

LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Awareness About Benefits of a Disability Certificate Among Persons with Hearing Impairment in Kolkata, India

In India, people with disabilities are entitled to equal opportunities, equal rights and full participation, according to the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. The Government of India has made many provisions which persons with disabilities can access with disability certificates issued by governmental agencies. However, issuing a disability certificate would serve no purpose if the beneficiaries are unaware about the benefits. The authors conducted a survey to identify the utility of a disability certificate as perceived by persons with hearing impairment who attend camps specifically organised for certificate distribution, in six state government camps across Kolkata city, India.

There were only seventy-three participants with hearing impairment in the camps (0.82% of the total population of persons with hearing impairment), aged between 3 and 63 years. The majority (67.3%) were adults; the degree of hearing loss ranged from mild (5.5%), to moderate (2.3%), moderately severe (9.6%), severe (16.4%) and profound (66.2%). Children with hearing disability were low in number, along with people with lower degrees of hearing loss. The majority had profound hearing loss and sensorineural impairment (69.8%). The distribution of other types of hearing loss, namely conductive and mixed, was 2.3% and 27.9% respectively. The most common problem faced by 61.6% of the people with hearing disability was difficulty in communication, followed by difficulty in social interaction for 21.9%, job restrictions for 8.2%, road accidents for 5.2%; while 3.1% did not face any substantial hearing difficulties.

About 41% of the participants had no idea about the utility of a disability certificate. Among those who were aware, it was reported that the certificate was most often used to obtain transport benefits (30.1%). The other significant usage included vocational benefits (13.9%), financial benefits (10.4%), medical benefits (8.4%) and educational benefits (6.2%).

Persons with permanent hearing impairment need to be empowered to live with it, by availing of the facilities provided by the government. Simultaneously,

awareness is needed in society, so that perceptions are widened, prejudices are dropped and persons with disabilities are accommodated in the mainstream. Professionals also need to be educated about the significance of the disability certificate and the factors which would facilitate inclusion of persons with hearing impairment. Training programme prior to certification camps for different stakeholders, including volunteers, can be of help.

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