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Exploring Social Inclusion And Well-Being Among Persons With Disabilities: A Systematic Review Of Literature

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ABSTRACT

Social inclusion has been recognized globally as one of the most important determinants of the well-being among persons with disabilities (PWDs). Social inclusion encompasses the social, psychological and physical aspects of an individual's life. Persons with disabilities face challenges related to stigma and exclusion. These limitations lead to decrease their overall quality of life. Therefore, the present review aims to investigate the effect of social inclusion on the well-being of PWDs along with identifying key factors of inclusion and well-being, also highlight gaps in the current literature regarding social inclusion and the well-being of PWDs. Studies relevant to the topic were located from several databases i.e., PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar from 2024-2026 using keywords such as social inclusion, disability, well-being and social participation of PWDs. The data was extracted from the selected studies and analyzed through thematic synthesis by identifying themes social participation, social acceptance, social isolation, access to employment, perceived social support, and well-being. The systematic review illustrates the importance of developing inclusive strategies that address structural barriers, common perceptions and support systems along with the identification of limitations in existing literature.

Keywords: Social Inclusion; Persons With Disabilities; Social Wellbeing; Social Support; Disability Studies

Background

Social inclusion is defined as having the ability to fully participate in society. It generates feelings of belonging (Jones, 2010). Many studies examined the effects of physical inclusion on the well-being among persons with disabilities (PWDs). Inclusion usually includes accessibility to services as an important factor. It also includes transportation systems, and community facilities (Mwaka et al., 2024). Physical inclusion has shown that it is an important factor in determining whether individuals with disabilities are able to fully participate in their communities. The relationship between social inclusion and well-being was explored by Patel et al. (2020). They demonstrated that persons with disabilities experience high levels of self-esteem when they feel included socially. In



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addition, Emerson and Hatton (2014) showed that perceived acceptance and inclusion contribute positively to the psychological well-being among PWDs.

Kang and Dubois (2025) reported that discrimination, stigma, and social exclusion are significant predictors of psychological sufferings i.e., depression and anxiety. Therefore, it has been illustrated that social inclusion is an important factor for the psychological and social wellbeing of PWDs. Social inclusion affects the lives of PWDs. Social inclusion had been found to be a vital aspect of ensuring the needs of persons with disabilities are met (Ahmad et al., 2022). Therefore, creating systems and processes to ensure social inclusion will help to create healthy, productive members of society.

Providing opportunities for social interaction and creating conducive systems are necessary for the well-being of the PWDs. These systems are required to ensure inclusion (Ntinda & Reed, 2024). These are also essential components to support the physical and psychological wellbeing of persons with disabilities. PWDs often face numerous challenges and barriers (Rimmer et al., 2004). These barriers limit their ability to interact with others. Options for social interaction may provide them with additional opportunities to develop relationships (Martin, 2013). Resultantly, they become involved in their communities. The most successful approaches involve developing systems and processes that allow PWDs to participate in mainstream society (Noreau et al., 2015). These approaches often require modifications to physical space and the development of peer-to-peer interactions. In addition, changes to societal norms and expectations are also inevitable for PWDs. Various methods can be used individually and collectively to promote the physical and psychological wellbeing of PWDs (McKenna, 2025). By synthesizing global and regional studies while using systematic review of literature approach, this review aims to explore the relationship between social inclusion and well-being of PWDs. The review also aims to highlight the dimensions of social inclusion and well-being along with exploring the gaps in existing literature in term of relationship between social inclusion and well-being.

Methodology

This review follows established methodologies for conducting reviews of literature. The review included studies from social sciences conducted among disabled population. The review was designed to provide an objective and thorough assessment of the association between social inclusion and wellbeing among PWDs. A multi-step approach was used in the review which includes developing a search strategy and defining inclusion and exclusion criteria. The review explained how relevant information was extracted from each included study. The researcher critically appraised the evidence and used thematic analysis to analyze the results.

Search Strategy

An exploratory and structured search was conducted to include both local and global research related to social inclusion and wellbeing among persons with disability (PWDs). Multiple data bases included Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar etc., were used to enhance the inclusion of diverse studies in the review. Boolean operators were utilized to strategically locate the most relevant studies. These search operators include social inclusion, disability, persons with disabilities, well-being, social participation, psychological well-being, physical well-being, and social isolation. The searches were conducted on studies published from 2024 through 2026. This time duration was selected to include the most current studies available on the topic under investigation. Additionally, snowballing techniques were applied to the reference



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sections of key studies to discover other relevant studies. This approach was used for those studies which were not directly available via the preliminary electronic database search. Grey literature, including government documents, non-governmental organization (NGO) reports, and policy briefs were not included in the search strategy. This method allowed for a comprehensive synthesis of both empirical evidences published in scientific journals.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In the present review, the researcher used special inclusion and exclusion criteria to be selected suitable studies. Only those studies were included in the review which fulfilled the required criteria. First, the researcher selected only those studies which were conducted among PWDs either physical, sensor, intellectual, or developmental from 2024 to 2026. Secondly, those studies which included interventions, programs and policies to enhance social inclusion were added in the present study. Those studies in which outcome measurement was well-being or any of its dimensions or factor were included in the review.

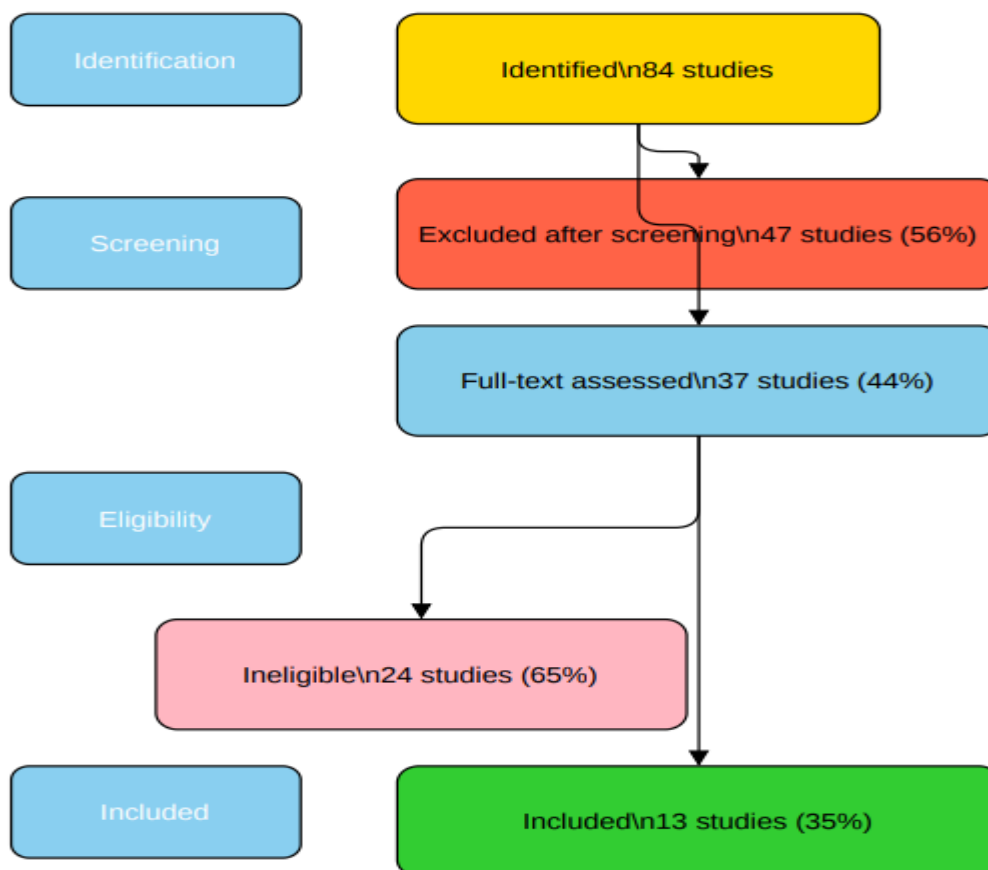


Figure 1 Flow diagram of included studies in the review

The researcher also included quantitative, qualitative and mixed method studies which were in English language and published. On the other hand, those studies were excluded from review which were in other languages. In addition, gray literature in the form of reports, policy briefs, police documents etc. were also excluded from the review. Those studies which were published before 2024 were also excluded from the review.



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Data Extraction and Critical Appraisal

A standardized data extraction form was developed by the researcher. The aim was to systematically record key information from each study. Key information from the study including names of authors, years of publications, country/region in which study was conducted, study designs, sample size of the study, types of disability among the PWDs, outcome measures and key findings and conclusions of the study. In the process of review, independent reviewers were asked to review to ensure the scientific rigor in review process. For ensuring the rigor, the researcher used the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). This tool is used to evaluate all types of empirical research studies. The tool assesses many factors which are linked with validity, reliability and appropriateness of the research design and potential bias in the study. This tool can also assess those studies which involve interventions to evaluate those studies based upon their effect size use of control and reliability of the outcome.

Data Synthesis and Analysis

A total of six themes were identified from the data extracted from the studies used in the review. These themes identify previously established dimensions of social inclusion and well-being. Major themes include social participation, social acceptance, social isolation, employment access, perceived social support and wellbeing. Social participation includes participation in community, education activities and civic engagement. Dimensions of social acceptance include peer attitude and stigma reduction of PWDs. The result also indicated that social isolation includes dimensions, i.e., the impact of exclusionary experiences on mental health. The dimensions of employment access include vocational programs and labor markets that are accessible for PWDs. The findings indicated institutional, peer and family network support as dimensions of perceived social support. However, the major dimensions of well-being include social, physical, psychological and economic well-being. Themes were extracted from the findings of the studies included in the review. For identifying themes, different codes were extracted from the qualitative finding. These themes were compared by region, disability types and strategies to promote social inclusion. This comparison allowed the identification of different patterns, contextual factors and gaps in the existing literature. These holistic strategies enabled the synthesis of evidences globally and highlight differences across the regions for PWDs.

Results

A total of 13 studies across the globe were included in the review on the topics of social inclusion and well-being particularly related to PWDs. The themes identified in the review were social participation, social acceptance, social isolation, employment access, perceived social support and wellbeing. Two major dimensions, i.e., psychological and physical well-being.

Social Participation

Social inclusion through participation is an important part of enhancing the well-being of PWDs. It includes their involvement in education, community activities, civic engagement and social support. There is evidence, inclusive social participation has a positive impact on the overall well-being of PWDs (Al Harthy et al., 2025; Cid et al., 2025). For example, Rahman and Javed (2025) reported, PWDs having access to community-based organizations (CBOs), peer support groups, and inclusive public places had much greater life satisfaction (Rehman&Javed, 2025). They also report higher



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level of independence than those without such opportunities (Ferrucci&Monteduro, 2025). In addition, interventions have also shown similar results. Dialogical literary gatherings (DLGs) in Pakistan facilitated social contact and improved emotional well-being of caregivers of children with disabilities (Lakhani et al., 2024). DLGs promoted reciprocal support and decreased internalized stigma (Lakhani et al., 2024). Social participation was predictive of long-term increases in well-being (Kumar, 2025). Adults with disabilities that participate in formal volunteering experience increased civic engagement. They also experienced higher self-efficacy even when informal social contacts were diminished (Masilo, 2025; Mprah et al., 2025).

Social Acceptance

Social acceptance has been associated with better well-being outcomes among PWDs. Inclusion into disability specific sports clubs, arts and group activities led to decreased levels of psychological distress including anxiety and depression. It also increased self-esteem of PWDs (Al Harthy et al., 2025). While, negative community attitudes, stereotypes and pity-based perceptions contribute to limited participation among PWDs (Ahmed & Batool, 2025). On the other hand, inclusive public campaigns and awareness programs contributed to increased acceptance and feelings of belonging for PWDs (Rehman&Javed, 2025; Singh, 2025). Normative beliefs were significant in predicting acceptance. Subjective social norms were reported to be predictors of willingness to support persons with mobility impairment (Kumar, 2025).

Social Isolation

Social isolation is still an obstacle to well-being of PWDs. Both structural and interpersonal forms of stigma were directly linked to psychological distress, anxiety, and depression (Singh, 2025). Moreover, inclusion in the education system through inclusive schools and programs in the community helped to reduce social isolation in PWDs (Lakhani et al., 2024; Masilo, 2025). These inclusive programs had positive effects on their mental health. It reduced their feeling of helplessness and hopelessness (Cid et al., 2025). Studies also indicated that PWDs also experienced perceived isolation when they perceived limited access to services (Mprah et al., 2025). Despite betterment across society, there were many persons with disability who continue to experience higher levels of loneliness as compared to general populations (Kumar, 2025).

Employment Access

The availability of work is one of the most important factors determining social inclusion. Economic self-sufficiency enhanced psychological well-being among PWDs (Cid et al., 2025; Kumar, 2025). Persons with disabilities encounter structural obstacles to employment. These include physical barriers at their workplace, discrimination during the recruitment process and inadequate support mechanisms (Omar et al., 2024). PWDs also experienced insufficient economic facilities (Masilo, 2025). Companies with inclusive recruitment policy provide a variety of accommodations to assist the employability of persons with disabilities and demonstrated better employee retention and productivity rates in contrast to others (Masilo, 2025). Although PWDs secure employment, many of them were relegated to precarious or instrumental positions. These limitations decreased their potential for job stability and career advancement (Kumar, 2025). Resultantly, they experienced limiting social inclusion. Employment-related accessibility interventions have resulted in successful incorporation into the workforce. These results were mainly linked to individuals with mobility impairments as compared



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to other types of disabilities (Masilo, 2025; Rehman&Javed, 2025). The results suggested that employment inclusion was beneficial not only economically but also psychologically and socially. Resultantly, they experienced and increased level of overall participation (Ferrucci&Monteduro, 2025; Cid et al., 2025).

Perceived Social Support

Perceived social support from family, peers and institutions plays a major role as mediator between social inclusion and wellbeing of PWDs (Billah et al., 2025; Lakhani et al., 2024). Higher levels of perceived social support increased community participation. It also increased psychological resilience among PWDs across the globe (Billah et al., 2025; Cid et al., 2025). The relationship between community participation and access to services. They found that interpersonal interaction with emotional/practical support had a direct contribution to psychological well-being among PWDs (Lakhani et al., 2024; Mprah et al., 2025). Perceived social support moderated negative effects of exclusion on quality of life. These results highlighted protective function of social networks for PWDs (Kumar, 2025; Ferrucci&Monteduro, 2025).

Well-being among PWDs

Two major dimensions of well-being were identified in the review including psychological and physical well-being. However, some studies also reported association of social inclusion on social and economic well-being.

Psychological well-being

The degree of an individual's social inclusion had a major influence on the level of psychological well-being. The quality of an individual's emotional state, overall sense of satisfaction in life, self-esteem and amount of distress experienced were identified as the dimensions of psychological well-being which were directly influenced by social inclusion (Cid et al., 2025; Kumar, 2025). Participating in community life, having inclusive educational experiences and having access to government services positively enhanced psychological well-being among PWDs (Mensah et al., 2025). Both inclusive education programs and community-based programs in urban areas resulted in increased self-esteem. These programs also decreased social isolation and enhanced emotional well-being (Khan & Fatima, 2025). Contrarily, self-stigma has a negative effect on well-being. However, they also noted that levels of "trait mindfulness" mediated this relationship between self-stigma and well-being (Singh, 2025; Kumar, 2025).

Table 1

Description of the studies included in review

Author(s)	Year	Country	Objective	Key Findings
Ferrucci&Monteduro	2025	Italy	Examine caregiving practices, social capital, and well-being among families of persons with disabilities	Caregiving is continuous; strong family bonding social capital, but limited bridging social capital; emotional recognition provides symbolic rewards; need for community support and public infrastructure.
Billah et al.	2025	Pakistan	Analyze empowerment and well-being of persons	Spiritual and ethical frameworks enhance mental well-being, reduce stigma, and foster inclusive



Table 1

Description of the studies included in review

Author(s)	Year	Country	Objective	Key Findings
Rana, Lee & Ojo	2026	Pakistan & Kenya	with disabilities using Islamic teachings Compare inclusive education supports for students with disabilities	livelihoods. Pakistani students prioritize physical facility support; Kenyan students prioritize policies and advocacy; highlights need for holistic institutional support.
Patel	2025	India	Examine social exclusion processes for disabled students in higher education	Exclusion is multi-layered (cultural, institutional, attitudinal); students face barriers in access, recognition, and participation; need for policy and cultural interventions. Barriers include lack of skills, employer biases, high accommodation costs, and limited inclusive policies; policy enforcement and training recommended.
Omar et al.	2024	Malaysia	Identify employer-perceived barriers to hiring persons with disabilities	Group work (self-help/peer groups) fosters economic inclusion, decision-making, and empowerment for marginalized populations.
Masilo	2025	South Africa	Situate social group work as an intervention for economic inclusion of women, youth, and persons with disabilities	Stigmatization and discrimination limit social participation; awareness programs and supportive environments are needed.
Rehman&Javed	2025	Pakistan	Explore attitudinal barriers faced by persons with physical disabilities	Social inclusion positively correlates with mental health and reduces anxiety/depression; sports clubs can enhance social and psychological well-being.
Al Harthy, Ahmed & Awed	2025	Saudi Arabia	Assess social inclusion and its association with mental health in sports clubs	Harmonious passion improves self-determined motivation, predicting higher life satisfaction and positive affect; sport participation enhances well-being.
Cid et al.	2025	Portugal	Analyze effects of passion and motivation on subjective well-being of elite athletes with disabilities	Caregivers face challenges in accessing support, managing psychosocial needs, and maintaining family dynamics;
Mprah et al.	2025	Ghana	Explore caregivers' experiences supporting deaf adults with mental	



Table 1

Description of the studies included in review

Author(s)	Year	Country	Objective	Key Findings
Singh	2025	India	health disorders Explore lived experiences of psycho-emotional disablism among adults with physical disabilities	need for specialized caregiving guidelines. Structural and social barriers cause emotional distress; participants attempt to “pass” as non-disabled, which is exhausting; highlights psycho-emotional barriers.
Lakhani et al.	2024	Pakistan	Explore informal social support for families of children with intellectual disabilities	Family and religious support is crucial; gaps in communication and institutional support increase stress and mental health risks.
Kumar	2025	India	Investigate relationship between disability identity acceptance and psychological well-being	Higher disability identity acceptance predicts better self-esteem, resilience, and life satisfaction; social support mediates stigma effects.

Physical well-being

Physical well-being is defined in term of mobility, energy level, and overall health. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that physical well-being influences directly an individual’s ability to participate in the community (Singh, 2025; Ferrucci&Monteduro, 2025). It also affected access to inclusive environments among PWDs (Rehman&Javed, 2025). Physical well-being hadalso positive influence on access to other rehabilitation related items such as assistive devices and equipment, recreation opportunities and transportation (Billah et al., 2025; Lakhani et al., 2024). A significant improvement in the overall quality of life, emotional well-being, and social inclusion when they were provided by inclusive activities across their community (Biagini et al., 2020; Diz et al., 2024). In addition, regular participation in moderate amounts of physical activity reduces the amount of stress associated with disability. It also promoted long-term physical and mental health of PWDs (Cid et al., 2025).

Table 2

Domains of the studies

Author(s)	Year	Country	Domain
Ferrucci&Monteduro	2025	Italy	Social Participation
Lakhani et al.	2024	Pakistan	Social Participation
Al Harthy, Ahmed & Awed	2025	Saudi Arabia	Social Acceptance
Rehman&Javed	2025	Pakistan	Social Acceptance
Singh	2025	India	Social Isolation
Masilo	2025	South Africa	Employment Access
Omar et al.	2024	Malaysia	Employment Access
Billah et al.	2025	Pakistan	Perceived Social Support
Mprah et al.	2025	Ghana	Perceived Social Support



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Patel	2025	India	Support Psychological Wellbeing
Kumar	2025	India	Psychological Wellbeing
Cid et al.	2025	Portugal	Psychological Wellbeing
Billah et al.	2025	Pakistan	Physical Wellbeing
Singh	2025	India	Physical Wellbeing

Conclusion

The review demonstrates the significant effect of social inclusion on the multidimensional well-being among PWDs. Evidence collected globally and regionally demonstrates that social inclusion via inclusive education, social participation, social networks, and equitable employment significantly improve all aspects of the well-being of PWDs. Participation in social situations increases an individual's sense of autonomy, life satisfaction and self-efficacy. Whereas being accepted by society reduces stigma and has been shown to increase self-esteem and mental health. Social support perceived from family and friends' acts as a protective factor when dealing with feelings of isolation or exclusion. It leads to increased levels of resilience and emotional stability. Access to meaningful employment increases economic independence. It also provides individuals with a greater level of social status. It also supports their overall level of societal integration. Although there are many benefits associated with creating an environment that allows for social inclusion, many obstacles continue to exist. These include attitudes that view a particular group as inferior, lack of accessible infrastructure, failure to enforce policies intended to create social inclusion and barriers created by culture and socioeconomic status, especially in developing economies. Long term, multi-dimensional research designs are required to assess various types of social inclusion interventions within different cultural, economic and infrastructure environments.

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