

Title of the Project : Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the S&T Sector– The Status and Prospects.

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Executive Summary :

The present study on employment of persons with various kinds of abilities is inspired by this fundamental concept : given proper tasks and enabling environment any person can prove their worth.

In India, the concern about differently abled persons is not widespread. Some headway has been made in establishing institutions to provide basic education. Research and development activities are still restricted to few national institutions. These institutions have own priorities, building up of an information base, is definitely not one among these. No wonder that only isolated attempt has been made to collect and collate information on employment and vocational rehabilitation in specific sectors. Studies on employment in the Railways by the National Institute of Mentally Handicapped and employment in large industries by the National Centre for the Promotion of Employment of the Disabled Persons are two examples of special efforts made in India.

Being more familiar with the sector, the investigators had chosen the academic, science and technology sector to collect, collate and analyze information on employment and employability of different abled persons including persons having orthopedic difficulties, hearing and speech problem, vision difficulties, mental impairments, spastic, or a combination of such problems.

The study was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, 2884 scientific and technical institutions were covered. The list included all research, development and academic institutions, in-house R&D units in industries, and scientific and industrial research organisations. Information on the identify of disabled employees by type of disability, age, sex, level of post held etc. was elicited in the Phase-I survey.

The Phase-II survey included only those institutions, which reported having one or more disabled employee(s) on their rolls. Information on the genesis of disability, educational attainments, inter-personal relationships at work place, problems encountered due to disability at the work place, aspirations and so on were collected from the individuals on a pre-coded questionnaire. In parallel, the institutions were requested to provide information on the facilities they have to enable persons with disabilities in the workplace, problems encountered by them in managing the disabled employees and so on.

Both the Phase-I & II surveys were conducted through mail. However, field visits were made in few cities where S&T institutions occur in clusters, for validation checks.

The Phase-I survey recorded a response rate of 49%. Out of the 2884 institutions contacted, 593 institutions had one or more disabled employees, 821 did not have any. The government institutions had 2760 disabled employees, out of the total 3801 enumerated in the survey. The average number of employees per government institutions is 7.0 compared to 5.4 in the private. However, only few states, score equal to or more than the average all-India figure.

Persons with orthopedic disabilities have the lion's share of jobs (76%), followed by the visually impaired 14%. It is strange that people with hearing and speech impairment account for only 10% of jobs held. To find an answer to this illogical situation it may be necessary to analyze the intake and output of hearing and speech impaired people at the University level. Possibly, their inability to fair well in the selection process especially in the interview would partly explain their low share.

The Phase-I survey results also reveal that only 9% of total disable employees are women. Only 10% of employees are below the age of 30 years.

It is heartening to note that as much as one third of the employees are at middle to senior positions, and another one third is engaged in skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Taking information on the age and job position together, it may be surmised that the disabled persons may take more time to prepare for a job, but they prepare well and joint at higher position and subsequently, also move up.

In Phase-II 169 institutional and 1314 individual questionnaires were received back till the cut-off date.

It is observed that disabled employees constitute only 1.68% of the total employment. The fact that 3% reservation is not followed is evident from the fact that as many as 49% of institutions even does not have a quota for the disabled. While the higher posts are filled through open competition, the lower ones are recruited through the employment exchange and recruitment against reserved posts.

Nearly three fourths of the institutions do not expect any reward or compensation for employing the disabled. As much as also 89% observe that the productivity of the disabled employees is equal to, or more than the normal employees, and 92% maintain that the disabled employees do not cause any problems in the work place. Yet the institutions do not employ disabled persons as many as they should. Further, only about a half of the institutions have simple facilities like a ramp and special toilet. The silver lining is that many (64%) institutions seem to be willing to recruit more disabled employees. How this "willingness" would eventually get translated to practice, is a moot point.

The results of the two surveys were presented in a workshop. Experts working on disabilities, disabled employees, and human resource development specialists, apart from statisticians, planners and policy-makers attended the event.

The exercise though short revealed important issues concerning employment and employability of persons with disabilities in S&T institutions. Employers have good experiences with disabled employees. They also say that they want to employ more disabled employees. What prevents them from doing so needs to be investigated, and the obstacles removed. The institutions directly and the architects and builders are to be sensitized to provide at least the bare minimum, facilities for the disabled.

The government should find out periodically the state of implementation of the 3% reservations system. Besides, the institutions may be urged to conduct on-the-job training programmes, psychological and social counseling services.

The fundamentals being right (employers being empathetic), possibilities of providing better employment opportunities to the disabled in terms of quality and quantity are apparently strong. A systematic approach to employment promotion supported with facts and figures is called for.