

Acknowledging the Disabled in the Covid-19 Response: A study on the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka

Isuru A. Rathnayake¹

Abstract

This study intends to investigate the psychological impact of the crippling consequences caused by the Covid-19 pandemic upon people with disabilities in Sri Lanka. The global spread of the Covid-19 pandemic forced people to renegotiate their traditional ways of living to match the demands of the health authorities to contain its spread. Such changes plunged almost all the societies into chaos, the impact of which was heavily felt by people with disabilities, one of the most vulnerable social groups. Studies on the experiences of people with disabilities in Sri Lanka have primarily focused on its socio-economic impact, creating a lacuna in research that explores its psychological impact. Six semi-structured interviews have been carried out with persons with disabilities along with a review of legislations/policy documents that relate to the rights of the target group to gather data for this study, which have been analysed through a theoretical framework that draws on Mike Oliver's social model of disability, Martha A. Fineman's vulnerability theory and Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality.

¹ Department of English, University of Kelaniya
Isurur_2019@kln.ac.lk

Date accepted - 08/02/2024

It examines the impact of prolonged lockdowns, use of online platforms, false rumors regarding health risks and the impact of empathy upon self-worth to understand the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon the disabled, thereby addressing the said research gap. It argues for the importance of a rights-based policy framework that integrates disability and other sectors, improving communicational and technical skills and taking measures to prepare these individuals to face crisis situations in helping them to assimilate to these new realities.

Keywords: Covid-19, persons with disabilities, psychological impact, rights-based approach, policymaking, Sri Lanka.

INTRODUCTION

The present study is an attempt to investigate the psychological impact of the crippling consequences caused by the Covid-19 pandemic upon persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka. The constant renegotiation of traditional ways of living to adhere to the demands made by the pandemic and the efforts to contain its spread, have plunged almost all societies into chaos, leaving people in a perpetual state of uncertainty. A direct outcome of this new normal was the toll on the psychological stability of people, resulting in conditions of anxiety and depression caused by the feelings such as fear and stress which are regarded as the immediate responses to this chaotic situation. Thus, studies on the Covid-19 pandemic engaged with interrogating its psychological impact raising the

importance of perceiving the pandemic through a psychological viewpoint, while paying special attention to the vulnerable social groups including the unemployed, pregnant women, illegal migrants and persons with disabilities (Saladino, et al., 2020; Patabendige et al., 2020).

This study takes as its point of departure the argument that, sufficient attention has not been paid to the psychological impact the Covid-19 pandemic may have had upon people with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Studies such as Perera et al. (2020) have laid ground for an important discussion on the socio-economic challenges persons with disabilities have encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic while drawing links to its cultural and gendered aspects. However, there is a dearth in the research that explores the psychological impact the new normal may have had upon people with disabilities which becomes significant in understanding their life during the pandemic. Therefore, this study serves to expand the existing knowledge about the experiences of persons with disabilities who live in low and middle income countries, and the psychological impact the chaotic conditions such as pandemics may have upon them, a research area which hitherto have been not been in the lime light of the studies that concern the disabled community of Sri Lanka.

This study approaches the said argument through a rights-based approach, arguing that the right to receive psychological assistant is an equal right, if not a higher necessity for people with disabilities, specially under trying times such as the Covid-19 pandemic. As

pointed out by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020), “While the COVID-19 pandemic threatens all members of society, persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted due to attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that are reproduced in the COVID-19 response”. For instance, prolonged lockdown periods along with the restrictions that have been imposed to prevent the spread of the virus may deprive the target group the access to familiar support networks upon which they have been relying in their day-to-day activities. Accessing essential services such as health care might become challenging, specially due to the lack of access or knowledge to handle online platforms through which such services were delivered. In the meantime, the lack of knowledge regarding the impact the Corona virus may or may not have upon their health conditions, together with the misleading rumours that were circulated during the pandemic may cause conditions of anxiety among people with disabilities. Thus, it can be argued that, these crippling circumstances led to what Perera et al. (2020) called a “doubling of the chaos” where people with disabilities were brought to face new barriers which aggravated their experiences.

Viewed in this light, the present study aims to discuss the psychological impact such crippling circumstances may have upon people with disabilities in Sri Lanka. It argues that, these situations may negatively affect the psychological stability of persons who have either physical or psychological disabilities that could culminate in tragic outcomes such as suicides, the evidence for

which were seen during the last few months. In the meantime, it also examines the significant role empathy can play during such chaotic situations while also contending for the harmful impact it could have had upon the target group. Therefore, it intends to highlight the growing need for the sectors such as health, education and social welfare to be more prepared and equipped to respond to the unique requirements of people with disabilities, one of the most important minority groups in the country. The ability to respond effectively and swiftly will become crucial to avoid causing unwarranted psychological challenges while assisting these people to adopt to the new realities.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Methodology and sampling technique

This study uses interviews as its primary research method. Six semi-structured interviews have been carried out with persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka in order to understand the psychological impact the unprecedented changes caused by the new normal may have had upon them. The research sample consists of three interviewees with disabilities who are actively engaged in providing welfare to people with disabilities in Sri Lanka. These interviewees are treated as key stakeholders who have experience in working with persons with disabilities. Furthermore, three individuals with disabilities representing undergraduates, government employees and the self-employed have also been interviewed to understand their experiences of life during the pandemic. The research sample

also has a balanced gender representation. Thus, this research sample has been selected based “on the basis of their relevance” to my research questions, theoretical position, analytical practice and most importantly the argument or explanation” that I am developing (Mason, 2002, p.12). This view on sampling which is known as “Theoretical Sampling” in qualitative research would help examine a selected number of interviewees in-depth, whose views and opinions are analysed to achieve the objectives of the study.

A review of the policy frameworks that relate to the protection of the rights of people with disabilities in Sri Lanka has also been conducted to provide an insight into the legal acknowledgement of the target group. This becomes crucial in observing people with disabilities, and their right to receive fair adjustments when grappling with the crippling consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic through a rights-based approach instead of a needs-based approach. Furthermore, it plays a significant role in realizing the remedial measures that can be adopted to improve the experiences of people with disabilities during such chaotic situations, as a means of improving their psychological stability which becomes paramount to their social well-being.

2.2 Theoretical framework of the study

2.2.1 Social model of disability

This study analyses the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon people with disabilities based on a theoretical

framework that draws on Mike Oliver's social model of disability as its cornerstone. According to this model, disability is recognised as "the outcome of social arrangements that work to restrict the activities of people with impairments through the erection of social barriers" (Thomas, 2002, as cited in Shakespeare, 2006, p.40). The social model of disability is a reactionary movement against the biomedical model of disability, which recognizes disability as "the inevitable and tragic consequence of being impaired" (Thomas, 2002, as cited in Shakespeare, 2006, p.40). It detaches disability from a physiological understanding and recasts it as a "natural" or inherent aspect of society that can and should be accommodated. The present study employs the social model as the cornerstone of its theoretical framework because it allows the interrogation of Sri Lanka's response to the Covid-19 pandemic through the perspective of a person with disabilities.

2.2.2 Vulnerability, intersectionality and a rights-based approach to policymaking

In her article 'The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition' published in the Yale Journal of Law & Feminism in 2008, Martha A. Fineman introduces vulnerability theory which critiqued formal equality in social welfare policymaking. She argued that, as disadvantages of social groups differ, merely applying the same legal rules to those groups often produces unequal results" (Kohnt, 2014, p.4). Thus she contends that achieving substantial equality in policymaking becomes crucial

in realizing governments' responsibility "to respond affirmatively" to vulnerabilities of different social fractions, "while ensuring that all people have equal access to the societal institutions (Kohnt, 2014, p.4). This view of Fineman is nuanced by using Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality which allows us to examine "the relation between systems of oppression which construct our multiple identities and our social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege" (Carastathis, 2014, p.306). According to her, people do not live within rigid compartments of gender, disability or ethnicity, but they intersect to create systems of oppression that work to marginalise the disadvantaged.

By drawing on the above theoretical viewpoints this study argues that people with disabilities occupy a unique position in society that demands special and sustained attention, a condition that is aggravated by the chaos caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Myriad changes society had to undergo when adopting to the new realities that were forced upon people who did not anticipate such developments led to crippling outcomes, the impact of which was heavily felt by the marginal groups such as the disabled. Therefore, this research argues that, acknowledging the unique requirements of these individuals would become crucial in achieving what Fineman calls a sustaining equality in policymaking, which may reduce the harm such crippling circumstances like Covid-19 could cause for people with disabilities in Sri Lanka. It would also help to acknowledge disability in a wider spectrum by acknowledging the influences of other social factors such as gender, ethnicity and

religion. Furthermore, achieving and sustaining equality will also be important for situating their unique requirements within a rights-based approach rather than a needs-based approach in policymaking, resulting in greater acknowledgement of people with disabilities in legal frameworks. Such attempts will contribute to the renegotiation of disability in Sri Lanka, not as an “impairment” but as an outcome of rigid social arrangements.

2.3 Limitations of the study.

A key limitation of this study is the vastness of the research area. Being a heavily under-researched interest area, there is a huge lacuna in studies that address the psychological impact of Covid-19 upon people with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the researcher recognizes the need for conducting more targeted research that concern different aspects of the disabled community in Sri Lanka. The researcher also acknowledges his insider position as a visually impaired person. While acknowledging the importance of his experiences of living during the Covid-19 pandemic, he also ensures that it would not affect the conclusions of this study by using multiple research methods and theoretical viewpoints.

3. Understanding Disability during the Covid-19 Pandemic

3.1 Persons with Disabilities in Sri Lanka

According to the 2012 census of the Department of Census and

Statistics, there are 1,617,924 persons with some form of physical or psychological disability, amounting to 8.7% of the total population of Sri Lanka (Department of Census and Statistics, n.d., p.5). As indicated by the 2001 census of the Department of Census, there have been 274711 persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka by the 31st of December 2000 (Census of Population, n.d., p.1). Compared to the census of 2001, a significant growth of people with disabilities can be observed by the year 2012.ⁱ

In light of the above data, it becomes evident that there is a growing community of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Therefore, these individuals constitute an important minority group in the country, a group that is characterised by its ethnic, economic, cultural and religious diversity. Therefore, it can be justified that, acknowledging people with disabilities in the processes of policymaking and policy implementing becomes an important as well as challenging responsibility of the country. Both the government and private sectors should be sensitive to the diverse needs of these people in paving the way to a more inclusive future for Sri Lanka.

3.2- people with disabilities within the Sri Lankan legal framework

As suggested above, people with disabilities can be recognised as an emerging minority group in Sri Lanka whose rights should be given due respect. Therefore, this section aims to outline the

legislative frameworks that are available in Sri Lanka to protect their rights while highlighting some pertinent issues relating to them that prevent authorities taking prompt and effective actions in crisis situations like Covid-19.

According to Article 12.1 of the 1978 constitution of the Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka, “All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law” (The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2015, p.3). Expanding on the above article, articles 12.2 and 12.3 assert the following.

Article 12.2: “No citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any one of such grounds.”

Article 12.3: “No person shall, on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex or any one of such grounds, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to shops, public restaurants, hotels, places of public entertainment and places of public worship of his own religion” (The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2015, p.3)

In light of the above articles it becomes clear that, disability has not been explicitly recognised as a criterion which could lead to socio-political demarcations in the society. The only provision that was made in recognizing the basic rights of people with disabilities can be found in the article 12.4 which states:

“Nothing in this article shall prevent special provision being made, by law, subordinate legislation or executive action, for the

advancement of women, children or disabled persons” (The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2015, p.3).

A close examination of the above constitutional closures substantiates the fact that Sri Lanka has paid only a cursory attention to the rights of people with disabilities. Although the current constitution has undergone 20 amendments within the course of 43 years, such closures remain unchanged to date, whereas the number of persons with disabilities have shown a steady growth.

The *Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (1996)* is recognised as the main legislation pertaining to the rights of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka (Perera et al., 2020). Complementing this act, the National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka was introduced by the Ministry of Social Welfare as an attempt to “Respond to the requests of the Disability Movement” in Sri Lanka (Ministry of Social Welfare, 2003, p.5). The National Action Plan for Disability 2013 proposed by the Ministry of Social Services along with the National Human Rights Action Plans of 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 also have made provisions to acknowledge the rights of people with disabilities. Furthermore, Sri Lanka is a signatory of the “Salamanca Statement and Framework for inclusive education” (1994), introduced by the United Nations Educational, scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) with the aim of realizing equal learning opportunities for the students with special needs. Sri Lanka also has ratified the United Nations

convention on the rights of disabled persons (2008) although it has been the 162nd country to ratify it after eight years from its introduction (Perera et al., 2020, p.115).

The information provided above may provide a promising picture about the legislative acknowledgement of the rights of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka. However, as suggested by Peiris-John et al. (2013) legal and policy development relating to disability in Sri Lanka is still in its infancy, and the State's responsibility towards persons with disabilities remains weak. For instance, most of the policy measures that have been adopted by the local policy documents manifest the influence of a bio-medical or rehabilitative understanding of disability² which becomes detrimental to the promotion of a rights-based approach in policymaking. In contrast, international conventions such as the United Nations convention on the rights of disabled persons observes disability through socio-cultural, economic and political frameworks which creates space for a nuanced understanding of disability.

Unsatisfactory implementation of the above-mentioned policies has also been recognised as a key issue that hinders the realization of the rights of people with disabilities in Sri Lanka (Samararatne & Soldatic, 2015). Critics have argued that such policy measures have failed to trickle down to the lower strata of the society, pointing to a significant loophole in the policy implementation process. A direct outcome of such inconsistencies is the inability to respond

Refer to the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2 for a detailed explanation.

swiftly and effectively to the requirements of people with disabilities which becomes crucial in crisis situations, given that failure to do so may result in dire circumstances.

3.3 Covid-19 Pandemic in Sri Lanka.

On the 11th of March 2020 Sri Lanka reported its first locally transmitted Corona patient which led to the imposing of an island wide curfew on the 20th of March 2020. This curfew lasted until the 11th of May 2020, when it was lifted after 51 days under restrictions as a measure to gradually recommence public and private services. However, Sri Lanka was hit by a second wave of Corona by October 2020, resulting in an exponential growth of the Corona patients and Corona-related deaths. Although the government did not impose an island-wide curfew in battling the new wave of Corona, it introduced lockdown measures in the areas which were recognised as high risk zones.

As discussed above, the Sri Lankan government has implemented police curfew and other lockdown measures in its response to the spread of the Corona virus in the country. One of the key objectives of such measures was to minimise the social interaction between people as a means of containing the spread of the virus. However, an inevitable outcome of such measures was the disruption of familiar support networks upon which people with disabilities were relying on to fulfill their daily requirements. Thus, people with disabilities experienced heightened levels of social isolation which had an adverse impact on the socio-psychological well-being of the

target group.

Governmental initiatives to facilitate essential services while containing the spread of the virus appear to be negligent of the specific requirements of people with disabilities (Perera et al., 2020). This study argues that the failure to include such vulnerable groups in the Covid-19 response may lead to the marginalisation of the already sidelined social groups, adversely impacting the socio-psychological equilibrium of such individuals.

4. Psychological impact of Covid-19 upon People with disabilities

The purpose of this section is to reinterpret the experiences of people with disabilities in Sri Lanka during the pandemic through a psychological viewpoint. It aims to discuss some of the remedial measures that can be adopted in helping such individuals to overcome the unique challenges they face, thereby improving their psycho-social experiences. Furthermore, it intends to present the changes the disabled community has been forced to adopt during the pandemic in a new light, arguing for the potential of such changes to provide alternatives to overcome barriers these individuals traditionally face in their day to day life.

A key barrier people with disabilities encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic was the intermittent lockdown measures. As pointed out by interviewee (1), interviewee (2) and interviewee (3), These lockdown periods have deprived the people with disabilities access

to their familiar support networks upon which they were relying on to carry out their day-to-day activities: “they might require the help of their friends, work colleagues and other support parties to complete their work”, asserted Interviewee (1). The loss of spatial agency because of being imprisoned in one location with less or no freedom to move created a challenging situation for people with disabilities. Thus, they were left to grapple with the changes caused by the pandemic alone, which led to frustration over the challenging task of reshaping their life styles to match the new normal and the anxiety due to the fear of not been able to meeting deadlines, protecting livelihood etc. Sharing experiences of learning during the pandemic interviewee (4) who was an undergraduate asserts, “We had to use new technologies to learn. With no training and sometimes nobody who is aware of such technologies it was a daunting task for not only me but for many undergraduates with disabilities”.

Recording similar experiences, both interviewee (5) and interviewee (6) pointed out that they felt anxious about the outcomes these lockdowns may have upon their livelihood, citing that no assurance was given to them regarding any assistance in a case of adverse effect by any authority.

Viewed in this light, it becomes clear that people with disabilities have experienced “the detrimental outcomes” of prolonged social isolation especially due to the vulnerable position they occupy in the society, resulting in heightened levels of frustration and anxiety. As pointed out by Interviewee (2), The sudden shift to online

platforms as the means of continuing life without “any preparation what-so-ever” pushed these individuals to a precarious condition. In the meantime, the fear of being left behind if they fail to adapt to these new platforms intensified this precariousness, leaving in its wake a group of individuals who were agitated and frustrated.

Explaining their views on using online platforms, interviewees highlighted the crippling outcomes resulted by the infrastructural, financial and technological challenges that were caused by the new normal. Interviewee (3) contends,

“Most of the individuals used such platforms for the first time in their life. Some even didn’t have the means to buy laptops or smart phones. Worsening that was the poor internet connections”.

Thus, it highlights the intersecting socio-economic and political forces that define disability, the importance of which is heavily felt in crisis situations like Covid-19. It emphasizes the complexity of the experiences of people with disabilities during such crisis situations, by arguing that as a social fraction that was "already among the most excluded in our societies before the COVID-19 pandemic, they along with their families” face the debilitating outcomes of it the most. Such crippling circumstances coupled with the unavailability of a formal space to voice their concerns create a feeling of rejection, a feeling that they have not been given due recognition as citizens of the country. This feeling may negatively impact the psychological stability of these individuals resulting in low self-esteem and self-confidence. Thus, it highlights the need for the authorities to swiftly intervene in recognizing and addressing

the specific needs of people with disabilities in Sri Lanka, ensuring that they have not been left behind in our response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The impact Covid-19 may or may not have upon the health of people with disabilities also demands attention in this discussion. Due to their physical or psychological impairments, people with disabilities are regarded as been in constant need of health care and supervision when compared to persons without disabilities (The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020; The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). Therefore, the inability to continue their regular medical routines may lead to a state of fear and anxiety among the target group. In the meantime, the dissemination of false rumours about the health impact the virus may specifically have upon people with disabilities have the potential to cause unwarranted fear and anxiety among the community. Interviewee (6) points out in this regard,

“They say that this virus has come to reduce the vulnerable groups like elders and the disabled. These things might not be true but they are scary”.

The dissemination of such rumours specially through the social media platforms leads not only to the heightened levels of anxiety among the target group, but also to the further marginalization of the persons of disabilities in the society. As pointed out by interviewee (1) such “debilitating practices weaken the self-esteem of these individuals” that becomes detrimental to the empowerment

of them to feel as equal citizens of the society. They serve to create a gulf between people with disabilities and the general society, a challenge that may impede the attempts of building an inclusive society in Sri Lanka. In light of the above points, it becomes clear that there is a potent necessity for the government and other authorities to swiftly intervene to recognize people with disabilities as an integral fraction of society in their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it points to the importance of sensitising the authorities to the unique requirements of these individuals, thereby promoting them to act swiftly and effectively in crisis situations.

It is also important to discuss the role empathy can play in facing such immobilising circumstances like the Covid-19 pandemic. As defined by Saladino, Algeri and Auriemma (2020, p.2) empathy can be understood “as a form of identification in the psychological and physiological states of others”. Expanding on this definition Decety and Ickes (2009, p.12) argue that, empathy entails “knowing another person’s internal state” and the ability to adopt that person’s posture or “Matching their Neural Responses”. Viewed in this light, empathy may play an important role in re-evaluating our response to crisis situations like Covid-19.

As highlighted by all the interviewees, the informal support networks that they had forged with their neighbours or relatives during the time of the pandemic have become the main sources of assistance to them in grappling with the immobilising outcomes of the pandemic.

“They can feel what we undergo” (interviewee (5)).

In the meantime, as pointed out by interviewee (1), such networks may also work to heighten the sense of vulnerability these individuals may feel during crisis situations. Thus, such relationships may therefore work to diminish their self-worth which may be detrimental in the long run despite the undeniable importance of those relationships in facing the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, it hints at the importance of relocating the discussion on facilitating people with disabilities during crisis situations in a rights-based approach where they do not have to “ask for what they really deserve” (interviewee (2), 2021). Prioritising a rights-based approach would in turn be crucial in building the self-confidence of people with disabilities, empowering them to articulate their requirements, specially in crisis situations. It will also play a significant role in driving forward the disability movement in Sri Lanka, realizing a more inclusive society in the long run.

It is also important to note that, the new realities which are been forced upon people by the Covid-19 pandemic have become instrumental in helping people with disabilities to overcome some of the traditional challenges that they face in their day to day life. As contended by interviewee (4),

“Online lectures have eliminated the need for me to go to physical lecture rooms which became a big advantage I had never anticipated” (interviewee (4), 2021).

Replacing physical meetings through online meetings, financial transactions via online payments are some of the unforeseen advantages people with disabilities experienced during the Covid-

19 pandemic. These advantages have helped to overcome the target group from some of the traditional barriers they faced in their lives. Thus, it highlights the potential of renegotiating the pandemic as a push towards new possibilities that could be explored in empowering people with disabilities. As argued by the interviewee (1), one crucial disadvantage in realizing the benefits of such developments relates to the poor technical and communicational skills the target group may have. Thus, it highlights the need for more strategised policy interventions to strengthen the Sri Lankan disabled community and help them reap the unforeseen benefits of these new realities.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to interrogate the psychological impact the new realities brought forth by the Covid-19 pandemic may have upon people with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Drawing on the data gathered by six interviews and a review of legislative accommodations of the target group, this study has discussed the impact of prolonged lockdowns, sudden shift to online platforms, health related rumours and empathy during the pandemic times, while arguing for the potential of reinterpreting the pandemic as a way of overcoming the traditional barriers persons with disabilities may experience. Therefore, in its conclusion this study intends to recommend the following to achieve a more inclusive response to the Covid-19 pandemic and finding the way forward for the

disabled community in Sri Lanka within these new realities.

First, it highlights The importance of an integrated policymaking approach where other sectors collaborate with disability experts when responding to crisis situations. Such collaborations become crucial in identifying the specific challenges faced by the people with disabilities beforehand, and to respond to them at the level of drafting policies. MOreover, this study emphasises the need to rethink policies concerning people with disabilities through a rights-based approach. Integrating disability experts in the process of policymaking becomes an important step in such a renegotiation of policy frameworks. Furthermore, promoting a right-based approach in policy development may also help to elevate the recognition people with disabilities enjoy in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, the need for improving technical and communicational skills of people with disabilities stands as another key observation of this study. As observed during the interviews, insufficient technical awareness became a key challenge people with disabilities had to face during the pandemic. It had a detrimental impact on their ability to swiftly adapt to the new normal, which in turn demand us to rethink the specific steps that could be taken to strength these individuals to face crisis situations.

This study also highlights the importance of raising awareness regarding the vital role psychological well-being can play among people with disabilities. Thus, it argues for the need to Educate and encourage people with disabilities to reach for assistance regarding psychological health as an important step in facing similar crisis

situations in future.. One other step in ensuring the psychological well-being of vulnerable communities such as persons with disabilities would be to improve awareness of pandemic and its health risks, which in turn may help to avoid false rumours regarding its health impact. Viewed in this light, it becomes clear that there is a potent necessity to rethink our response to the Covid-19 pandemic through a disability perspective. Such a re-interpretation of our response to crisis situations such as Covid-19 may enable us to realise a more holistic and inclusive approach which is strong enough to acknowledge the different social groups in our society.

References

- Carastathis, A. (2014). The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory. *Philosophy Compass*. 9(5), 306 – 314.
<https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/phe3.12129>
- Department of Census and Statistics. (n.d.). *Disability in Sri Lanka*.
http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Population/PopHouStat_Disability
- Department of Census and Statistics. (n.d.) *Census of Population and Housing 2001 - Sri Lanka Disabled persons by Type of Disability, Sex, Rate per 10000*.
<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Resource/en/Population/PopH>

ouStat/PDF/Disability/p11d1DisabledpersonsbySexandDis
trict.pdf

Department of Census and Statistics. (2013). *Sri Lanka – Information on Disabled Persons, Census of Population and Housing* 2001.

http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Population/PopHouStat_Disability

Decety, J., & Ickes, W. (Eds.). (2009). *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*. MIT Press.

Kohnt, N. (2014). *Vulnerability Theory and the Role of Government*.

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/72837901.pdf>

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Researching*. Sage Publications.

Ministry of Social Welfare. (2003). *National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka*.

<http://67.199.83.28/doc/NatPolicyDisabilitySep2003srilanka1.pdf>

Patabendige, M., Gamage, M., Weerasinghe M. & Jayawardane, A. (2020). Psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among pregnant women in Sri Lanka.

International Journal of Obstetrics.

<https://obgyn.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ijgo.13335>

Peiris-John, R. L., S. Attanayake, L. Daskon, A. R. Wickremasinghe, and S. Ameratunga. 2013. “Disability Studies in Sri Lanka: Priorities for Action.” *Disability and Rehabilitation* 36 (20): 1742–1748.

doi:10.3109/09638288.2013.864714.

Perera, B., Kandasami, N. & Soldatic, K. (2020). Disability Exclusion during the Coronavirus Pandemic(COVID-19) in Sri Lanka. *University of Colombo Review (Series III)*, 1(1), 47–59. <https://ucr.cmb.ac.lk/wp-content/uploads/UCR-Disability-Exclusion.pdf>

Saladino, V. Algeri, D. & Auriemma, V. (2020). *The Psychological and Social Impact of Covid-19: New Perspectives of Well-Being*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577684>

Samararatne, D.W. & Soldatic, K. (2015). Inclusions and exclusions in law: experiences of women with disability in rural and war-affected areas in Sri Lanka. *Disability & Society*, 30(5), 759–772. [Ahttps://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09687599.2015.1021760](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09687599.2015.1021760) >

Shakespeare, T. (2006). *Disability Rights and Wrongs*. Routledge.
The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. (2015). Parliament Secretariat.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). (2020). *COVID-19 REPORTS Persons with disabilities and coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Latin America and the Caribbean: status and guidelines*. <https://www.cepal.org/publications/45492-persons-d...>

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner. (2020). *Covid-19 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/COVID-19_and_The_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities.pdf

ⁱ It should be noted that the 2001 census does not account for “Disabled individuals” who were “living other than homelessly or in non-housing units (Sri Lanka - INFORMATION ON DISABLED PERSONS, Census of Population and Housing 2001, 2013, p.2). Furthermore, the ethnic war that ensued in Sri Lanka until 2009 also contributed to the increased number of persons with disabilities in the country.