Poverty and Disability: A Critical Review of the Literature in Low and Middle-income Countries

Dr Maria Kett
Assistant Director
Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre
University College London
m.kett@ucl.ac.uk
8th December 2011
Presentation Outline

- The DFID-funded Cross-Cutting Disability Research Programme (CCDRP)
- Conceptual framework of disability and poverty
- The disability-poverty nexus
- Why the collection of statistical data is important
- Definitions of disability and poverty
- Introduction to the critical review:
  - Methodology employed
  - Papers reviewed
- Principal findings
- Discussion and conclusions
Cross-Cutting Disability Research Programme

- The Centre is a partnership between Leonard Cheshire Disability and University College London
- It is dedicated to generating a body of knowledge about disability issues that helps to improve the lives of people with disabilities, and their families and their communities, around the world.
- Awarded the DFID-funded CCDRP in November 2009
- Three main components:
  - Research
  - Capacity building
  - Research uptake
Review Questions

- What is the evidence that demonstrates a link between disability and poverty in LMICs?
- What does this evidence tell us of the types of relationships that exist between disability and poverty?
The Disability-Poverty Nexus

- “Disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty” (Elwin, 1999; Parnes, 2009; van Kampen, 2008)
  - Hence, if one is disabled:
    - Less likelihood of completing primary education
    - Less likelihood of securing long-term and sustainable employment
    - Depleted levels of social capital and relational bonds
    - The majority of developing countries have no social protection programmes
  - Similarly, if a person is poor:
    - Cannot afford basic healthcare = preventable diseases
    - Increased levels of under- and malnutrition
    - Live in unsanitary and poor housing
    - Lack of access of clean water

→ However, the dynamics of the disability-poverty relationship remains ill-defined and under-researched
Why is Evidence Important?

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has the potential to create a paradigm shift in terms of the formulation and implementation of disability policy and practice (UN, 2006)

- The Convention explicitly recognises the importance of collecting robust statistical data
- This data facilitates the effective promotion and enforcement of disability rights, and provides a basis for civil society institutions to hold their governments to account for disability rights and obligations
- Bilateral and multilateral donor agencies are increasingly requiring evidence based data to support the case that disability issues are and inherent component of international development (DFID, 2000; JICA, 2006; GTZ, 2006).
Definitions of Disability and Poverty

Both terms lack definitional clarity:

Disability

- Medical model – normative physiological and or intellectual abnormality of the body
- Social model – disabled people are excluded from society by systemic attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that exclude them from participating in contemporary society
- Human rights model – maintains that disabled people have the same inherent rights as every other citizen
- Capability approach – focuses upon the analysis of the vulnerabilities and (lack of) opportunities encountered by persons with disabilities in comparison to non-disabled people
Definitions of Disability and Poverty

Poverty

- Traditionally, poverty has been defined in terms of monetary income – both in absolute and relative terms
- Welfare economists maintain that those who are poor live below a predetermined subsistence income (currently set at $1.25 per day)
- Increasingly, poverty has come to be seen as multi-dimensional - encompasses a range of factors, including tangible and intangible
There is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest that there is a co-correlation between disability and poverty.

- Social exclusion
- Negative social attitudes
- Lack of access to public services (health and education)
- Poor sanitation and housing
- High levels of unemployment
- Depleted levels of social capital and relational bonds, etc.
Introduction to the Critical Review I

- So, anecdotal evidence would suggest there is a strong relationship between disability and poverty
  - BUT the evidence-base for this is extremely poor
- This is the first critical review of the peer-reviewed literature that explicitly and systematically analyses this relationship
- The methodology that was employed was an adapted version of the EPPI-centre approach to systematic review and the work of Greenhalgh et al:
  - Reviewed the existing peer-reviewed literature
  - “Grey literature” was omitted
- Paper written in collaboration with UCL colleagues (Prof Nora Groce, Prof Shelia Wirz, Dr Gayatri Kembhavi, Dr Jean-Francois Trani, Dr Raymond Lang and Dr Maria Kett)
Introduction to the Critical Review II

- Historically, a number of commonly cited statistics regarding disability and poverty have been extensively quoted in the literature. For example:
  - 10% of the world’s population can be considered to have a disability (revised to 15% in the recently published World Report on Disability (World Health Organisation, 2011))
  - 75% of disabled people live in developing countries
  - 98% of all children with disabilities do not complete primary education
  - 20% of the world’s poorest people are disabled
- However, there is scant robust statistical data that support these figures, and therefore should be considered as “guestimates” at best – “evidence by citation” (Murray Strauss, 2007)
Search Criteria

- Search terms that were used were:
  - (Disab* OR handicap) AND (developing countr* OR low income countr*) AND (poverty OR poor)

- The following databases were used:
  - CINHAL Plus
  - ELDIS
  - ERIC (Educational Resources Information Centre)
  - JSTOR
  - PsychINFO
  - PubMed
  - Web of Science
Papers Reviewed

Initial search = 293 papers

60 papers included in short list for review

20 papers selected from short list for review

27 papers selected for Final review

224 papers excluded based on titles and abstracts

7 additional papers identified not yet listed in databases
Key Themes

- Disability and economic (or income-based) poverty
- Disability and multi-dimensional poverty
- Compounding factors – for example, health, type of impairment, gender, age and aging.
Disability and Economic/Income Poverty

- **Absolute and relative poverty:**
  - The economic incapacity of an individual to satisfy their basic needs such as food, housing, clothing, etc.
- Includes household income and assets
- 13 of the 27 articles discussed disability and economic poverty, of which 7 found a positive correlation
  - For example, Filmer (2008) found that in 13 countries, being a disabled adult is statistically significant in the lowest to quintiles
  - Some studies used non-asset based measures of poverty, such as social class and area of residence
  - 5 of the 13 papers from that there was no difference between disabled and non-disabled people in relation to poverty
    - In fact, one study in South Africa found that disabled people had a higher income than the national average, which may be attributed to specific disability grants.
Disability and Multi-Dimensional Poverty

- Multi-dimensional poverty includes a portfolio of factors, such as education, health care, employment, as well as the ability to participate in family and social life.
- This multi-dimensional definition assesses social exclusion and marginalisation.
- 19 of the 27 papers addressed disability and multi-dimensional poverty:
  - One common finding was that children with disabilities did not complete primary school education.
  - In addition, employment is closely associated with 11 papers making explicit reference.
  - Evidence of negative wage differentials between disabled and non-disabled people.
  - Partially can be attributed to negative social attitudes and stigma associated with disability.
Compounding Factors

- Nine papers made reference to other factors that are directly and indirectly related to the causal link between disability and poverty.
- These included gender, the nature and severity of impairment, the contrasting dynamics of disability and poverty between rural and urban areas, and the ability to access mainstream public services.
- In general, disabled women are more likely to be affected by poverty than disabled men, although the reasons for this are under-researched.
- Aging – there is evidence that not only are older adults more vulnerable to becoming disabled, but that they are also vulnerable to poverty, thus compounding the difficulties they face.
- With the changing demographic profile of LMICs, there is also an urgent need to explore the growing issue of aging, disability and health in LMICs with reference to poverty if health and social policy planning for LMICs is to be effective.
- Few of these factors have been studied in any depth.
Discussion and Conclusions

- The evidence generated by this systematic review supports the anecdotal belief that disability and poverty are strongly correlated.
- However, the dynamics and intricacies of this relationship remain ill-defined and under-researched: therefore, the “analysis of the relationship between disability and economic status should be interpreted as an association and not necessarily as a cause and consequence” (Filmer, 2008)
- This is compounded by the lack of universally agreed definitions of what constitutes “disability” and “poverty”: “How researchers construct a variable for disability will influence the correlations they find between disability and various socioeconomic characteristics, such as poverty” (Braithwaite & Mont, 2009)
- Consequently, more longitudinal studies are required to explore the dynamics of the disability-poverty nexus.
- Moreover, if the political profile of disability is going to be raised as a legitimate area for international development, (particularly in the aftermath of the MDGs), bilateral and multilateral donors will require more robust statistical data regarding disability and poverty.
Recommendations

- More research to support evidence-based policy (e.g. effectiveness, value for money…)
- More research on impact to better target interventions
- Better disability data collection – including specific standardised questions in large scale surveys
- Cross-disciplinary research on the interaction between compounding factors (e.g. aging, gender, class, ethnicity, chronic diseases, HIV/AIDS…)
- Integration of disability into broader poverty reduction strategies and other aid interventions
  → Implications for aid-effectiveness
Any Questions?

Thank You