

ROLE OF JOURNALISTS IN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TOWARD SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS CHILDREN AND THEIR CONSCIOUSNESS

Hafiz Rukhsar Ahmed¹
Quratulain Rizvi²

Abstract

The aim of the current study was to explore the awareness of journalists about disability and their role in creating awareness regarding disability. Journalists who are working for print media (Newspaper) and electronic media (News channel) in Sialkot and Lahore were the population of study. It was a cross sectional study, consisted of N=60 Journalists both male & female. Journalists were rated on a researcher made questionnaire which consisted of 33 items. The internal reliability of the instrument was found to be 0.91. It was concluded that journalists have comprehensive knowledge regarding all the disabilities except autism. It is recommended that Disability content should be included in mass-communication or journalism studies to make journalists a voice of persons with disabilities.

Keywords: Awareness, Journalists, Disability

¹Ph.D Special Education Scholar, Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: hafizrukhsarahmed@gmail.com

²Ph.D (Scholar) Special Education, UMT, Lahore. Email: qnierizvi@yahoo.com

Introduction

This topic explains the knowledge, attitude, and practice of journalists for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities face many problems in their lives which are overlooked by their families and society. So, the role of journalists is very important in creating awareness for the rights of this marginalized group of society (Hanitzsch, 2018). In the present era the role of journalists is very important in creating awareness of marginalized groups because media is one of the fastest ways of communication. Usually, people with disabilities are seen less in the media's news and their opinions are not taken as compared to persons with no disability on contemporary issues. This attitude also shows marginalization of persons with disabilities by journalists (Ellis & Goggin, 2015). Persons with disabilities are only seen in the media for specific issues due to disability and its negative effects in the family or society.

Journalists can play their role by disclosing the inequalities faced by people with disabilities. So, the journalists' knowledge, attitude and practices are very important to make them responsible in representing people with disabilities. The media unfortunately portrays the limitations of disability and challenges aroused with the disability, ignoring the fact that persons with disability may have different other abilities. The language and images used by journalists can play an influential role in creating a clear and positive view of persons with disabilities. It is also worth considering that there should be comprehensive representation of differently abled persons in media to help and facilitate 2.49% persons, so far, a segregated community, who are unaware of their rights and who are purposefully discriminated.

According to Journalists for human rights, media is the most effectual mean to sensitize public for human rights. Journalists of any media can make and educate persons with disabilities about their rights, and they can be overseer against the violation of human rights (Blanck, 2017). A person, who writes, assembles, and disperses news and information for the community is called Journalist. Usually, journalists work for general issues and sometimes specified issues like sports journalists. Changing the attitude of society has been a major challenge in any society. But when it comes to journalists, they play an influential role in changing the attitude of society (Foust, 2017). One of the primary responsibilities of journalists is to research, document and present the issues faced by the public in a fair and neutral manner (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Journalists have the potential to convince any society or community with their ideas and unique interpretations by using the different types of media. They usually talk about the issues which we face in daily life (Jones, 2012).

Journalism has been the most fundamental weapon in formulating ideas and concepts around the globe. The role of journalists in the media can never be overlooked. Media plays a vital role in creating awareness of emerging issues of society 's rights, justice and needs. Media has been representing disability both positively and negatively. It is usually argued by disability activists that

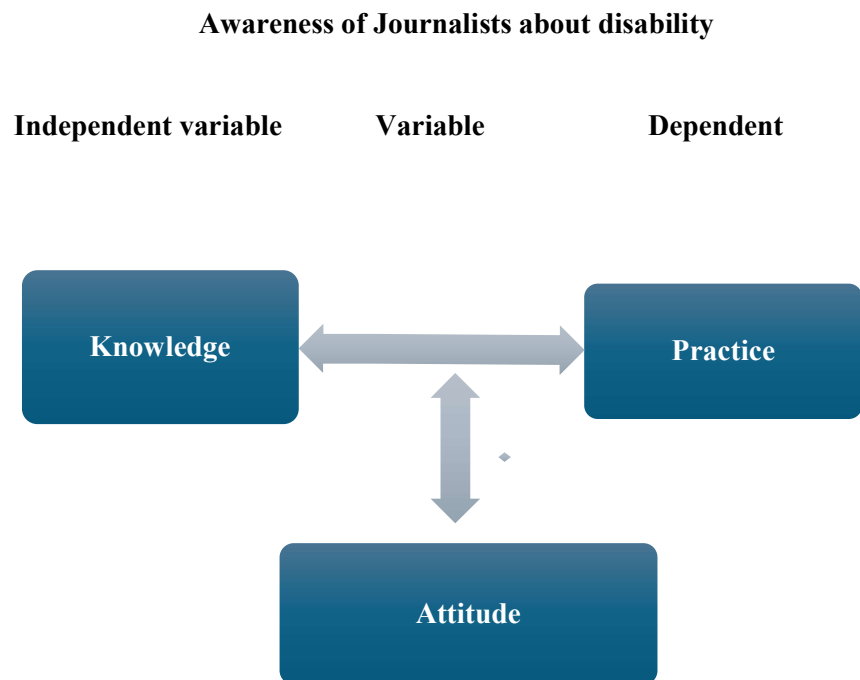
persons with disability are expelled in the representation by media. Media personnel often show pessimistic stereotypical behaviors while representing persons with disabilities. This behavior has generated a poor self-concept and misunderstandings among persons with disabilities (Haller, 2013). It has been an area of interest for scholars to know the different models which journalists use to represent persons with disability and problems faced by them. These models are usually described as medical models, social pathology model and supercrip model. Persons with disabilities highly depicted as dependent on medical professionals for treatment and protection. On the other hand journalists have shown people with disability as disadvantaged group which is highly dependent on society members for survival and support. Supercrip model is represented for those persons with disabilities who have some extra ordinary skills along with disability. Most of the time persons with disability are represented as exploiting their disability because they use unreasonable access and constitutional rights (Quinlan & Bates, 2008).

Disability is a condition which impedes a person from performing their life skills independently. It can be an impairment of cognition, development, physical limb/s or any sense. Disability can occur in any stage of life e.g. at pre-natal, peri-natal and post-natal stage. There are so many causes for disability which are congenital and acquired. Apparently, disability causes no pain, but it pours deep effects on the quality of life of those persons who have disability (Bognar, 2015). Persons with disabilities have been treated as charity-based individuals rather than right-based individuals. They have been depicted as helpless and dependent on others. So because of this approach PWDs (person with disabilities) were not included in mainstream society which created an image that they were unable to cope with community. They have been kept deprived of accessing their basic rights like employment, inclusion education, property. But now a right based paradigm has slightly taken place for persons with disabilities. The practices of recognizing or acknowledging rights are slow but are being accepted all over the world (Francis, 2015).

Article 8 of the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities is highly related to the news media because it purposely talks about raising awareness about person with disabilities. It is a guiding principle which aims to notify the journalists and news media for the representation of disability (Kayess & French, 2008). Beth Haller developed the media models of disability. According to Haller and her colleague's media is still representing persons with disabilities as misery and using stereotyping behaviors and language after so many decades of disability campaigns. So, the knowledge of journalists and media is very important to represent disability in a positive and realistic manner to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disability. Disability theory provides interference for the disability studies which have been a part of critical and cultural theory for a long time. Disability studies alter the crucial statements about the identity, ideology, politics, social injustice, and the body of persons with disability. On the other hand, disability studies highlight the core issues of persons with disabilities to be solved (Siebers, 2018).

In the context of Journalism, framing is a key term by which journalists generate and highlight the new stories of the emerging issues of the society. This concept of framing was generated by Erving Goffman in 1974 (Davis & Kent, 2016). Usually, journalists collaborate with some other media personnel to explain issues and stories by using various frames that resonate more efficiently including the more audiences (Haller, 2010). According to Haller, the attitude of a community towards persons with disability is formed by the narratives of journalists rather than making a social contact with them. So it is so simple to argue that attitudes, knowledge and practice of journalists about persons with disability have a great influence on the perception and attitude of those people who do not have any disability.

Figure 1
Conceptual framework



Moderating Variable

This framework shows the relationship of three different aspects of awareness of journalists. A journalist who has knowledge will practice creating awareness. The attitude of the journalist will mediate the practice and knowledge of journalists about disability.

Significance of the Study

This study will help journalists to reflect on their roles in creating awareness about disability. It will sensitize journalists to become the voice of persons with disability in terms of their rights. This study will also suggest how journalists can participate in creating awareness about disability in our society.

Objective of the Study

This study was conducted to achieve the following objectives.

- To identify the awareness of the journalists about the disability
- to find out the attitude of journalist about persons with disabilities
- To identify the practices of journalists in creating awareness in society about disability

Research Questions

The current study was conducted to answer the following question:

- How much awareness do journalists have about disability?
- What is the attitude of journalists towards people with disabilities?
- What are the practices of journalists in creating awareness in society about disability?

Methodology

The present study was descriptive in nature. A quantitative approach was used, and a survey method was applied to collect the data.

Population

The population of the study was the journalists who are working for print media (newspapers) and electronic media (news channels). Both male and female journalists were included in the study.

Sampling

Convenient sampling techniques were used to collect the data. The sample of the study comprised 60 journalists. Among these journalists, 68% were males and 32% were females. The journalists were divided into three groups on the basis of their qualification: 15% were Graduate, 78% were Masters in mass communication and 10% held the degree of M.Phil in mass communication. They were also distributed in six different groups depending on their professional experience: 47% had 1-5 years, 23% had 6-11 years, 22% had 11-15 years, 7% had 21-25 years and 1% had 26-30 years' experience whereas, no participant had 16-20 years' experience.

Study Area

This study was conducted in Sialkot and Lahore city. Following new channels and newspapers were approached for the purpose of data collection: 92 News Channel, Geo News, Samaa, Duniya News Channel, Bol News Channel, 24 News Channel, Dawn News Paper, Khabaian Newspaper.

Procedure of Data Collection

A dichotomous questionnaire was developed for the data collection. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire and collected it back from the journalists.

Development of Tool

Researchers have constructed a questionnaire to know the awareness of journalists about disability. This instrument consisted of 33 items, having the options of “Yes”, “No” and “To some extent. Its validity was determined by the review of 5 special education teachers, and 3 faculty members of University of Punjab and University of management & technology at Lahore. The feedback of experts was considered valuable, and changes were made which were suggested by the expert teachers. The researchers estimated the internal consistency of the instrument using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha to examine whether the items were correlated with each other and measuring the same concept. The internal reliability of the instrument was found to be 0.91.

Presentation of Data Results: Quantitative Analysis

The data was analyzed by using SPSS. The percentage of each item was calculated. The results were intercepted using descriptive statistics.

Table 1

Percentage Distribution of Awareness of Journalist

Item No	Item/Statement	N=60		
		Yes	No	To Some Extent
1	Do you have knowledge about the term “intellectual disability”?	91.7	3.3	5
2	Do you think children with intellectual disability can read and write?	35%	20	45
3	Do the deaf students have capabilities to speak?	41.7	20	38.3
4	Do physically handicapped children have capabilities to perform their daily life activities by using physical assistance?	56.7	1.7	41.7
5	Can blind students get education by using their auditory skills?	100	0	0
6	Do the students with learning disability face difficulties in reading and writing?	60	8.3	31.7
7	Do you have awareness about the term “Autism”?	28.3	60	11.7
8	Is Autism and intellectual disability same?	91.7%	5	3.3
9	Is the number of special schools is enough according to the prevalence of disability?	5	86.7	8.3
10	Are special people 10% of our population?	23.3	46.7	30

11	Can persons with disabilities become responsible citizens like normal citizens?	76.7	16.7	6.7
12	Do you think role of media is important for protection of the rights of persons with disability?	98.3	-	1.7
13	Do you think children with special needs can understand and maintain relations with other community members?	66.7	21.7	11.7
14	Do you think children with special needs have abilities to understand the feelings and emotions of others?	83.3	3.3	13.3
15	Do the persons with disabilities understand the social values, rules and regulations of a society?	80	5	15
16	Are basic health services being provided to persons with special needs?	26.7	68.3	5
17	Do the persons with disabilities have abilities to learn vocational skills like tailoring or carpentering etc?	63.3	23.3	13.3
18	Can persons with disabilities get technical education?	58.3	8.3	33.3
19	Can person with disabilities show their full potential in the field of sports?	80	18.3	1.7
20	Do the persons with disabilities have abilities to take decision about their future?	16.7	31.7	51.7
21	Do the persons with disabilities have opportunities to get jobs according to their abilities or skills?	13.3	60.0	26.7

The results of the above table show that journalists have comprehensive knowledge regarding all the disabilities except autism. 60% of the journalists have no knowledge about the term autism. More than 90% of journalists mixed

autism with intellectual disability. All the journalists knew that students with visual impairment can get education by using their auditory skills. Almost all the journalists believed that the role of the media is very important for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. More than 80% of journalists believed that people with disabilities have a good sense of understanding the feelings and emotions of other people and they have full potential to show their different abilities in the field of sports. 86.7% of journalists have a good knowledge about the fact that the number of special schools is not enough according to the prevalence of disability. More than 65% of journalists believe that the status of basic health services is poor for persons with disabilities.

Table 2
percentage distribution of attitude of journalist

Item No	Item/Statement	Percentage		
		Yes	No	To Some Extent
22	Do you think attitude of journalists towards persons with disability is sympathetic?	55	25	20
23	Do the journalists have positive attitude for persons with disability?	66.7	15	18.3
24	Do you feel empathy when you meet a person with disability?	98.3	-	1.7
25	Do you like to do coverage the issues of persons with disability in media?	76.7	5	18.3
26	Do you consider that information authentic that is given by a person with disability?	61.7	33.3	5

Table 2 shows the attitude of journalists towards persons with disabilities. The results show that overall journalists have a positive attitude towards people with disabilities. 98.3% of journalists feel empathy when they meet a person with disability. They also show a positive attitude whenever they need to do coverage of issues related to persons with disabilities. More than 60% of journalists rely on the information given by persons with disabilities.

Table 3
Percentage distribution of practices of journalist

Item No	Item/Statement	N=60		
		Percentage		
		Yes	No	To Some Extent
27	Are you satisfied with the role of print media regarding the rights of persons with disabilities?	16.7	36.7	46.7
28	Are you satisfied with the role of print electronic media regarding the rights of persons with disabilities?	16.7	36.7	46.7
29	Do you think media has played its significant role in representing disability for their rights?	18.3	41.7	40
30	Are you satisfied with the role of media as presenting disability for charity?	16.7	66.7	16.7
31	Have you written any article/column for persons with disability?	10	90	-
32	Have journalists presented a positive role of persons with disabilities in media?	16.7	75	8.3
33	Were you taught about disability during your studies of journalism?	11.7	85	3.3

Table 3 shows that journalists are lacking in their practices for the representation of persons with disabilities. Item no.30 has revealed that journalists are not satisfied with the role of the media presenting disability for charity. Almost all the journalists admitted that they have never written any article/column for the rights or issues of persons with disabilities. 85% of journalists reported that they were not even a single word about disability in their academic period.

Discussion

Journalists are usually the voice of those people who cannot raise their voices for their rights. If journalists have to highlight some issues or they need to represent any community, it is mandatory for them to have accurate information about that particular issue. Awareness of journalists can play a significant role in representing people with disabilities for their rights. Awareness involves knowledge, attitude and practice. The current study has revealed that journalists have basic knowledge about persons with disabilities. All journalists knew that persons with visual impairment get education by using their auditory skills. It is also supported by Rokem and Ahisaar (2009) that students with visual impairment highly depend on their cognition and auditory skills to get education. The journalists also have awareness that the number of special education schools is not enough according to the prevalence of disability. Manzoor and Hameed (2016) also revealed that 96% of students with disabilities are out of school and have no access to school. It indicates that

special education schools are not enough according to the prevalence of disability. In this study all the journalists have acknowledged that the role of media is very important in creating awareness about disability, but it seems only a verbal statement because journalists are not practicing highlighting the issues of persons with disability which they face in daily life. Most journalists have made no efforts to protect the rights of people with disabilities and to sensitize the public for the rights of persons with disabilities. It shows that journalists have no interest or serious concern about the issue of PWDs. Its main reason is that journalists are not taught about PWDs during their professional education like other general issues. As it is evident by current study that disability is not included in journalism studies. Now disability education is becoming a part of communication studies as revealed by Shawn (2015) “disability discourse belongs to journalism education”. Journalists pay little attention to marginalized groups of any society. The current study disclosed that journalists have a positive and sympathetic attitude towards persons with disabilities. This can be seen in some news in which they have highlighted some issues regarding the employment of blind community. But their practices are not persistent to raise voice for PWDs. Journalists don’t seem to take initiatives for the rights of PWDs as their practices can be seen in the results of this study. Most of the journalists do not favor the charity-based approach for PWDs. This point is worth appreciating for journalists, but their practices are opposite in this view. Most of the time, it is seen that the media presents PWDs for the sake of charity. According to Kayess (2008) UNCRPD reinforces a right based approach for persons with disabilities rather than charity-based approach.

Conclusion

In the light of above results and discussion it is concluded that journalists’ role is very important in creating awareness for the right of persons with disabilities. There is a dire need for journalists to get more knowledge about the PWDs and their rights and to practice their knowledge. In this way journalists can help this marginalized segment of society. Journalists would have to play a positive role in the representation of PWDs. Journalists would only be sensitized when disability discourse became a part of their education and training.

Recommendations

Journalists must be encouraged to get knowledge about PWDs and their rights.

Disability content should be included in mass-communication or journalism studies to make journalists a voice of PWDs.

Persons with disabilities should be included in daily news reporting and their positive aspects must be highlighted in front of society.

Journalists should adopt a right-based approach for PWDs rather than charity-based approach to present their issues.

References

- Blanck, P. D., & Flynn, E. (Eds.). (2017). *Routledge handbook of disability law and human rights*. London: Routledge.
- Bognar, G. (2016). Is disability mere difference? *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 42(1), 46-49.
- Ellis, K., & Goggin, G. (2017). *Disability and the Media*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Foust, J. (2017). *Online journalism: principles and practices of news for the Web*. Routledge.
- Francis, L., & Silvers, A. (2015). *Americans with disabilities*. Routledge.
- Hanitzsch, T., & Vos, T. P. (2018). Journalism beyond democracy: A new look into journalistic roles in political and everyday life. *Journalism*, 19(2), 146-164.
- Jones, C. (2012). Literature review: Journalism and disability from a Canadian perspective. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 1(2), 75-108.
- Kayess, R., & French, P. (2008). Out of darkness into light? Introducing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. *Human rights law review*, 8(1), 1-34.
- Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*. Three Rivers Press.
- Manzoor, A., Hameed, A., & Nabeel, T. (2016). Voices of out of school children with disabilities in Pakistan. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 16, 1099-1103.
- Quinlan, M. M., & Bates, B. R. (2013). Dances and discourses of (dis) ability: Heather Mills's embodiment of disability on dancing with the stars. In *Understanding Disability Studies and Performance Studies* (pp. 64-80). Routledge.
- Rokem, A., & Ahissar, M. (2009). Interactions of cognitive and auditory abilities in congenitally blind individuals. *Neuropsychologia*, 47(3), 843-848.
- Siebers, T. (2018). Introduction. In *Disability Theory* (pp. 1-33). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.309723.3>
- Zhang, L., & Haller, B. (2013). Consuming image: How mass media impacts the identity of people with disabilities. *Communication Quarterly*, 61(3), 319-334.
- Ahmed, H. R., & Rizvi, Q. (2023). Role of journalists in awareness campaign toward special educational needs children and their consciousness. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 7(1), 104-114.

Received on: December 11, 2023

Revised on: January 11, 2024

Accepted on: January 17, 2024