



The Role of Community-Based Rehabilitation and Community Based Inclusive Development in Facilitating Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities Globally

Plain English Summary

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Introduction

Persons with disabilities have the right to receive fair and equitable treatment, meaning when they experience discrimination or unfair treatment, they should be able to access information and locations used in the administration of justice. Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) is a multi-sectoral strategy that addresses human rights and inclusion. CBR works in five domains: health, education, livelihood, social and empowerment. Justice is a component within the social domain of CBR. In this paper, we explore problems faced by people with disabilities in accessing justice. We also explore how CBR and community-based inclusive development (CBID) programs support access justice.

Methods

We have written this paper based on information collected through online conversations with CBR practitioners/stakeholders around the world. The CBR Global Network organized and facilitated the conversations in five different regions (i.e., Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Pacific, and the Arab regions). Through these conversations, we tried to understand current practices and the future of the field as it relates to justice, choice, and power. Information collected through conversations has been grouped based on similarities and differences.

Main findings

A total of 191 people joined the online conversations, and 46 of them had some form of disability. During online conversations, participants shared that people with disabilities face barriers to accessing justice. One of the barriers participants mentioned is that community members lack knowledge about rights and legislation. Because of limited knowledge about disability and the rights, community members sometimes exclude people with disabilities from social participation. For instance, many teachers or principals do not know that children with disabilities have rights to education or do not want to adhere to it. Therefore, sometimes teachers do not want to accept children with disabilities in their schools. Participants also said that how



buildings are built and how information is shared about rights are not disability-friendly; therefore, many people with disabilities cannot go to courthouses or police stations to report cases. Furthermore, people with communication difficulties face problems communicating with people working in the justice system because sign language interpreters are often not available. Another problem participants noted is the financial barrier. Many people with disabilities cannot pay for lawyers and deaf interpreters at the police station. Participants mentioned that women and girls with disabilities experience more barriers. Women and girls with disabilities are vulnerable to experiencing domestic violence and sexual abuse. They also have less decision-making power in the family. As a result, many women and girls with disabilities cannot seek justice when they experience inequality. Participants shared that many CBR/CBID programs are doing different activities to support access to justice, such as increasing awareness about disability. Some CBR/CBID programs connect people with disabilities to lawyers who provide services to them free of cost.

Participants discussed that sometimes family creates barriers in accessing justice. Specifically, if an individual with a disability experience sexual assault/abuse, families try not to talk about it because they fear that people will treat the entire family differently; therefore, they keep it secret instead of prosecuting to save the family's reputation. Participants emphasized the role of families in facilitating access to justice. They mentioned that families can help their family member with a disability to understand their rights and advocate for justice. They can also support their family member with a disability in building self-confidence and decision-making abilities.

Additionally, participants noted that people with disabilities could play a vital role in facilitating access to justice. They can support each other, which we call peer support, in understanding their rights. They can also come together, form an organization, advocate for their rights, and help each other navigate the justice system. Finally, participants noted that it is important to include people with disabilities and their family members in decision-making bodies in the community. For instance, it is important to have representation in the boards of trustees in schools, government ministers, and boards of directors. Participants believe that if people with disabilities and their families are included in these decision-making bodies, they can advocate for themselves and thus facilitate their access to justice.

Main implications

We believe that the findings of this paper will help CBR/CBID programs to take necessary actions to address problems faced by people with disabilities in accessing justice. CBR/CBID programs worldwide can conduct various activities to promote awareness about disability and rights. CBR/CBID programs could arrange training for people working in justice systems (e.g., lawyers, police) about disability issues. CBR/CBID programs can advocate with the justice system to ensure that a range of communication methods/support is available to meet the needs of people with



communication difficulties. As women with disabilities face more barriers, CBR programs can advocate for women's education and train them with knowledge and skills so that women with disabilities can advocate for themselves. Furthermore, CBR/CBID programs can facilitate the establishment of PWDs in leadership positions and enable them to share their voice in decision-making.

Find out more

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