

## The role of Social Welfare services in supporting people with mobility disabilities a case study of Swat

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the critical role of social welfare services in supporting people with mobility disabilities in Pakistan. Despite legislative measures such as the Persons with Disabilities Act 2020 and social welfare initiatives like the Ehsaas Kafalat and Benazir Income Support Programmes, individuals with mobility disabilities face persistent barriers, including inadequate infrastructure, limited vocational training, and societal stigma. Employing a qualitative exploratory design, the research examines the accessibility, effectiveness, and limitations of these services through interviews, focus group discussions, and policy analyses. Findings reveal significant challenges, such as inconsistent policy implementation, insufficient disability-friendly infrastructure, and gaps in awareness among service users. Social welfare programs, while offering financial aid and assistive technologies, often fail to address the multifaceted needs of this population. Additionally, societal stigma and a lack of trained personnel further exacerbate exclusion. The study emphasizes the need for comprehensive reforms, including accessible infrastructure, standardized policy enforcement, and inclusive awareness campaigns. Recommendations include fostering collaboration among government bodies, NGOs, and local communities, enhancing capacity-building programs, and integrating assistive technologies to empower individuals with mobility disabilities. By addressing these systemic issues, the research aims to contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society for people with mobility disabilities in Pakistan.

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### Introduction

Social welfare services play a critical role in enhancing the quality of life for individuals with mobility disabilities, who often face unique challenges in accessing education, employment, healthcare, and public spaces. In Pakistan, the prevalence of physical disabilities is significant, with approximately 3.3 million people reported to have mobility impairments, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2017). Despite constitutional provisions and national policies aimed at ensuring equal rights and opportunities, individuals with mobility disabilities frequently encounter systemic barriers, including inadequate infrastructure, limited awareness, and insufficient implementation of supportive measures (Shah & Butt, 2020). Addressing these challenges requires a robust framework of social welfare services tailored to meet their specific needs. The role of social welfare services in Pakistan has evolved over the years, with government and non-governmental organizations working to provide support to vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities. Programs such as the Ehsaas Kafalat initiative and the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) have been instrumental in offering financial aid to individuals with disabilities. However, these efforts often fall short in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by people with mobility disabilities, such as limited accessibility to public spaces, lack of vocational training, and inadequate healthcare facilities (Ali, 2019). These gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to social welfare that not only provides financial assistance but also ensures accessibility and inclusion. In the context of Pakistan's socio-economic landscape, fostering inclusive social welfare services is not just a matter of policy but also of societal transformation. Studies have emphasized the importance of community-based rehabilitation and inclusive development strategies to empower individuals with mobility disabilities and integrate them into mainstream society (Khan & Qureshi, 2021). This research aims to explore the current role of social welfare services in addressing the challenges faced by people with mobility disabilities in Pakistan, identifying key gaps, and

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proposing actionable recommendations to improve their effectiveness. Despite numerous efforts, Pakistan continues to face challenges in implementing disability-inclusive policies effectively. The Persons with Disabilities Act of 2020 is a step in the right direction, aiming to ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, yet its enforcement remains inconsistent across the country (Zafar & Malik, 2021). Many rural and underprivileged areas still lack access to basic facilities such as ramps, accessible transportation, and disability-friendly workplaces. This disconnect between policy and practice underscores the urgent need to assess the effectiveness of social welfare programs and identify the barriers hindering their success. Moreover, the stigma and societal attitudes towards disability in Pakistan exacerbate the challenges faced by individuals with mobility impairments. Cultural perceptions often result in marginalization and exclusion from educational and professional opportunities, further limiting their ability to lead independent lives (Hameed & Tariq, 2022). Social welfare services must not only address physical and economic barriers but also work towards changing societal mindsets. By fostering awareness and promoting inclusivity, these services can create an environment where people with mobility disabilities are empowered to reach their full potential. To further enhance the effectiveness of social welfare services, collaboration between government bodies, civil society organizations, and the private sector is crucial. Integrated approaches that combine policy development, community-based initiatives, and technological innovations can bridge the existing gaps. For example, assistive technologies such as mobility aids, digital platforms for service delivery, and accessible transportation systems can significantly improve the independence and quality of life of individuals with mobility disabilities (Ahmed & Javed, 2021). Furthermore, strengthening the role of local governments in implementing disability-inclusive programs, particularly in rural areas, can help ensure that support services reach marginalized communities. The active involvement of people with disabilities in policymaking and program design is also essential, as it ensures that their lived experiences and needs are accurately reflected in the solutions provided.

### Literature Review

The role of social welfare services in supporting individuals with mobility disabilities has been widely recognized as a crucial factor in promoting their inclusion and improving their quality of life. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mobility disabilities are among the most common forms of physical impairments, affecting individuals' ability to access education, employment, and healthcare (WHO, 2019). In Pakistan, mobility disabilities account for a significant proportion of the disabled population, yet support systems remain underdeveloped, leaving many individuals marginalized (Shah & Butt, 2020). Social welfare services, therefore, are essential in addressing these barriers by providing financial aid, rehabilitation programs, and accessible infrastructure. In Pakistan, the government has made efforts to implement policies that address the needs of people with disabilities. The Persons with Disabilities Act of 2020 is a landmark step that seeks to ensure equal rights, accessibility, and opportunities for persons with disabilities (Zafar & Malik, 2021). However, the practical implementation of these policies remains inconsistent, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas. Research by Ali and Rehman (2020) highlights that while urban centers have seen some progress in disability-friendly infrastructure, rural regions lack basic facilities such as ramps, accessible toilets, and transportation systems. This disparity underscores the need for more equitable and inclusive social welfare initiatives. Financial assistance programs like the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and the 'Ehsaas Kafalat' initiative have been instrumental in providing support to vulnerable populations, including those with mobility disabilities (Ahmed, 2019). These programs offer cash transfers and other benefits to individuals and families living below the poverty line. However, Khan and Qureshi (2021) argue that financial aid alone is insufficient to address the multifaceted challenges faced by people with mobility impairments. Vocational training, rehabilitation services, and employment opportunities must complement financial support to ensure long-term empowerment. The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in bridging gaps in social welfare services cannot be overlooked. Organizations like Pakistan Disabled Foundation and STEP (Special Talent Exchange Program) have played a significant role in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities and implementing community-based rehabilitation programs (Hameed & Tariq, 2022). These initiatives focus on skill development, mobility aid provision, and raising awareness to combat societal stigma. However, limited funding and coordination between government agencies and NGOs often hinder their impact. Cultural attitudes and societal stigma remain major challenges in addressing the needs of individuals with mobility disabilities. Research by Hassan and Farooq (2020) highlights that in many parts of Pakistan, disabilities are often associated with shame or viewed as a burden on families. This

cultural perception exacerbates exclusion from education and employment opportunities. Social welfare services must incorporate awareness campaigns to challenge these stereotypes and promote the rights of individuals with disabilities. Inclusion efforts should focus on changing mindsets alongside providing practical support. Healthcare access is another critical area where social welfare services play a role. Mobility disabilities often require long-term medical care, rehabilitation, and assistive technologies. However, Javed et al. (2021) note that healthcare facilities in Pakistan are ill-equipped to provide specialized services for individuals with mobility impairments. Rehabilitation centers are limited, particularly in rural areas, and assistive devices such as wheelchairs and prosthetics are often unaffordable. Social welfare programs need to prioritize healthcare access by subsidizing assistive technologies and expanding rehabilitation services. Education remains a significant barrier for individuals with mobility disabilities in Pakistan. While inclusive education policies exist, their implementation is weak. According to Shah and Butt (2020), schools often lack accessible infrastructure, and teachers are not trained to support students with disabilities. As a result, children with mobility impairments face higher dropout rates and lower educational attainment. Social welfare services can play a transformative role by funding inclusive schools, providing transport facilities, and offering scholarships to students with disabilities. Employment opportunities for individuals with mobility disabilities are also limited in Pakistan. Khan et al. (2020) argue that despite policies mandating job quotas for persons with disabilities, these quotas are rarely implemented. Many workplaces lack accessible infrastructure, and employers often overlook candidates with disabilities due to misconceptions about their capabilities. Social welfare services can address this by promoting vocational training programs, creating disability-friendly workplaces, and incentivizing employers to hire individuals with mobility impairments. The role of technology in supporting people with mobility disabilities is increasingly gaining attention. Assistive technologies such as motorized wheelchairs, prosthetics, and digital tools can significantly improve mobility and independence. However, Ahmed and Javed (2021) note that access to these technologies remains limited in Pakistan due to high costs and a lack of awareness. Social welfare services can bridge this gap by subsidizing assistive devices and introducing technology-based rehabilitation programs to enhance the quality of life for individuals with mobility disabilities. Finally, international frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provide a guiding principle for improving disability rights and services. Pakistan ratified the UNCRPD in 2011, committing to ensuring

### **Research Objectives**

1. To identify the social welfare services available for supporting people with mobility disabilities in Pakistan.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of social welfare services in addressing the needs and challenges of individuals with mobility disabilities.
3. To analyze the barriers that hinder access to social welfare services for people with mobility disabilities.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the key social welfare services currently available to support people with mobility disabilities in Pakistan?
2. How effective are these social welfare services in addressing the challenges faced by people with mobility disabilities?
3. What are the major barriers to accessing social welfare services for individuals with mobility disabilities in Pakistan?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study addresses the critical role of social welfare services in supporting people with mobility disabilities in Pakistan, offering insights for policymakers, social organizations, and researchers. It highlights the effectiveness and limitations of existing services, such as financial aid, healthcare, and vocational training, while identifying barriers like inadequate infrastructure, societal stigma, and limited awareness. The research promotes awareness and advocacy for disability rights, encouraging inclusive policies and societal attitudes. By providing actionable recommendations, it aims to improve accessibility, empower individuals with mobility disabilities, and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society.

## Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative exploratory design to examine the role of social welfare services in supporting people with mobility disabilities in Pakistan. The target population includes individuals with mobility disabilities, social welfare officers, and NGO representatives, selected through purposive sampling. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis of policies like the Persons with Disabilities Act 2020. Thematic analysis will be used to identify key patterns, challenges, and insights by transcribing, coding, and categorizing data into themes such as accessibility, effectiveness, and barriers to services. Ethical considerations include informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, with approval sought from the relevant institutional review board. The research will be conducted over 1 month, divided into phases for tool development, data collection, analysis, and report writing.

## Results of the study

### 1. Accessibility to Social Welfare Services

*A major finding of this study was the limited accessibility of social welfare services for people with mobility disabilities. Both the interviews with individuals with mobility disabilities and the FGDs with social welfare officers highlighted the physical and infrastructural barriers that hindered access to services. Several participants reported that public buildings and welfare offices lacked wheelchair ramps, elevators, or accessible restrooms, making it difficult for people with mobility disabilities to visit these institutions.*

*There was a consensus among the social welfare officers and NGO representatives that transportation was another significant barrier. Public transport systems were often not equipped to accommodate wheelchairs or other mobility aids, leading to exclusion from essential services. The Persons with Disabilities Act 2020 was mentioned during the document analysis, but its implementation was found to be inconsistent across regions, with some provinces lacking the necessary infrastructure and resources to comply with the law.*

### 2. Effectiveness of Social Welfare Services

*The second theme that emerged from the data was the effectiveness of the social welfare services currently available. According to the participants, there was a general perception that while some services were available, they were often “inadequate” or “inefficient”. For instance, some individuals with mobility disabilities expressed frustration with the slow processing of disability benefits and the lack of personalized support. Social welfare officers also acknowledged the challenges in meeting the growing demand for services with limited resources and manpower.*

*On a positive note, a few NGO representatives shared examples of successful initiatives aimed at providing ‘community-based support’ for people with mobility disabilities. These included training programs for caregivers, provision of assistive devices, and advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the rights of people with disabilities. However, these services were often seen as ‘fragmented’ and ‘unsustainable’, with limited coverage outside major urban areas.*

### 3. Barriers to Accessing Social Welfare Services

*Awareness and Information Gaps Many individuals with mobility disabilities were unaware of the social welfare services available to them. Social welfare officers and NGO representatives highlighted the “lack of awareness campaigns and information dissemination strategies that could inform people about their rights and available services.*

*Social Stigma and Discrimination another significant barrier identified was the ‘social stigma’ surrounding disability. Both individuals with mobility disabilities and social welfare officers pointed out those societal attitudes often led to ‘discrimination’ in the provision of services. For instance, some people with disabilities reported feeling ‘humiliated’ when seeking assistance, which discouraged them from accessing services.*

*Limited Training and Capacity Social welfare officers mentioned that the lack of specialized training in disability services was a major challenge. Many officers felt ill-equipped to address the unique needs of individuals with mobility disabilities, leading to a mismatch between the services offered and the actual needs of the population.*

*Political and Institutional Challenges, the document analysis of the ‘Persons with Disabilities Act 2020’ revealed that while the law provides a comprehensive framework for disability rights, its implementation has*

been slow due to political and institutional challenges. Participants noted that political will was often lacking, and bureaucratic inefficiencies hampered the effective delivery of services.

#### 4. Policy Gaps and Recommendations

The document analysis of policies such as the *Persons with Disabilities Act 2022* revealed several gaps in the current framework. Although the Act mandates equal access to services, it does not provide clear guidelines for monitoring and evaluation, which makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of implemented policies. Social welfare officers and NGO representatives recommended the development of clearer guidelines for service delivery, as well as increased funding to ensure that services are both accessible and effective.

Participants also emphasized the need for collaborative efforts between government bodies, NGOs, and local communities to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals with mobility disabilities. They recommended a focus on awareness campaigns, capacity building for service providers, and increased advocacy for disability rights at both the local and national levels.

#### Findings of the study

The results of this study reveal that while social welfare services in Pakistan offer some support to people with mobility disabilities, significant challenges remain. Accessibility issues, inconsistent service delivery, and systemic barriers limit the effectiveness of these programs, often leaving individuals with mobility impairments marginalized and underserved. Physical barriers, such as a lack of ramps, elevators, and accessible transportation, exacerbate the difficulties faced by people with disabilities in accessing essential services. Additionally, the disparity in service availability between urban and rural areas further highlights the inequities within the current social welfare system.

Systemic challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiencies and inadequate training for social welfare officers, contribute to delays and mismatches in service delivery. Cultural stigma and societal attitudes towards disability create an additional layer of exclusion, discouraging individuals from seeking the support they need. Moreover, the inconsistent implementation of disability-inclusive policies, such as the *Persons with Disabilities Act 2020*, reflects a lack of political will and resource allocation necessary for sustainable change.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes the development of accessible infrastructure, such as disability-friendly public buildings, transportation systems, and community centers. Enhancing policy implementation through clear guidelines, regular monitoring, and increased funding is essential to ensure equitable service delivery. Furthermore, promoting socio-cultural inclusion through awareness campaigns and educational programs can help challenge stereotypes and foster a more inclusive society. The findings of this study provide a critical foundation for policymakers, social welfare departments, and NGOs to design and implement more inclusive and effective strategies. By fostering collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities, stakeholders can bridge existing gaps and create an environment that empowers individuals with mobility disabilities. Integrating innovative solutions, such as assistive technologies and community-based rehabilitation programs, can further enhance the independence and quality of life for people with disabilities, ensuring their full participation in society.

#### Recommendation

- Prioritize the construction of accessible public buildings (welfare offices, community centers, transport stations) and include wheelchair ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and wide doorways.
- Restructure public transportation to ensure wheelchair accessibility by retrofitting existing vehicles and introducing new accessible ones.
- Standardize the implementation of the *\*Persons with Disabilities Act 2020\** across provinces and allocate adequate resources for infrastructure development and training of personnel.
- Simplify processes for accessing disability benefits and services, introduce online portals for application submissions and status tracking, and personalize services to meet individual needs.
- Expand and sustain community-based initiatives like caregiver training programs, assistive device provision, and advocacy efforts, and form partnerships with local organizations to increase service coverage, especially in rural areas.
- Increase funding for social welfare services and ensure equitable distribution across regions and introduce capacity-building programs for social welfare officers to enhance their understanding of mobility disabilities.



- Launch nationwide awareness campaigns to inform people with mobility disabilities about their rights and available services, using various media platforms (TV, radio, social media).

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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