Original Article

AWARENESS ABOUT THE PERSONS WITH DISABILITY ACT AMONG LEPROSY PATIENTS AND OTHER DISABLED PERSONS

R. Robins¹, D. Martin², K. Durai Raj³, M.S. Raju⁴

To assess the level of awareness about the different provisions of the Persons with Disability Act (PWD Act) among leprosy patients and other disabled, 233 disabled persons from the self-help groups formed by Vadathorasalur Leprosy Control Unit have been interviewed using a structured interview checklist. The results show that 74.7% of the respondents were aware that identity cards are available for the disabled, 56.2% were aware of the free education benefit to the disabled, as low as 35.6% were aware of the scholarships, 33% knew about the employment reservations, 24.9% heard about the housing scheme of the government for the disabled, but 24.5% only knew about law against discrimination, 31.8% came in contact with institutions for the severely disabled and only 16% were aware of the unemployment allowance to the disabled.

The level of awareness is low among women with regard to all components of the Act. It was found that students studying up to secondary level were not aware of the availability of scholarships and free education, which needs to be seriously looked into, especially by educational institutions. The level of formal education played a significant role in increasing awareness about the Act among literates. The knowledge is low among persons of all occupations. The study showed that there is a great need for an educational intervention programme to publicize the provisions of the Act among the disabled and their families.

INTRODUCTION

Several legislations have been enacted in India to promote better health and welfare, especially with respect to weaker sections of the population. The ancient rules and regulations for personal health, dietetics and hygienic rituals at the time of birth and death were prescribed by Manu Samhita in the science of Ayurveda around 1400 BC (Rao, 1966). The Birth and Death

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Registration Act of 1873, the Vaccination Act of 1880 and the Drugs Act of 1940 were significant among those enacted during the British rule. The Mental Health Act (1987), the Employees' State Insurance Act (1948), the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992), etc. are examples of legislations adopted following country's independence. Concerning leprosy, some of the famous laws pertain to the Indian Lepers Act of 1898 (Chawla, 1988), which has subsequently been repealed as obnoxious. Many other legal provisions, particularly those relating to marriages, have ushered in a better life for those involved.

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) (PWD) Act was enacted in 1995 with considerable publicity to empower persons with disabilities, on one hand, and to eliminating discrimination of all kinds on the other. Leprosy-cured are listed as disabled, probably different from the others, due to the negative perceptions of the disease in the society (Mutatkar, 1979). Though it is nearly 10 years since the Act came into force, it is observed that many people are not aware of the Act and those who were aware of the Act do not approach the government to obtain the benefits. There has been hardly any study on the community's awareness about this legislation which also could play a major role. It is necessary that the disabled as well as the community be educated about the provisions of the Act to enable them seek benefits on their own.

Empowerment of marginalized people through self-help groups (SHG) is a new concept widely practised in the country. SHGs are self-governed, with decisions about production and marketing taken collectively. These groups represent a new culture in rural development, breaking away from traditional bureaucracy and top-down management (Rajagopal, 1999). It was felt that these groups are potentially a great source for education.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. assess the level of awareness about different provisions of the PWD Act among the members of self-help groups with leprosy-afflicted and other disabled persons, and

2. assess the role of demographic factors on the awareness of members of SHGs about the Act.
MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Area

Vadathorasalur (in Kallakurichi taluk of Villipuram district in Tamil Nadu) and its surrounding areas (old leprosy control area of the Leprosy Mission, Vadathorasalur) have a high number of disabled persons.

Tools for Data Collection

A structured interview schedule was used for data collection.

Selection of Respondents

A door-to-door survey was conducted by volunteers to identify the disabled people in the Vadathorasalur LCU area. 184,897 people were surveyed and 2,013 disabled persons were identified, of whom 667 joined the SHGs, forming 33 SHGs. Others did not join the SHGs due mainly to their inability to move and mix with others as a result of their disability. About 10% did not join the SHGs because of their financial well being.

As the SHGs consist of leprosy-cured and other disabled, the main activity of the SHGs is to strive for, and organize, small-scale savings, to promote financial upliftment of the disabled, while promoting healthy interaction between the leprosy-cured and other disabled. Only those with grade 2 disability among the leprosy-affected and those with more than 60% disability among other disabled persons were considered for the study.

Socio-demographic Profile of the Sample

233 persons (60 women and 173 men) were interviewed taking proportionate representation from all the 33 SHGs. The sample consisted of 5 types of disabilities, viz., hearing impaired (13), leprosy cured (40), mentally ill (5), orthopaedically handicapped (151) and visually impaired (24) (see Table 1). Based on their educational status, the respondents could be categorized into 3 main groups: illiterates (68), those studied up to 5th class (64), and those studied up to 9th class (75). Those studied up to 12th class or graduation level were very few (see Table 4). Age-wise, they ranged from 13 years to 65 years, but those between 14 and 35 years constituted 48%, and 30% were in the 36-50 year age-group. There were few above 50 years and below 13 years (see Table 3). About 49% were agricultural labour (coolies), 19% were self-employed, 17% were unemployed, 13% were students and only 2% were in service (Table 5).
Table 1. Disability features among the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hearing impaired</td>
<td>3 (23.1)</td>
<td>10 (76.9)</td>
<td>13 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leprosy-cured person</td>
<td>9 (22.5)</td>
<td>31 (77.5)</td>
<td>40 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentally ill*</td>
<td>1 (20.0)</td>
<td>4 (80.0)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopaedically handicapped</td>
<td>43 (28.5)</td>
<td>108 (71.5)</td>
<td>151 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visually impaired</td>
<td>4 (16.7)</td>
<td>20 (63.3)</td>
<td>24 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60 (25.8)</td>
<td>173 (74.2)</td>
<td>233 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In case of mentally ill, awareness of family members has been assessed

RESULTS

The number of the respondents who were aware of the different components of the Act has been cross-tabulated with four socio-demographic characteristics of the sample, i.e. sex, age, level of education and occupation.

Knowledge about different components of PWD Act and Sex

Sex is seen to have a significant influence on awareness of the sample with reference to eight components of the Act; the details of the findings are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Level of awareness about different components of the PWD Act, by sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of the PWD Act</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sigstat. (P)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity card for the disabled</td>
<td>132 (76.3)</td>
<td>42 (70.0)</td>
<td>174 (74.7)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free education</td>
<td>104 (60.1)</td>
<td>27 (45.0)</td>
<td>131 (56.2)</td>
<td>0.042*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship facilities for the disabled</td>
<td>118 (68.2)</td>
<td>32 (53.3)</td>
<td>150 (64.4)</td>
<td>0.038*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment reservation</td>
<td>66 (38.1)</td>
<td>11 (18.3)</td>
<td>77 (33.0)</td>
<td>0.005**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing scheme of the government</td>
<td>51 (29.5)</td>
<td>7 (11.7)</td>
<td>58 (24.9)</td>
<td>0.006**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law against discrimination of the disabled</td>
<td>50 (28.9)</td>
<td>7 (11.7)</td>
<td>57 (24.5)</td>
<td>0.007**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of institutions for the severely disabled</td>
<td>62 (35.8)</td>
<td>12 (20.0)</td>
<td>74 (31.8)</td>
<td>0.023*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment allowance</td>
<td>35 (20.2)</td>
<td>3 (5.0)</td>
<td>38 (16.3)</td>
<td>0.006**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P < 0.05    ** P < 0.01

1. Identity card for the disabled. In order to ascertain the level of awareness among the respondents, they were asked about the availability of the identity cards for the disabled from the government. The responses showed that 174 (74.7%) of them were aware about the identity cards;
the proportion of males is 132 (76.3%) as against 42 (70%) females. However, the difference in the levels of awareness between males and females is not statistically significant.

2. **Free education.** With regard to awareness about getting free education through government, 131 (56.2%) were aware of the facility on the aggregate, and the same is more among males with 104 (60.1%) and less among females 27 (45%). The difference between males and females is statistically significant (p<0.05).

3. **Scholarship facilities for the disabled.** While 150 (64.4%) of the total sample were aware of the scholarship facilities for the disabled, the variation between males and females is statistically significant (P<0.05) with 118 (68.2%) among males against 32 (53.3%) among females.

4. **Employment reservation.** On the aggregate, 77 (33%) were aware of employment reservation for the disabled, while the same is true only in 11 (18.3%) among females against 66 (38.1%) among males. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01), explaining the vast gap between males and females.

5. **Housing scheme of the government.** Regarding awareness about the housing scheme for the disabled, on the whole only 58 (24.9%) of the sample were aware of this facility, with only 7 (11.7%) females and 51 (29.5%) males. And the variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

6. **Law against discrimination of the disabled.** Only 7 (11.7%) females and 50 (28.9%) males (about 24.5% on the aggregate) were aware of the law against discrimination of the disabled. While the general awareness about the law is low, the variation between males and females is statistically significant explaining the further ignorance of females about this vital component of the Act.

7. **Availability of institutions for the severely disabled.** Only 12 (20%) females and 62 (35.8%) males were aware of the availability of institutions meant for the severely disabled and the variation between males and females is statistically significant (P<0.05).

8. **Unemployment allowance.** Only 3 (5%) females and 35 (20.2%) males were aware of unemployment allowance and the variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).
Knowledge about different components of the PWD Act and Age

The respondents have been divided into four groups, i.e. less than 13 years, 14-35 years, 36-50 years, more than 50 years of age, and the awareness levels with reference to different components of the Act have been cross-tabulated against these age-groups. Age has a significant influence on awareness of the sample with reference to eight components of the Act. Details of the findings are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Level of awareness about different components of the PWD Act, by age-groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of the PWD Act 1995</th>
<th>&lt;13 Years</th>
<th>14-35 Years</th>
<th>36-50 Years</th>
<th>&gt;50 Years</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity card for the disabled</td>
<td>N=22 (%)</td>
<td>N=111 (%)</td>
<td>N=70 (%)</td>
<td>N=30 (%)</td>
<td>N=233</td>
<td>stat. (P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free education</td>
<td>13 (59.1)</td>
<td>91 (82.0)</td>
<td>49 (70)</td>
<td>21 (70)</td>
<td>174 (74.7)</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship facilities for the disabled</td>
<td>10 (43.5)</td>
<td>78 (70.3)</td>
<td>43 (61.4)</td>
<td>19 (63.3)</td>
<td>131 (56.2)</td>
<td>0.042*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment reservation</td>
<td>1 (4.5)</td>
<td>49 (44.1)</td>
<td>22 (31.4)</td>
<td>5 (16.7)</td>
<td>77 (33)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing scheme of the government</td>
<td>1 (4.5)</td>
<td>31 (27.1)</td>
<td>23 (32.9)</td>
<td>3 (10)</td>
<td>58 (24.9)</td>
<td>0.010*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law against discrimination of the disabled</td>
<td>1 (4.5)</td>
<td>32 (28.8)</td>
<td>20 (28.6)</td>
<td>4 (13.3)</td>
<td>57 (24.5)</td>
<td>0.036*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of institutions for the severely disabled</td>
<td>6 (27.3)</td>
<td>37 (33.3)</td>
<td>25 (35.7)</td>
<td>6 (20)</td>
<td>74 (31.8)</td>
<td>0.432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment allowance</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>28 (25.2)</td>
<td>7 (12.9)</td>
<td>1 (3.3)</td>
<td>38 (16.3)</td>
<td>0.002**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P < 0.05    ** P < 0.01

1. **Identity card for the disabled.** 13 (59.1%), 91 (82.0%), 49 (70%), 21 (70%), were aware of the identity card for the disabled in <13 years, 14-35 years, 36-50 years, >50 years age-groups respectively. However, the variation is not statistically significant.

2. **Free education.** About free education, 7 (31.8%), 69 (62.2%), 36 (51.4%), 19 (63.3%) were aware in <13 years, 14-35 years, 36-50 years, >50 years age-groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P < 0.05).

3. **Scholarship facilities for the disabled.** 10 (45.5%), 78 (70.3%), 43 (61.4%), 19 (63.3%) were aware of the scholarship facilities for the disabled in
<13 years, 14-35 years, 36-50 years, >50 years age-groups respectively. The variation is statistically not significant.

4. **Employment reservation**: 1 (4.5%), 49 (44.1%), 22 (31.4%), 5 (16.7%) were aware of employment reservation, in <13 years, 14-35 years, 36-50 years, >50 years age-groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P < 0.05; P < 0.01).

5. **Housing scheme of the government**. 1 (4.5%), 31 (27.1%), 23 (32.9%), 3 (10%) were aware of the government housing scheme in <13 years, 14-35 years, 36-50 years, >50 years age-groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P < 0.01).

6. **Law against discrimination of the disabled**. About the law against discrimination of the disabled, 1 (4.5%), 32 (28.8%), 20 (28.6%), 4 (13.3%) were aware in <13 years, 14-35 years, 36-50 years, >50 years age-groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P < 0.05).

7. **Availability of institutions for the severely disabled**. About availability of institutions for the severely disabled, 6 (27.3%), 37 (33.3%), 25 (35.7%), 6 (20%) were aware in <13 years, 14-35 years, 36-50 years, >50 years age-groups respectively. The variation is statistically not significant.

8. **Unemployment allowance**. 0, 28 (25.2%), 7 (12.9%), 1 (3.3%) were aware of unemployment allowance in <13 years, 14-35 years, 36-50 years, >50 years age-groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P < 0.01).

**Knowledge About PWD Act and Level of Education**

The respondents have been categorized into 5 groups based on their levels of education, i.e. Illiterates, 1-5 class, 6-9 class, 10-12 & ITI and graduates. Awareness levels with reference to different components of the Act have been cross-tabulated against the above groups. The level of education has a significant influence on awareness of the sample with reference to all the eight components of the legislation under study. The details of the findings are in Table 4.
Table 4. Level of awareness about different components of the PWD Act, by level of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of the Act</th>
<th>Illiterate (N=68)</th>
<th>1-5 (N=64)</th>
<th>6-9 (N=75)</th>
<th>10-12 &amp; ITI (N=21)</th>
<th>Graduates (N=5)</th>
<th>Total (N=233)</th>
<th>Sig stat. (P)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity card for the disabled</td>
<td>39 (57.4)</td>
<td>42 (65.6)</td>
<td>68 (90.7)</td>
<td>20 (95.2)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
<td>174 (74.7)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free education</td>
<td>24 (35.2)</td>
<td>25 (39.1)</td>
<td>58 (77.3)</td>
<td>19 (90.5)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
<td>13 (56.2)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship facilities for the disabled</td>
<td>28 (41.2)</td>
<td>30 (46.9)</td>
<td>66 (88%)</td>
<td>21 (100)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
<td>150 (64.4)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment reservation</td>
<td>6 (8.8)</td>
<td>14 (21.9)</td>
<td>36 (48)</td>
<td>16 (76.2)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
<td>77 (33.0)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing scheme of the government</td>
<td>8 (11.8)</td>
<td>9 (14.1)</td>
<td>29 (38.7)</td>
<td>10 (47.6)</td>
<td>2 (40)</td>
<td>58 (24.9)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law against discrimination of the disabled</td>
<td>10 (14.7)</td>
<td>4 (6.3)</td>
<td>28 (37.3)</td>
<td>11 (52.3)</td>
<td>4 (80)</td>
<td>57 (24.5)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of institutions for the severely disabled</td>
<td>15 (22.1)</td>
<td>12 (18.8)</td>
<td>27 (36)</td>
<td>15 (71.4)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
<td>74 (31.8)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment allowance</td>
<td>3 (4.4)</td>
<td>1 (1.6)</td>
<td>17 (22.7)</td>
<td>14 (66.7)</td>
<td>3 (60)</td>
<td>38 (16.3)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P < 0.05  ** P < 0.01

1. **Identity card for the disabled.** About the identity card for the disabled, 39 (57.4%), 42 (65.6%), 68 (90.7%), 20 (95.2%), 5 (100%) were aware in Illiterate, 1-5 class, 6-9 class, 10-12 & ITI, and graduates categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

2. **Free education.** 24 (35.2%), 25 (39.1%), 58 (77.3%), 19 (90.5%), 5 (100%) were aware of free education in Illiterate, 1-5 class, 6-9 class, 10-12 & ITI and graduates groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P< 0.01).

3. **Scholarship facilities for the disabled.** About scholarship facilities for the disabled, 28 (41.2%), 30 (46.9%), 66 (88%), 21 (100%), 5 (100%) were aware in Illiterates, 1-5 class, 6-9 class, 10-12 & ITI and graduates groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

4. **Employment reservation.** About employment reservation, 6 (8.8%), 14 (21.9%), 36 (48%), 16 (76.2%), 5 (100%) were aware in Illiterate, 1-5 class, 6-9 class, 10-12 & ITI and graduates groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P< 0.01).

5. **Housing scheme of the government.** About the housing scheme of the government, 8 (11.8%), 9 (14.1%), 29 (38.7%), 10 (47.6%), 2 (40%) were aware in Illiterate, 1-5 class, 6-9 class, 10-12 & ITI and graduates categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P< 0.01).
6. **Law against discrimination of the disabled.** 10 (14.7%), 4 (6.3%), 28 (37.3%), 11 (52.3%), 4 (80%) were aware about the law against discrimination of the disabled in Illiterate, 1-5 class, 6-9 class, 10-12 & ITI and graduates groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P < 0.01).

7. **Availability of institutions for the severely disabled.** About availability of institutions for the severely disabled, 15 (22.1%), 12 (18.8%), 27 (36%), 15 (71.4%), 5 (100%) were aware in Illiterate, 1-5 class, 6-9 class, 10-12 & ITI and graduates categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P < 0.01).

8. **Unemployment allowance.** 3 (4.4%), 1 (1.6%), 17 (22.7%), 14 (66.7%), 3 (60%) were aware about unemployment allowance in Illiterate, 1-5 class, 6-9 class, 10-12 & ITI and graduates groups respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P < 0.01).

**Knowledge about PWD Act and Occupation.** The respondents have been categorized into 5 groups based on their occupations, i.e., cool, self-employed, service, students, and unemployed, and the awareness levels with reference to different components of the Act have been cross-tabulated against the above groups. Occupation has shown a significant influence on awareness of the sample with reference to the eight components of the Act under study. The details of the findings are in Table 5.

**Table 5. Level of awareness about different components of the PWD Act, by occupation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of PWD Act 1995</th>
<th>Cool</th>
<th>Self-employed</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sigstat (P)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=115</td>
<td></td>
<td>N=44</td>
<td>N=5</td>
<td>N=29</td>
<td>N=40</td>
<td>N=233</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity card for the disabled</td>
<td>81 (70.4)</td>
<td>40 (90.9)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
<td>23 (79.3)</td>
<td>25 (62.5)</td>
<td>174 (74.7)</td>
<td>0.015*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free education</td>
<td>58 (50.4)</td>
<td>35 (79.5)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
<td>17 (58.6)</td>
<td>16 (40)</td>
<td>131 (58.2)</td>
<td>0.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship facilities for the disabled</td>
<td>72 (62.6)</td>
<td>36 (81.8)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
<td>21 (72.4)</td>
<td>16 (40)</td>
<td>150 (64.4)</td>
<td>0.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment reservation</td>
<td>32 (27.8)</td>
<td>24 (54.5)</td>
<td>4 (80)</td>
<td>6 (20.7)</td>
<td>11 (27.5)</td>
<td>77 (33)</td>
<td>0.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing scheme of the government</td>
<td>25 (21.7)</td>
<td>19 (43.2)</td>
<td>5 (100)</td>
<td>3 (10.3)</td>
<td>6 (15)</td>
<td>58 (24.9)</td>
<td>0.000**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law against discrimination of the disabled</td>
<td>24 (20.9)</td>
<td>15 (34.1)</td>
<td>3 (60)</td>
<td>7 (24.1)</td>
<td>8 (20)</td>
<td>57 (24.5)</td>
<td>0.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of institutions for the severely disabled</td>
<td>29 (25.2)</td>
<td>16 (38.4)</td>
<td>4 (80)</td>
<td>13 (44.8)</td>
<td>12 (30)</td>
<td>74 (31.8)</td>
<td>0.034*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment allowance</td>
<td>12 (10.4)</td>
<td>13 (29.5)</td>
<td>3 (60)</td>
<td>5 (17.2)</td>
<td>5 (12.5)</td>
<td>36 (16.3)</td>
<td>0.003**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P < 0.05  ** P < 0.01
1. **Identity card for the disabled.** About the identity card for disabled, 81 (70.4%), 40 (90.9%), 5 (100%), 23 (79.3%), 25 (62.5%) were aware of it in cooli, self-employed, service, student, and unemployed categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

2. **Free education.** 58 (50.4%), 35 (79.5%), 5 (100%), 17 (58.6%), 16 (40%) were aware of free education in cooli, self-employed, service, student, and unemployed categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

3. **Scholarship facilities for the disabled.** About scholarship facilities for the disabled, 72 (62.6%), 36 (81.8%), 5 (100%), 21 (72.4%), 16 (40%) were aware of it in cooli, self-employed, service, student, and unemployed categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

4. **Employment reservation.** Of employment reservation, 32 (27.8%), 24 (54.5%), 4 (80%), 6 (20.7%), 11 (27.5%) were aware in cooli, self-employed, service, student, and unemployed categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

5. **Housing scheme of the government.** About the housing scheme of the government, 25 (21.7%), 19 (43.2%), 5 (100%), 3 (10.3%), 6 (15%) were aware of it in cooli, self-employed, service, student, and unemployed categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

6. **Law against discrimination of the disabled.** About the law against discrimination of the disabled, 24 (20.9%), 15 (34.1%), 3 (60%), 7 (24.1%), 8 (20%) were aware of it in cooli, self-employed, service, student, and unemployed categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

7. **Availability of institutions for the severely disabled.** About availability of institutions for the severely disabled, 29 (25.2%), 16 (36.4%), 4 (80%), 13 (44.8%), 12 (30%) were aware of it in cooli, self-employed, service, student, and unemployed categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P<0.01).

8. **Unemployment allowance.** Of unemployment allowance, 12 (10.4%), 13 (29.5%), 3 (60%), 5 (17.2%), 5 (12.5%) were aware in cooli, self-employed, service, student, and unemployed categories respectively. The variation is statistically significant (P < 0.01).
DISCUSSION

Legislation pertaining to health had been in existence in India since pre-independence period. Many laws have been brought into force from time to time with regard to different ill/health conditions, viz., hearing impaired, leprosy-cured persons, mentally ill, orthopaedically handicapped and visually impaired, etc. Few old examples of health legislation with reference to leprosy patients are: the Indian Lepers Act 1898, the Indian Railways Act 1890, the Indian Motor Vehicles Act 1979, the Hindu Marriage Act 1956, the Muslim Marriage Act 1939, the Indian Christian Marriage Act 1872, etc. (Chawla, 1988) which provided legal ground for restricting leprosy patients’ movement and participation in the society, as such probably changing the society’s thinking.

Mere enactment of laws cannot usher any change unless the public are simultaneously educated about their provisions and given sufficient motivation. The enactment of the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1992 (also referred to as IMS act) did not show encouraging results and even after 10 years most of our colleagues are unaware of the provisions and importance of this legislation (Tiwari, 1992). Despite the existence of laws in India that prohibit child labour (children under the age of 14 years), 70 to 115 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are estimated to be part of India’s labour force. Child labour in the agriculture sector alone accounts for 80% of child labour in India and 70% of working children globally (Mathews, 2003). Experience from several public health laws or vital events registration legislation shows that, even after a century or more, their impact is still poor.

The enactment of the PWD Act is no exception as seen from the results of this study. For proper dissemination of the law, there are a number of legal provisions for education, employment and vocational training, job reservation, research and human resource development, creation of barrier-free environment, rehabilitation of persons with disability, unemployment allowance for the disabled, special insurance scheme for disabled employees and establishment of homes for persons with severe locomotor disability, speech and hearing impairment, visual impairment, low vision, mental retardation, cerebral palsy and leprosy-cured disabled persons (Government of India, 1992), but it appears that more is needed to be done in order to increase awareness. While knowledge per se may not lead to change in attitude or behaviour (Raju, 1995), it does constitute the necessary first step.
The present study focussed on the awareness on the part of members of self-help groups of the provisions of the PWD Act, on the assumption that this group was likely to be better motivated to enjoy the provisions of the legislation, but the findings are disappointing. Self-help groups have shown themselves to be quite effective as agents of change in the community (Kameshwari, 1998), and since they are primarily formed to enhance socioeconomic benefits, the understanding of the PWD Act will certainly promote their interests. The experience of similar groups such as trade unions or other associations shows the value of such educational processes (Srivastava, 2001). The need for motivating the self-help groups in learning more of this important legislation is obvious.

Those better educated are generally more knowledgeable and avail the benefits of any legislation or welfare programmes faster. The present study, however, shows disappointing findings even among those who studied up to high school level. Even among graduates, about 40% of them do not know about the unemployment allowance (Table 4). This emphasizes the general need for intensive education about the Act of all sections of the population, especially among the poorer sections, and in the interior villages.

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