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Review

Integrating Disability into Disaster Management Education in India: A Critical Review

Tisha Goswami[1*], Ansar Ahmad[1]

[1] Department of Teacher Training and Non-Formal Education (IASE), Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025, India; tishagoswami07@gmail.com (T.G.); aahmad19@jmi.ac.in (A.A.).

[*] Correspondence: tishagoswami07@gmail.com; tel.: +919810648924

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ABSTRACT

Children with Special Needs (CwSN) are at heightened risk during disasters due to inadequate disaster management provisions for them. Their disabilities make them particularly vulnerable when disaster protections are inadequate or when injured children receive improper treatment. This further hinders their educational development. Furthermore, the lack of fully disability-inclusive infrastructure and educational facilities in schools makes them vulnerable to disasters, as they face cognitive and physical barriers. This study investigates the involvement of CwSN in disaster management, the programmes and global efforts to include them, the policies that incorporate them, and the role of socio-economic and psychological factors in their education. This study finds that there is limited data available on CwSN and their disaster management education, thereby highlighting gaps in current disaster management educational practices for CwSN. It further concluded that there is a lack of proper disability-inclusive provisions for CwSN to support them in disaster management; thus, there is an urgent need to provide CwSN with adequate disaster management educational provisions in emergencies. It also suggests incorporating disability-specific disaster management strategies into disaster management education to reduce the risk of disasters and promote global cooperation in building resilient communities that protect and include CwSN during emergencies.

KEYWORDS

CwSN; disability; disaster management; emergencies; policies.

1. Introduction

A disaster is a severe disruption that results in the widespread destruction of both material and non-material resources, as well as human and environmental damage. It also reduces the ability of people to manage their resources due to the interaction of hazards, vulnerabilities, and inadequate risk mitigation measures (ISDR, 2004). Therefore, it is essential to manage disasters effectively to minimise disruptions. For this reason, the Disaster Management Act, 2005, in India describes disaster management as an ongoing process that includes planning, organising, coordinating, and carrying out actions to reduce risks and improve readiness, along with quick responses, assessing the

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severity of situations, and developing evacuation plans (NDMA, 2005). Disaster management also includes organising and overseeing the use of resources to deal with all the humanitarian aspects of an emergency. This can be achieved by managing various risks, engaging all stakeholders, and addressing the pre-disaster, disaster, and post-disaster phases (FEMA, 2011). Similarly, it is strongly linked to practical implementation through safe facilities, risk management, and curriculum integration, which, in turn, depend on disaster awareness and understanding among school stakeholders (Cruz & Ormilla, 2022).

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines disability as a growing concept influenced by the interaction between disability and societal barriers that limit the participation of people (United Nations, 1989). On that account, do not let disability become a hindrance in the lives of Children with Special Needs (CwSN). Integrating disability into disaster management education for children is essential, as it ultimately leads to the adoption of inclusive education practices in this field. Inclusive education is a form of education that ensures equal opportunities for all at all levels of educational progress (United Nations, 1989). Education systems that are inclusive and empowering are fundamental to achieving social justice during times of crisis (Cvetković, 2022, 2023). Additionally, disaster management education provides access to emergency information and includes children as valuable community members, promoting their participation in emergency-related programs (Collaborating4Inclusion, 2024). Therefore, effective disaster management requires education to address these vulnerabilities and ensure disability-inclusive recovery efforts. Additionally, concepts related to sustainability should be incorporated into disaster-related training across all levels of education to strengthen disaster risk resilience (Đorđević & Gačić, 2024).

During disasters, the CwSN are labelled as one of the most vulnerable groups. Moreover, there is a lack of proper educational and disaster preparedness strategies; even the current policies and frameworks overlook their specific needs. These disabilities tend to hinder their ability to reach their full potential, which requires specialised educational programmes and initiatives based on disaster management. Despite global initiatives and policies promoting inclusivity, educational institutions often fail to address the unique disaster management requirements of CwSN or to include them in disaster preparedness interventions. This gap is particularly concerning given the lack of comprehensive data on the intersection of disability and disaster management education. This study, by reviewing global policies and initiatives focused on CwSN, aims to shed light on the urgent need for disability-inclusive disaster management educational provisions and recommendations. Ultimately, these efforts will help reduce the risks they face and contribute to building more resilient communities that prioritise the protection and inclusion of CwSN during emergencies.

2. Methods

This study critically examines the integration of disability in disaster management education for CwSN, drawing on secondary data. It conducts an extensive review and in-depth analysis of existing literature, which includes national and international academic articles, books, reports, and policy documents. These sources were examined to understand the educational and disaster management provisions for CwSN. A thematic content analysis approach was employed to identify key themes based on patterns and gaps in current provisions related to CwSN, education, and disaster management and to offer recommendations for more inclusive disaster management education.

3. Need for Disaster Management Education for CwSN

There are approximately 240 million CwSN worldwide (UNICEF, 2022b, 2021a). An estimated 7.8 million children under the age of 19 in India live with disabilities (UNESCO, 2019). In India, 2.1 per cent of the child population are CwSN, but only 1.54 per cent have been covered for educational purposes (Devi & Reddy, 2016). Further, assistive devices are not yet available to all of them, as fewer than half of the schools are inclusive of CwSN. Significant challenges persist in providing education to CwSN. Children with multiple disabilities have a significant chance of being out of school

and comparatively have lower foundational and numeracy skills than students without disabilities (UNICEF, 2021a). Furthermore, school enrollment for CwSN declines significantly with each educational level and with reduced enrollment among girls compared to boys (UNESCO, 2019).

On top of that, schools are usually designed for large student intakes with unfavourable structures for CwSN, particularly during evacuations, and their vulnerability further gets exacerbated by lack of access to resources, limited social capital, less autonomy, and risks from extreme weather changes due to their unique needs (Peek & Stough, 2010). CwSN often face marginalisation in disaster management and conflict prevention despite their vulnerability during such crises (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2008). The present generation of students, including those from gender-inclusive Communities, has a high likelihood of being displaced by climate change and related emergencies if they continue to be excluded from disaster management initiatives (UNICEF, 2022a).

They are often unfairly affected by disasters, experiencing drops in school performance and behavioural problems, which are exacerbated by a lack of specialised teachers, inaccessible facilities, and the potential loss of important school records, all of which hinder ongoing support and recovery for CwSN (Stough et al., 2019). Minimal data and studies are available on the schooling lives of the CwSN impacted by disasters; however, it is estimated that 3–4 years of schooling are believed to be missed due to forced displacement caused by a catastrophe (UNICEF, 2022b).

Due to all these limitations, effective disability-integrated disaster management education is crucial for CwSN, as schools tend to frequently encounter crises (natural disasters, violence, or personal tragedies) that can severely impact the mental and physical well-being of CwSN. These crises can bring about traumatic changes that threaten the safety and instil feelings of helplessness. CwSN are especially vulnerable due to their unique physical, sensory, or cognitive challenges, which can hinder their ability to respond effectively (NEA, 2018). Disaster management education can thus help these children prepare for emergencies and navigate them with the proper support, thereby reducing their risk and increasing their resilience. By addressing their specific needs, we can better integrate them into broader emergency response plans, helping to mitigate the impact of disasters and improve their overall safety and sense of security (Christian Blind Mission, 2012).

4. Disaster Management Education for CwSN in Schools

Educational institutions often fail to address the specific needs of CwSN in their disaster preparedness and response plans. The school curriculum generally lacks disability-specific content, both in textbooks and in the teaching and learning practices prepared by facilitators (Ediyanto et al., 2023). Because of this gap, CwSN are unable to obtain the instruction and training necessary to handle situations effectively. The execution of disaster-specific mock drills is the most crucial part of the training process. With the aid of awareness and pragmatism, testing actual scenarios, and modifying expectations based on age and aptitude, they are considered essential in enhancing pupils' abilities to cope with any adversity (Johnson et al., 2018).

However, less than 25 per cent of nations with drill policies execute both natural and artificial hazard drills more than once a year for all grades in school (Paci-Green et al., 2020). Furthermore, many schools' infrastructures are not designed with the special needs of students in mind. This includes inadequate physical accessibility, such as the absence of ramps and narrow doorways (Agarwal & Joshi, 2023). The National Building Code and Accessibility Standards encompass regulations for accessibility features that play a critical role in disaster situations (BIS, 2016). These features, such as ramps, wide doorways, and accessible emergency exits, guarantee the safe evacuation of people with disabilities.

During an emergency, this lack of preparedness can lead to dire consequences for CwSN, who might struggle to evacuate safely or access critical support services. The insufficiency of disaster management resources within institutions exacerbates the situation. In the absence of adequate resources and training, schools cannot offer essential support to CwSN during crises (Kumar &

Dwivedi, 2018). The absence of preparedness is especially alarming in disaster-prone areas where the effects of natural disasters are more intense and recurrent.

5. India's Educational, Legal and Policy Framework for CwSN

Table 1, provided below, lists India's constitutional articles, laws, acts, and frameworks, as well as schemes, initiatives, and international interventions adopted by India related to CwSNin terms of education, disability, or disaster management.

Table 1. Compiled by the authors, India's Educational, Legal, and Policy Framework for CwSN

India's Educational, Legal, and Policy Framework for Children with Special Needs	
Constitution of India	Article 15(1): Prohibits discrimination, including against persons with disabilities Article 21: Right to life and liberty Article 46: State's role in promoting educational and economic interests
Laws, Acts, and Frameworks	The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 The National Trust Act, 1999 National Curriculum Framework 2000 Disaster Management Act, 2005 National Curriculum Framework 2005 National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006 The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 National Policy on Disaster Management, 2009 The National Policy for Children, 2013 The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 National Disaster Management Plan, 2016 National Disaster Management Guidelines on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction, 2019 National Education Policy, 2020 National Curriculum Framework, 2023
Schemes and Initiatives	Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme 1999, 2003 Integrated Child Protection Scheme, 2009 Inclusive Education for the Disabled at Secondary Stage, 2009 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 2001 ShaGun (Shala Gunvatta) portal, 2017 Samagra Shikha Abhiyan 2018 NIDM: training programmes and material for inclusive DM NDMA: educational audio-visual aids for kids Inclusive educational material developed by NIOS and NCERT CWSN management system by CBSE, 2024 Technological advancement with inclusive material on YouTube, DIKSHA platform, BARKHA series, e-pathshala, SWAYAM, SWAYAM PRABHA
International Interventions	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2008 Incheon Strategy "To make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and Pacific Region, 2012 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015

6. Educational Initiatives for CwSN

The Salamanca Framework was the first-ever global initiative that focused on the education of CwSN. It emphasised that education is a fundamental right for everyone, mandating that all individuals, regardless of their disadvantages, should be included in the same educational settings (UNESCO, 1994). It advocates for inclusive education to ensure all children can learn together. Inclusive education prioritises justice and upholds all other human rights of children, including their rights to expression, protection from all forms of abuse, and life opportunities, along with access to all healthcare facilities, habilitation, and rehabilitation (UNICEF, 2017b). Indicating the need for disaster management education for the CwSN to provide them with safety and protection by learning about mitigation strategies.

Globally, various initiatives aim to improve disaster preparedness and response for CwSN. Sustainable Development Goal four aims to provide quality education and includes target 4.5, 'Eliminate all Discrimination in Education', and target 4.8, 'Build and Upgrade Inclusive and Safe Schools', focusing on the equal access of CwSN at all different levels of education and safe learning environments for them by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). Therefore, achieving the educational rights of children with disabilities is crucial for promoting inclusive and sustainable development, and it serves as a profitable investment for the future. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN General Assembly, 2007) has been ratifiedby vast number of parties, indicating a global commitment to providing inclusive education for all children with disabilities.

However, the practical implementation presents challenges, requiring continuous efforts to ensure the effective integration of CwSN into disaster management strategies. The Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Framework, aligned with international rules and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, aims to incorporate disability considerations by enhancing cross-sector initiatives, promoting collaborative learning, and removing obstacles to improve safety and resilience in emergencies (Collaborating4Inclusion, 2024; United Nations, 2016). It provides specific guidance on making disaster management practices inclusive, such as ensuring accessible communication, facilities, and services during emergencies. It also highlights the importance of involving individuals with disabilities in the planning and decision-making processes.

The implementation of crisis-sensitive educational planning involves assessing the resources and capacities for emergency risk reduction and response within the education sector, encompassing teachers, school principals, and other relevant stakeholders. Knowing where equalities and inclusions are lagging can help reduce the risks of conflict and violence (UNICEF, 2023). UNICEF's Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) effectively integrate Children with Special Needs (CwSN) into the mainstream by developing targeted interventions for them.

In India, the National Policy on Education (MHRD, 1986) highlighted the importance of considering disability aspects in the education sector to ensure inclusive education for CwSN. It aimed to eliminate disparities by focusing on integrated education for children with mild disabilities, providing special schools for severe cases, strengthening vocational training, reorienting teacher training, and encouraging public volunteering. Moreover, it also brings to the forefront the need to revise the curricula to include representation from all. The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (MSJE, 2006) also highlighted the importance of including CwSN by suggesting ways to make education more accessible and to integrate them into regular schools while also ensuring that special education services are provided. The Right to Education Act (MHRD, 2009) guarantees 'free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years', including those with disabilities. In addition, the school safety policy recommended establishing accessible evacuation routes for all students, implementing specialised training programmes for school staff, and conducting mock drills that include all students (NDMA, 2016). The legal framework of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act prioritises inclusive education, accessibility, and equal opportunities for people with disabilities, including children (MSJE, 2016). The latest National Education Policy, 2020, seamlessly integrates inclusive education into the Indian education sector, adopting a child-centred approach (Gosai, 2023).

Despite these initiatives in India and globally, the risks associated with disasters have not decreased; instead, they have increased. According to the World Risk Index Report, the Philippines,

Indonesia, India, Mexico, and Colombia are among the top five countries most prone to disasters (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft & IFHV, 2023). These countries frequently experience natural disasters that pose significant risks to their population. India's ranking was not as high as it is now; in 2020, it ranked 86th. All these initiatives are taken to prepare the children, who are the future of India. Why, then, are the disaster risks for these children increasing over time? The proper implementation of inclusive education raises this question. When CwSN are situated in high-risk areas, disaster preparedness and response become even more critical and challenging. One of the reasons extremely high-risk countries are not disaster-resilient is due to the inadequate adoption and implementation of national disaster management strategies that align with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNICEF, 2021b).

In the world, a total of 16 per cent of the population comprises persons with disabilities, and 3 per cent of the population are CwSN (WHO, 2023; UNICEF, 2021a). In India, there are a total of 7.8 million CwSN, which comprise 0.5 per cent of the country's total population (UNESCO, 2019). Figure 1, given below, illustrates that a total of 0.85 per cent of the CwSN were enrolled in the schools in in India, and only 22.7 per cent of CwSN were enrolled in schools out of the total CwSN population in India. Furthermore, the data in the figure indicates inadequate disability-friendly infrastructure in the schools. This highlights a broader challenge. Even when inclusive policies exist, there is a lack of appropriate spatial and infrastructural planning. Similarly, disaster management cannot succeed without spatial planning for potential disasters, even with ideal laws and policies in place (Öcal, 2021).

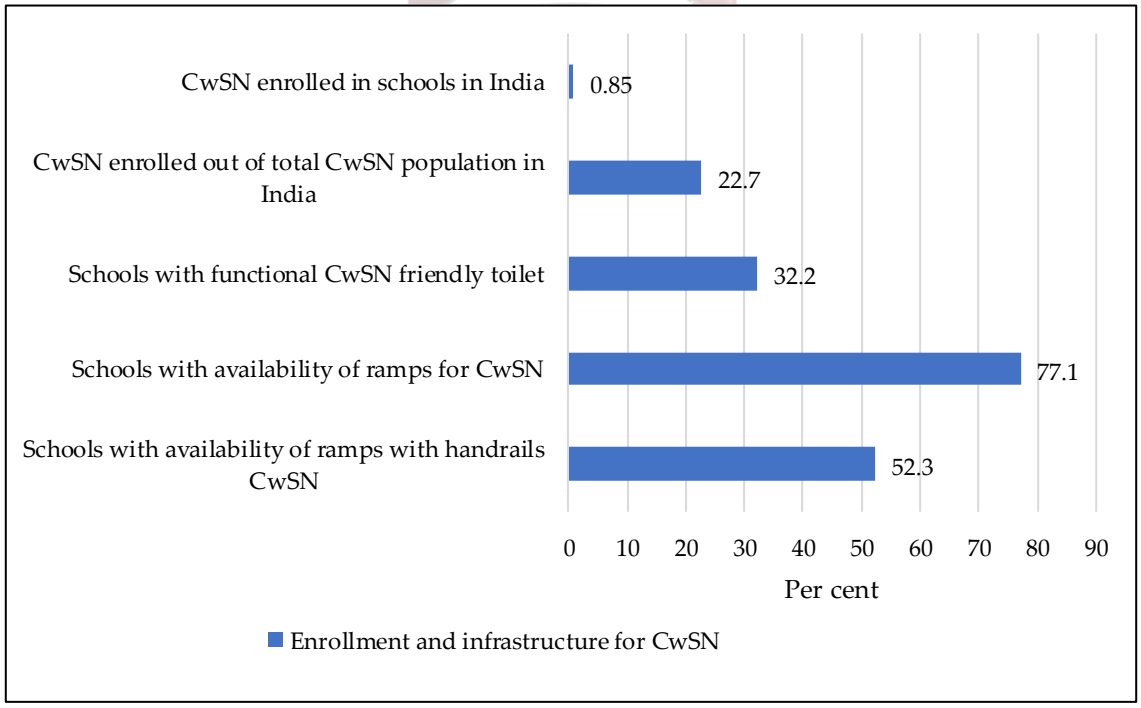


Figure 1. Data compiled from UDISE+ report (Ministry of Education, 2023), Enrollment and infrastructure for CwSN.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) (2019) survey data, as presented in Figure 2, highlights the deficiency of educational infrastructure for CwSN and the necessity for increased educational interventions to address their low literacy and enrollment rates. Furthermore, the inadequate amount of aid received from the government and non-governmental organisations highlights the need for streamlining the aid process for the CwSN.

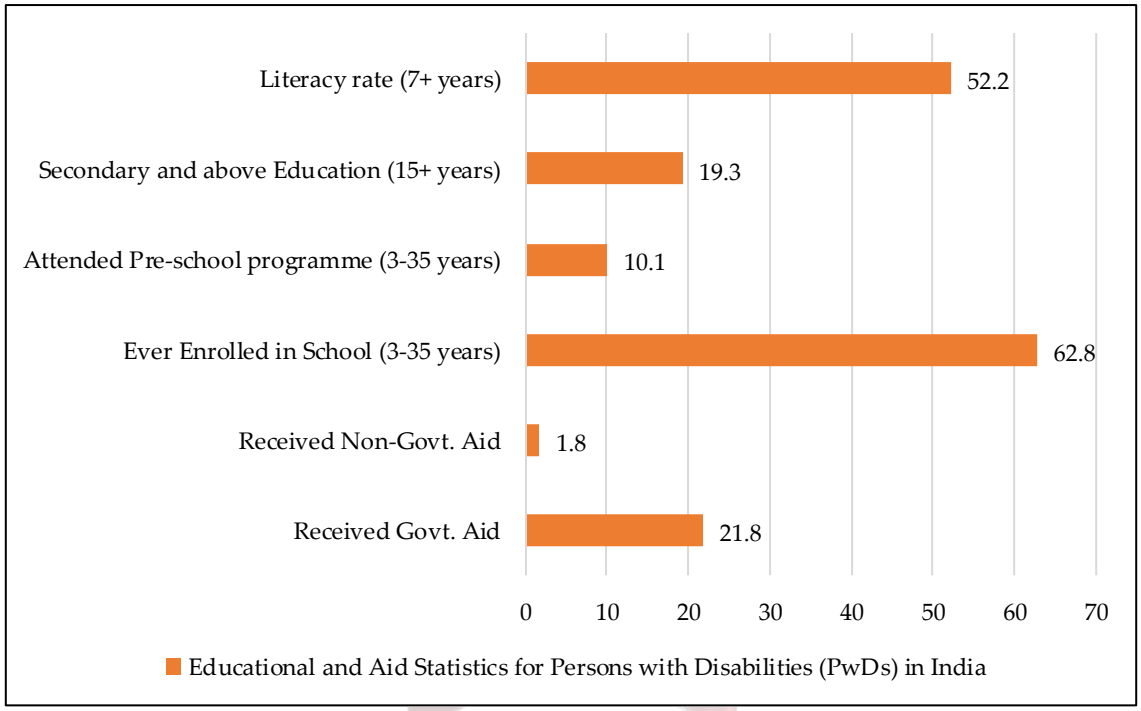


Figure 2. Data compiled from the National Statistical Office (NSO) (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2019), Educational and Aid Statistics for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in India.

Globally, best practices in inclusive disaster management education for CwSN have shown to be relatively successful. Amar Jyoti School in Delhi has developed a comprehensive disaster management strategy, including easily accessible infrastructure and trained personnel, to enable a safe evacuation (Zone4Solution, n.d.). Initiating disability-inclusive training in 2016, the State Disaster Management Authority in Kerala provided resources in accessible formats, including Braille, sign language, and audio-visual formats, to more than 2,600 people (Kerala SDMA, n.d.). India's disaster relief and rehabilitation program, conducted by the CII Foundation, involves expert consultations to promote disaster resilience in health and education, raises CSR funds, and collaborates with international agencies for community projects (Kaur & Singh, 2024).

Nepal has advanced inclusive disaster preparedness by developing accessible IEC materials with subtitles and sign language, thereby enhancing awareness among people with visual and hearing impairments (UNDP Nepal, 2023; M'Vouama et al., 2022). Similarly, Turkey's EDUCEN Project, in partnership with six NGOs, developed training programs that incorporated the experiences and skills of people with disabilities while also identifying cultural patterns unique to different disability groups to strengthen their resilience (Akgungor & AKUT Search and Rescue Association, 2016). For families of children with exceptional medical needs in the United States, Drexel University created a disaster preparedness toolbox (Drexel University, 2020). Moreover, Turkmenistan has incorporated disaster risk education into its preschool program under the guidance of UNICEF (UNICEF, 2017a). Kupenda for the Children provides community leaders in Kenya with advocacy training to enhance inclusive readiness (Kupenda for the children, 2020).

7. Representation of CwSN in Disaster Management

The hierarchical structure of education authorities, with the Central Board of Education at the highest level and the local Board of Education at a lower level, often leads to suboptimal implementation and unequal representation of CwSN in disaster management decisions (Stough et al., 2017). This top-down approach impedes the effective incorporation of disability considerations into disaster plans. About 15 per cent of the world's population is comprised of individuals with disabilities,

and the majority of these nations have no record of inclusion of CwSN into the decision-making process, making them educationally vulnerable (Jang & Ha, 2021).

CwSN have been looked after during disasters primarily due to an established norm of including them (NCD, 2019). The power of other stakeholders at the top of the institution's hierarchy outweighs that of the CwSN and many other stakeholders, such as students and teachers, in making decisions on behalf of the entire institution. Students with special needs have extremely low representation in national disaster management processes, leading to higher fatality rates in catastrophes compared to students without disabilities (Jang & Ha, 2021). The lack of inclusion in decision-making processes means that the specific needs of CwSN are not adequately addressed, resulting in increased vulnerability during emergencies. This is also supported by a survey conducted in 2013 and again in 2023, which states that the conditions of the CwSN have remained unchanged since 2013 despite their significant interest in the decision-making process (Collaborating4Inclusion, 2024).

CwSN possess the necessary competence to comment on their lives and participate in decision-making. By listening to and incorporating their views and perspectives, we should represent their opinions in the decision-making and research process (Srivastava, 2016). The UNICEF (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises the need to change the mindset of considering children as passive and incapable of self-protection; instead, they should be considered entitled to participate in decision-making alongside adults. However, the reality is that, despite countries' focus on children's participation, CwSN are often excluded from initiatives such as youth forums, children's parliaments, peer education, and other projects (UNICEF, 1989). Moreover, they are not active in research or local, national, or international movements, so it isn't easy to know their perspectives.

Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) mandates the implementation of measures to safeguard children with disabilities during emergencies. These children are considered more vulnerable to discrimination and violence, and they face greater challenges during crises due to disruptions in essential services, such as health and education, and increased barriers to aid (UN General Assembly, 2007).

8. Impact of Socio-Economic and Psychological Factors on CwSN

Poverty, a major socioeconomic drawback, is highly linked with disabilities; one can find the highest number of CwSN in the poorer regions of the world, with data showing 192 million out of 240 million CwSN belong to only the developing nations of the world (Kett et al., 2020). Therefore, by not addressing the complexities due to poverty, the issues associated with disability cannot be addressed, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (FRA, 2018). The lack of resources and support in impoverished areas further complicates the implementation of effective disaster management strategies. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights addressing poverty as a crucial element of effectively tackling disability issues (UN General Assembly, 2007). This, in turn, will help reduce their vulnerability to disasters.

The coronavirus disease devastated the lives of many people. It impacted their education to a significant extent by increasing the digital divide for disadvantaged students, including the ones with disabilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of personalised education plans, loss of in-school resources, and insufficient assistive technologies at home posed significant barriers for CwSN to access remote education. Effective pandemic response requires understanding which interventions work best for different impairments and training front-line personnel to meet these needs (UNICEF, 2020). School closures are anticipated to lead to significant disruptions in students' daily lives, where remote homeschooling can be particularly challenging for children with special needs (CwSN), as they require not only Internet access and other technological resources but also assistive technologies and individualised lesson plans (Jeste et al., 2020).

Different disabilities lead to different challenges for the CwSN. Students with cognitive or emotional disabilities are at a high risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder due to their difficulty in maintaining composure and remembering disaster mitigation instructions, which can hinder their

ability to protect themselves during an emergency (Ha, 2015). Children with functional disabilities, such as communication or self-care issues, are likely to have less attendance in school compared to children without such disabilities. In contrast, children struggling with anxiety or depression-type issues have similar attendance scenarios, but they also often lag in numeracy skills (UNICEF, 2022a).

Multiple stakeholders collaborate to design, develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate activities that address the support needs of people with disabilities before, during, and after disasters. The role of multiple stakeholders is to work together in planning, executing, and evaluating disaster management activities, from policymaking to their implementation within institutions.

At every level, people with disabilities have a crucial role and require their representation (ARC, 2024). Furthermore, the stakeholders involved with the CwSN must possess the right mindset and drive to support them. The worsened psychological conditions of the carers or parents due to a catastrophe directly impact the CwSN well-being and place them at a high risk of mental health issues (WHO, 2013). A teacher's attitude towards students is crucial for understanding the provisions available to them and their importance in ensuring protection (UNESCO, 2019). Typically, due to a lack of skills and training, teachers struggle to create resources and demonstrate empathy for CwSN; often, they are unable to identify the issues and provide solutions to ensure uninterrupted education for all (Ediyanto et al., 2023). Not only the teachers but also how parents treat their children with special needs is important. Similarly, sociocultural factors, such as religion and beliefs, significantly influence a child's safety and the school's response to them (UNESCO, 2019).

9. Limitations

The study is limited to the availability of secondary sources of data on CwSN in the context of education and disaster management. Additionally, the findings are provided based on all the types of disabilities among CwSN in India, irrespective of their different requirements for disaster management education.

10. Conclusions

Disaster management education is essential for building resilient communities; however, CwSN are often overlooked in disaster preparedness and response efforts. Disasters affect everyone, but due to their special needs, CwSN face unique challenges during emergencies. Despite recognising these challenges and developing policy frameworks, educational institutions often fail to integrate disability considerations into disaster management education. Therefore, to promote positive development for CwSN, there is an urgent need to effectively integrate disaster management education into the school curriculum, enabling CwSN to handle future disasters with the necessary skills and abilities effectively. Addressing the needs of CwSN in disaster management requires a multifaceted approach that includes improved educational practices, inclusive policies, socioeconomic considerations, and global collaboration. By considering their specific needs, we can mitigate the impacts of disasters and enhance their safety. This includes integrating disability-specific content into disaster education, ensuring accessible emergency services, and providing specialised support during evacuations. Furthermore, assistive technology and active engagement in recovery and peace-building efforts are crucial for building resilient communities and protecting the CwSN during emergencies.

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