

# Community and Family Studies

Groups in Context: People with Disabilities

# People with Disabilities

- There are four categories of disability:
  - Physical
  - Intellectual
  - Psychological
  - Sensory

# Prevalence of each group within the community

- In 2015:
  - Almost one in five Australians reported living with disability (18.3% or 4.3 million people).
  - The majority (78.5%) reported having a physical disability as their main long-term health condition. The remaining 21.5% reported mental and behavioural disorders.
  - Older people represent a large portion of the disabled population. In 2015, 50.7% of older people were living with disability.

# Individual diversity within each group

- Disabled people may suffer from one or several disabilities. These can be temporary or permanent and can range from mild to severe.
- The lives and experiences of people with disabilities vary greatly:
  - Many disabled people complete high school and university and lead average working lives.
  - Some have relationships, marry and have children.
  - Others may require more assistance with everyday life.

# Terminology used by the community to describe the group

Positive	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Person with a disability</li><li>• Brave</li><li>• Special</li><li>• Courageous</li><li>• Strong</li><li>• Differently abled</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Retard</li><li>• Spastic</li><li>• Imbecile</li><li>• Crippled</li><li>• Lunatic</li><li>• Crazy</li></ul>

# Discuss the impact this might have on individuals within the group

- The way that we refer to people is important: words can be empowering, disempowering or even offensive.
- There are *positive* terms that can be used to refer to individuals with a disability; however, even these can be considered negative depending on the way they are used and simply due to the fact that they mark disabled people out as *different* or *other*.
- For more information, see:
  - [http://www.aucd.org/docs/add/sa\\_summits/Language%20Doc.pdf](http://www.aucd.org/docs/add/sa_summits/Language%20Doc.pdf)

# Issues of concern for the four specific groups within the community

- Satisfaction of needs
- Access to services
- Factors affecting access to services

# Satisfaction of needs

- Adequate standard of living (food, clothing, shelter)
- Health
- Education
- Employment
- Safety and security
- Sense of identity



# Adequate standard of living

- An adequate standard of living requires people to have access to appropriate food, clothing and shelter.
- Inadequate food, clothing and shelter can have a negative effect on a person's physical wellbeing, particularly on health.
- More than one in four disabled people live below the poverty line and they are more likely to become homeless than people without disabilities.
- People with disabilities often face additional costs, arising from the need for specialist equipment and health care, which can impact their ability to access adequate food, clothing and shelter.

# Health

- Disabilities are often the result of health issues or can cause health issues. Despite the prevalence of health issues within the disabled community, people with disabilities should still be able to live healthy lives.
- Health issues and lack of access to health care can exacerbate a person's disability and negatively affect their physical or emotional wellbeing.

# Education

- Education is a way of gaining knowledge, being part of a community and gaining employment.
- Education is essential to improving a person's social, emotional and future economic wellbeing.
- Some disabilities are intellectual and may limit a person's access to higher education – though regardless, all people should have access to an education at a level and pace that is suitable for them.
- Furthermore, many disabilities have no impact on a person's ability to learn, and education may be an important way of attaining knowledge and employment.

# Employment

- Employment is important for many disabled people, particularly given the high cost that comes with disability.
- More than half of disabled people aged between 15 and 64 are employed (53.4%), compared to 83.2% of those without a disability.
- Employment also allows people to have financial independence and a sense of purpose and achievement.
- Although some disabled people are unable to take part in the work force, many are capable and interested in working.

# Safety and Security

- Every person, disabled or otherwise, should feel safe and secure.
- People with disabilities are often more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, leading to a sense of abandonment or loneliness, affecting their emotional wellbeing.
- It is important that disabled people are made to feel safe and secure.

# Sense of Identity

- Sense of self is important to all people, with or without a disability.
- A sense of identity is particularly important for people with disabilities who are often noticed solely for their disability. It is important for a person's self esteem and wellbeing that they are confident, independent and have an idea of who they are.

# Access to services

- Types of services:
  - financial support
  - transport
  - accommodation and housing
  - health care
  - counselling
  - education
  - employment
  - legal aid

# Types of Services

- Financial Support

- Disabilities are often expensive and many people with disabilities are unable to work.
- However, there are services that provide financial support to people with disabilities.
  - The NDIS has recently been introduced in Australia to assist people with disabilities and their carers. *(However, it will only cover approx. 460,000 people – far less than the number of people with disabilities in Australia).*
  - Sickness Allowance is also available for individuals with short-term disabilities in order to cover some expenses while they are unable to work.
- The availability of financial support will have a positive impact upon the individual, giving them stability and independence.



# Types of Services

- Transport
  - Disabled parking spaces can be found in almost every car park, and they enable individuals, particularly those with wheelchairs, to park closer to their destination and to get in and out of their vehicle more easily.
  - Trains and buses have also been made accessible to people with disabilities, as they have special seating and entrance points.

# Types of Services

- Accommodation and Housing
  - Specialty furniture allows people with disabilities to be more independent within their own home and to complete more tasks for themselves, improving a person's self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.
  - There is also housing available for people with disabilities to cater for individual needs, such as SIL accommodation.

# Types of Services

- Health Care

- Disabilities vary significantly and require different forms of health care, including speech pathology, physical therapy and psychology. The severity of some disabilities can be mitigated through health care. For example, access to physical therapists can assist people with down syndrome with their fine motor skills and muscle movement.
- Adequate health care is essential to a person's physical wellbeing and improving certain skills through therapy can also be empowering for people with disabilities, giving them a greater sense of independence and achievement.

# Types of Services

- Counselling
  - Counselling is often an important service for people with disabilities.
  - For example, individuals with aggressive forms of autism, often benefit from counselling in order to learn how to control their disability and understand what is happening in their brain.
  - Counselling may also alleviate the stress and frustration that many people with disabilities experience.

# Types of Services

- Education

- Specialty education services are often available within mainstream schools to include people with disabilities. This allows people with disabilities to engage in education and to socialise with both the general public and other children in the same circumstances.
- There are also schools that specialise in disabilities and are able to cater to more severe disabilities that may impact upon a person's ability to attend a mainstream school.

# Types of Services

- Employment

- There are a number of employment services that arrange employment for people with disabilities.
- Employment is important to an individual's economic and social wellbeing.
- Some large corporations, such as McDonalds, put in place policies to support the employment of people with disabilities:
  - 'McDonald's is a long standing supporter of employment opportunities for people with disability. We aim to ensure that we address the needs of people with disability whether they are employees or customers. Our training programs aim to ensure that our people are 'disability confident' so we always provide a helpful and respectful service.'

# Types of Services

- Legal Aid

- Legal services are typically expensive and inaccessible; however, access to legal assistance is often necessary for people with disabilities due to their involvement with the law as:
  - Participants in crime,
  - Victims of crime,
  - Victims of discrimination.
- People with disabilities are typically more vulnerable when it comes to the law.
- Intellectual disabilities, in particular, are overrepresented in the criminal justice system.
- Furthermore, legal services are also necessary in cases of discrimination.
- Legal Aid is a service that provides free or heavily discounted legal assistance, and they have a particular focus on vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities.

# Factors affecting access to services

- Characteristics of individuals within the group:
  - age
  - gender
  - level of education
  - culture
  - type of disability
  - first language spoken
  - socioeconomic status
- Resources:
  - time
  - money
  - energy
  - knowledge
- Aspects of the service:
  - opening hours
  - confidentiality
  - location
  - staffing



# Characteristics of Individuals within the Group

- Age

- Disabilities affect people of all ages, though older people are statistically more likely to have a disability.
- A person's age will be relevant to how their disability affects them.
- Children with disabilities largely rely on their parents for support, whereas adults and young adults will tend to be more independent.
- Older people, though representing a larger portion of the disabled population, rarely have parental support and most often rely on carers. Furthermore, their age and the frailty that comes from growing older may exacerbate their disability.

# Characteristics of Individuals within the Group

- Gender

- Some disabilities are gender based or are more likely to affect a person of a certain gender (for example, color blindness and hemophilia are more likely to affect men) – this can mean that one gender suffers more as a result of the disease, or often that support is only available for the gender that typically suffers from the disease.
- Furthermore, gender discrimination that exists more generally in the community is exacerbated when combined with disability.

# Characteristics of Individuals within the Group

- Level of Education

- Often people with disabilities need a higher level of support when it comes to education to cater for their specific needs.
- Depending on the type of disability, this can require different things, such as tutoring, access to technology or accessible buildings.
- The greater a person's level of education, the more independence they have and the greater their chances in life.

# Characteristics of Individuals within the Group

- Culture

- Discrimination on the basis of culture can make it more difficult to access treatment and assistance.
- Furthermore, different cultures may perceive disabilities differently and may be more or less prepared to cater for disability.
- For people who already come from disadvantaged cultural backgrounds, disability can exacerbate the disadvantage they already face.

# Characteristics of Individuals within the Group

- Type of Disability
  - There are a huge number of disabilities of different severities and requiring different types of support.
  - Some disabilities are visible and others are invisible.
  - Some disabilities garner more awareness and support – the more widespread a disability is, the more accepted people with that disability are likely to be and the more resources that will be made available.

# Characteristics of Individuals within the Group

- First language spoken
  - Not being able to understand the language, or make yourself understood, may impact on a person's ability to be involved with the community or to ask for assistance when it is needed.
  - Linguistic difference can make life with a disability much more difficult.

# Characteristics of Individuals within the Group

- Socioeconomic status
  - A higher socioeconomic status would grant a person better access to disability services. Furthermore, people with a higher socioeconomic status would not be burdened by the greater cost of living with a disability, compared to people with a lower socioeconomic status.
  - People with a lower socioeconomic may have less access to resources and assistance, this may impact on their ability to treat their disability or to get effective assistance.

# Resources

- Time
  - Accomplishing day to day tasks often takes a longer amount of time for people with disabilities.
  - People providing services to people with disabilities will often have to be more patient than they would be otherwise.



# Resources

- Money
  - People with disabilities may need expensive equipment, so money can be a significant factor.
    - This may include hearing aids, wheelchairs etc.
  - While allowances are given to people with disabilities and their carers, the income may not be comparable to that of full-time employment.

# Resources

- Energy
  - The energy of a person with a disability may vary depending on their age and condition.
  - This may affect a person's decision to be involved with employment programs or educational courses.
  - If an individual has low energy, this would negatively impact their ability to work, to accomplish tasks and to engage with the community.

# Resources

- Knowledge
  - Some disabilities mean that individuals are unable to communicate. Sadly, some people mistake this lack of communication for a lack of knowledge. This is not always the case.
  - In fact, advancements in technology mean that people with disabilities have even more opportunities to acquire knowledge.
  - Furthermore, knowledge is essential for those who come into contact with people who have disabilities – knowledge of how to interact respectfully with disabled people is important to ensure that disabled people have positive interactions in the community.

# Aspects of the Service

- Opening Hours
  - A person's ability to access a service may be limited due to opening hours.
  - A person's work or education commitments may conflict with opening hours.
  - People with disabilities may find it easier to access services at particular times of the day.
  - Furthermore, they may wish to avoid busier times due to difficulties with crowds due to mobility issues or sensitivity to colours and noise.

# Aspects of the Service

- Confidentiality

- The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) states that people with disabilities have the right to access services without having to disclose unnecessary personal information and, if information is provided, they have the right to confidentiality.
- If this is not adhered to, individuals with disabilities may experience difficulty seeking work, attempting to access education or training, finding friends or utilising support networks.

# Aspects of the Service

- Location

- People in urban communities have better access to services than those in rural areas.
- This often means that people with disabilities who live in rural areas must travel, sometimes very long distances, to reach urban areas where services are available.
- Furthermore, rural areas may not have accessible features that are standard in urban areas, such as disabled parking spaces, ramps and public transport.

# Aspects of the Service

- Staffing
  - Staff members of services that assist people with disabilities need special training to ensure that they act with sensitivity and that they are capable of adapting to the diverse needs of clients.
  - Many services that cater to people with disabilities are poorly funded. As a result of this, many disability services rely heavily on volunteers and may lack trained or consistent staff, undermining their ability to help people with disabilities.
  - Lack of trained staff means that individuals may have to wait up to several hours to be cared for, which could be adverse for their health and wellbeing.