all states pictures remains same where Locomotor, Hearing Visual and Other types of disability form around 80 per cent of total disability, and other disability types such as Mental retardation, Mental illness, Speech disability et cetera remain continuously low. So on the above study it can be recommended that while making policies and provisions for disabled, it must be taken

into account that these four types covers around 80 per cent of disabled, so they must be given more attention. And these four types also require bulk of preventive measures to prevent growth of total disability.

Conclusion, Limitations to the Study and Scope of Further Research:

In census 2011, disability data has been collected for eight types of disability, among these three types Locomotor, Visual and Hearing Disability constitutes two third of total. We find state wise remarkable variation in disability prevalence, across its different types. Although there is no significant concentration of disabled population in any particular region, nonetheless a regional variation is noticeable. We have also not find any concentration zone for disability as whole, different types of disabilities have shown their distinct zones. It shifts from north to east, east to south, no regular pattern has been found for all disabilities. In spatial Pattern we have noticed a divide in disability prevalence, this rate is higher in developed states than backward states, like for north-eastern states it is the lowest in across all spectrums. As an outlier in backward states Jammu and Kashmir has emerged, where disability remains highest in most of cases.

The professional attributes like limitations on words and number of pages limits the pervasiveness of this study. Besides this as the study is purely based on the secondary data many questions remained unanswered, the claims of under reporting and false registration can only be checked by conducting a primary survey in the respective areas. The real factors responsible for regional variation in prevalence of different types of disabilities will only surface, when a micro level study of subject will be done in cooperation with the local disabled population.

It gives a way and a challenge for further research in the field as for a more comprehensive understanding of subject, a detailed micro level study is required. Only speculations can be made about the high degree of disability prevalence in certain developed states and low among whole north-east India.

Only charity based approach can't be a solution for the proper rehabilitation for disabled people of India, neither it would be good for country nor for even themselves. A rapidly growing country can't carry burden of such a large section, they must be mainstreamed in development process as instrument of development.

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