



## **Types of Disability and Employment Among Differently Abled Persons in Kerala: An Analysis Based on the 2015 Disability Census**

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The present study comprehensively examines employability based on the types of disabilities among differently abled persons in the state of Kerala, India. Based on data from the Kerala Disability Census conducted in 2015, the study provides a basis for analysing employment disparities within the disabled population. The study classifies employment status into three groups: permanent, temporary, and unemployed. These categories are analysed across six main types of disability: locomotor disability, hearing disability, visual disability (including blindness and low vision), intellectual disability, mental illness, and multiple disabilities. The results highlight significant heterogeneity in employment patterns depending on the nature of the disability. People with locomotor and hearing impairments show relatively higher employment rates, indicating greater integration into the labour market. In contrast, people with intellectual and multiple disabilities show comparatively low levels of employment, which points to their exclusion from the economic sector. These findings highlight the urgent need for policy action tailored to the specific challenges faced by different disability groups. The study calls for targeted vocational training programs, inclusive employment frameworks, and a redesign of workplace infrastructure to accommodate various physical and cognitive needs. Furthermore, it identifies the importance of a disability-sensitive workforce ecosystem that promotes equity and recognises the untapped potential of persons with disabilities, enabling them to become contributors to the socio-economic development of Kerala. By focusing on employability by type of disability, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, rehabilitation professionals, and social planners seeking to build a more inclusive and functional labour market. It also lays the foundation for future interventions aimed at promoting the economic empowerment and dignity of all people, regardless of their physical or cognitive conditions.

### **Key Words**

PwDs, differently abled, disabled, employability, multiple disability

### **Introduction**

Employment is not only a source of income but also a vital determinant of social identity, independence, and quality of life. It plays a significant role in enabling individuals to participate effectively in society, contribute to the economy, and achieve personal dignity and self-reliance. However, for people with disabilities, the journey towards employment is surrounded by significant barriers. These include social stigma, discrimination in employment



practices, physical inaccessibility of workplaces, and limited access to quality education and vocational training. Kerala, a state often known for its advanced social development—such as high literacy rates, improved access to healthcare, and gender equality—has shown a commendable interest in addressing disability-related issues. In 2015, the state undertook a disability census under the Social Security Mission. Kerala is the only state in India, which took an initiative to understand the proportion of this marginalised sector (Kerala Social Security Mission, 2015). Understanding the inequalities in the employment sector not only helps to identify existing inequalities but also to guide targeted interventions in rehabilitation, skills development, and comprehensive policy design.

### **Review of Literature**

According to the World Health Organization (2011), disabled people are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as compared to non-disabled individuals. This gap persists even in developed countries with strong non-discrimination laws and social awareness. In a developing country like India, these challenges are more pronounced due to inadequacies in education, health care, and social attitudes. Ghai (2002) provides a critical analysis of the Indian scenario, highlighting how socio-cultural stigma, as well as infrastructural limitations such as inaccessible public transportation and workplaces, significantly limit the employment opportunities available to people with disabilities. Empirical data from the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO, 2012) highlights interstate variations in the employment of people with disabilities and points out that the type of disability is an important factor influencing employability. Rajan and Kumar (2013) pointed out that employment rates for people with disabilities in Kerala are low, citing inadequate job training programs, limited employer awareness, and a lack of employment support services as contributing factors. Their findings suggest that disability-inclusive development in Kerala has not extended to the labour market for people with severe cognitive or physical disabilities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Various government initiatives and employment programs were implemented to improve the employability of the differently abled population in the state. In spite of these programs, a significant employment gap exists among differently abled persons with different types of disabilities. This disparity highlights that the type of disability may, in itself, constitute an obstacle to obtaining meaningful employment. The fundamental issue this study seeks to address is the extent to which the type of disability affects employability, and whether certain types of disabilities are adversely affected in the labour market. By exploring this relationship, the study aims to shed light on the invisible hierarchies that exist within the disabled



population. By focusing on disability-type-specific employability, the study aims to provide insights that will contribute to the design of effective, evidence-based strategies to increase workforce inclusion and reduce disparities among persons with disabilities in Kerala.

### Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and quantitative research design, relying entirely on secondary data obtained from the Kerala Disability Census 2015.

### Population

793,937 persons with disabilities (PwDs) across 14 districts of Kerala (Kerala Social Security Mission, 2015).

### Disability Categories

Locomotor, Hearing Impaired, Visual (Blind/Low Vision), Intellectual Disability, Mental Illness, and Multiple Disabilities.

### Employment Categories

Permanent Employment, Temporary Employment, and Unemployment.

### Analytical Tools

Descriptive statistics, percentage analysis, cross-tabulation, and graphical representation using bar charts.

### Objectives of the Study

- To analyse employment distribution across disability types.
- To identify the disability groups with higher employment levels and those with lower participation in the workforce.

### Analysis of Data

Objective 1: To analyse employment distribution across disability types

Objective 2: To identify disability categories with highest and lowest workforce participation

**Table 1: Employment Status by Disability Type**

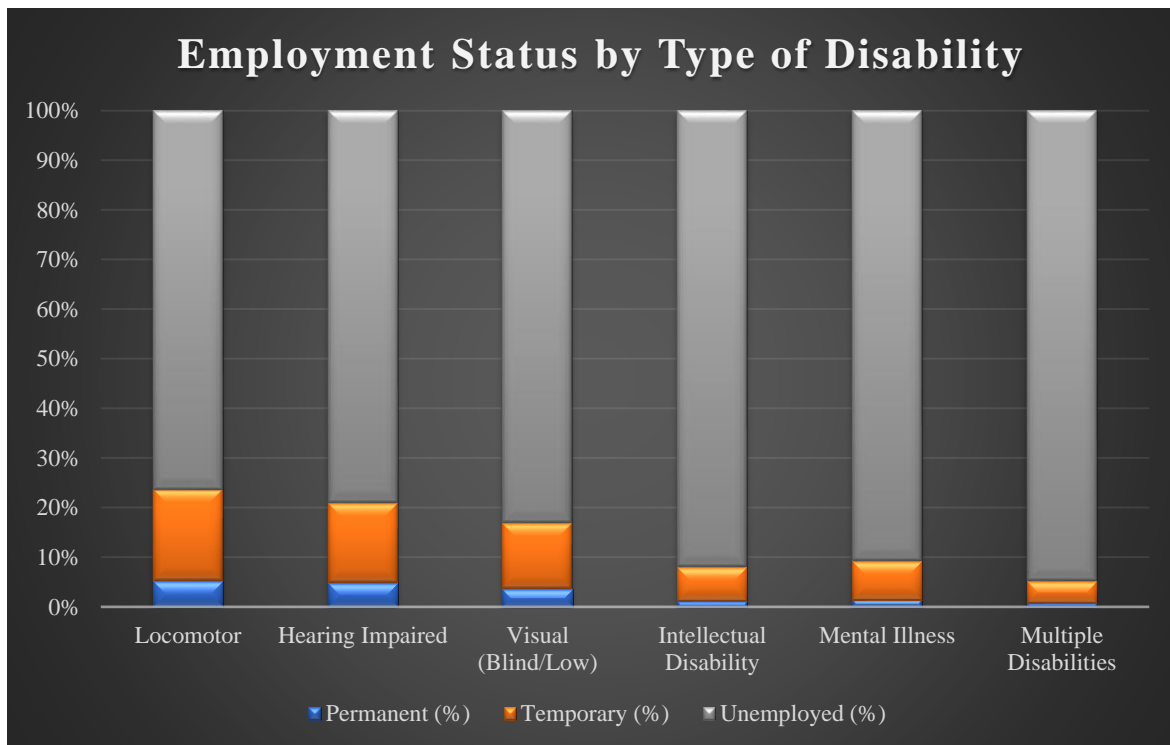
| Disability Type         | Permanent (%) | Temporary (%) | Workforce Participation (%) | Unemployed (%) |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Locomotor               | 5.2           | 18.4          | 23.6                        | 76.4           |
| Hearing Impaired        | 4.8           | 16.1          | 20.9                        | 79.1           |
| Visual (Blind/Low)      | 3.6           | 13.3          | 16.9                        | 83.1           |
| Intellectual Disability | 1.2           | 6.7           | 7.9                         | 92.1           |
| Mental Illness          | 1.5           | 7.8           | 9.3                         | 90.7           |
| Multiple Disabilities   | 0.9           | 4.3           | 5.2                         | 94.8           |

Source: Disability Census 2015 Page No.156

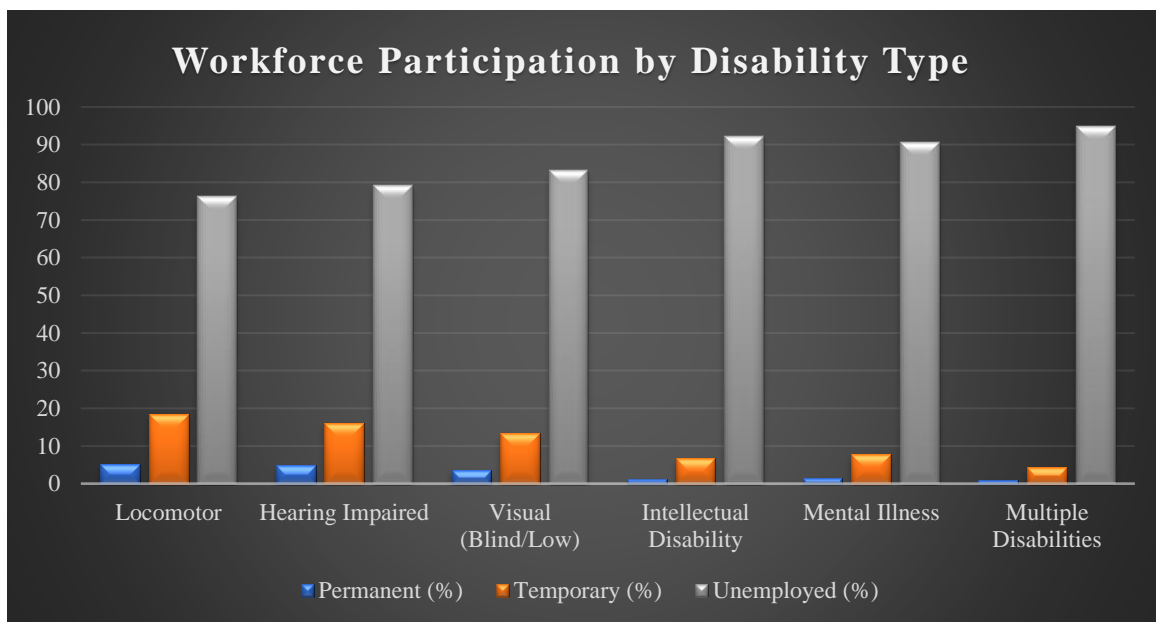
Compiled by the Researcher



**Figure 1: Employment Status by Disability Type**



**Figure 2: Workforce Participation by Disability Type**



The data show clear differences in employment across disability types. People with locomotor disabilities have the highest employment rate at 23.6%, with 5.2% in permanent and 18.4% in temporary jobs. Hearing-impaired individuals also have better outcomes, with 20.9% employed. In contrast, those with intellectual (7.9%) and multiple disabilities (5.2%) show the



lowest workforce participation, reflecting severe exclusion from the labour market. People with visual disabilities (16.9%) and mental illness (9.3%) also face low employment levels.

### **Implications of the Study**

The analysis of employment patterns across different disability types reveals critical disparities in workforce participation. Quantitative data from Table 1 show that persons with locomotor disabilities (23.6%) and hearing impairments (20.9%) demonstrate significantly higher participation in employment both permanent and temporary as compared to individuals with intellectual disabilities (7.9%), mental illness (9.3%), and multiple disabilities (5.2%). These findings point to an unequal treatment in the labour market based on the type of disability where physical disabilities are more accepted, but cognitive and multiple disabilities are often left out.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study aligns with Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (Sen, 1999), which emphasises that real freedom to achieve well-being varies from person to person based on available capabilities and opportunities. The data shows how different disability types enable or constrain an individual's ability to convert available resources into gainful employment, pointing to the existence of inequalities based on the type of disability.

The findings also support the Social Model of Disability, which states that disability is not merely a result of individual impairment but is largely produced by societal and environmental barriers. The high unemployment rates among those with intellectual and multiple disabilities highlight that exclusion is more structural which is affected by a lack of inclusive systems, employer acceptance, and rehabilitative infrastructure.

### **Practical Implications**

To bridge these employment gaps, the following practical strategies are recommended:

- Disability-specific employment zones can be established in collaboration with educational and training institutions, aimed at providing training facilities that match the abilities of particular disability groups.
- District Employment Exchanges should be strengthened by integrating rehabilitation professionals, including occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and job coaches trained in disability management.
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) units should develop job-oriented programs, and mentorship initiatives to empower persons with disabilities to access and retain employment.

### **The Role of Healthcare in Employment Inclusion**



The ability of a disabled person to participate in economic activities is frequently dependent on timely interventions such as physiotherapy, assistive technologies, psychological counselling, and regular medical follow-up. For individuals with mental illness or multiple disabilities, comprehensive healthcare and rehabilitation are essential not only for functional independence but also for sustained employability. Without a strong public health system tailored to the needs of PwDs, employment inclusion is not possible. Thus, integrating healthcare with vocational rehabilitation is necessary to ensure that individuals with disabilities are physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared to undertake and retain employment.

### **Conclusion**

This study brings to light a clear and concerning disparity in employment outcomes among persons with different types of disabilities in Kerala. While individuals with physical impairments such as locomotor or hearing disabilities have found inclusion in the labour force, those with cognitive and multiple disabilities have limited workforce participation.

The findings suggest that policymakers, employers, educators, healthcare providers, and society must design multi-level strategies that address barriers based on the type of disability. Additionally, it is important to integrate healthcare and rehabilitation services as they form the foundation for employment readiness. Only through comprehensive and inclusive development efforts can the empowerment of differently abled persons be possible so as to enable them to participate equitably in the labour market and contribute to Kerala's socio-economic growth.

### **Acknowledgement**

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest related to the present study.

### **Author Contributions**

Biji Jose: Conceptualisation, data collection, analysis and manuscript preparation.

Dr. S Muthulakshmi: Supervision and review of manuscript.

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