

Global Disability

Empowering Children of all Abilities



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KEYWORDS

- Disability • Child development • Neurodevelopmental disability
- Developmental stimulation

KEY POINTS

- Great disparities exist between children with and without disabilities with regard to education, health resources, participation in community life, and sometimes even access to basic necessities such as food and water.
- Children who receive early screening and diagnosis of neurodevelopmental disabilities have greater opportunities for treatment, therapies and learning opportunities.
- Early developmental screening of children is critical to identify those who will benefit from intervention.
- We sincerely believe there is reason for optimism. Around the world, children of all ability levels are increasingly included in health, education and social systems.
- Care for children with unique health care needs is improving and interdisciplinary teams are working together to care for all children.

GLOBAL BURDEN

Early childhood is the most effective time to prepare children to reach their full potential. The returns on investment in early child development cannot be matched across populations.”^{1–3} Studies estimate that more than 250 million children do not reach

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their developmental potential owing to nutrition, infection, lack of developmental stimulation, and early life adverse events.⁴ Worldwide, disability is more likely to be acquired than congenital, and much owing to the influences of poverty. About 10% to 25% of the world's population lives with a disability, making this the largest minority group in the world.^{5,6} People with disabilities are most likely to reside in the lowest resources settings where risk factors for stress, inequity, and lack of medical care or education may be very high.⁶ Poverty often contributes to disabling conditions, and disabling conditions may contribute to people living in poverty. The World Bank estimates that people with disabilities make up 1 in 5 of the poorest people in the world—those living on less than a dollar per day, who lack basic provisions such as clean water, clothing, and shelter.⁷

A limited number of children with disabilities are able to attend school around the world.⁸ Even fewer have access to high-quality early childhood care and intervention. Research is clear that early interventions provided before the school years can result in remarkable outcomes in cognitive, social and behavioral, and academic domains before children enter school.⁹ Universal education, particularly early childhood education, has not yet been adopted and limited resources often dictate that only children who are healthy, mobile, and ready to learn are able to attend school. Great disparities exist between children with and without disabilities with regard to the type of education, resources provided, participation in community life, and sometimes even access to basic necessities such as food and water.^{5,6,10} In addition, access to medical care may also be limited for people with disabilities. Owing to stigma, cost, physical barriers, and lack of education for medical providers, the children most in need of health care may be the ones least able to access it.⁷ Unfortunately, children and adults with disabilities are much more likely to be victims of violence, abuse, and neglect than those without disabilities.^{11–14}

Lack of access to education for school-age children with disabilities not only affects their overall development and well-being, but it often prevents them from entering the workforce and maintaining stable employment.¹⁵ Without adequate employment, people with disabilities are relegated to a poor quality of life and continued cycle of poverty. Around the world, children with disabling conditions may be hidden from daily society owing to stigma, discrimination, and lack of education about causes and treatments of disabilities.

Unless disabled people are brought into the development mainstream, it will be impossible to cut poverty in half by 2015 or to give every girl and boy the chance to achieve a primary education by the same date - goals agreed to by more than 180 world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000.

—James Wolfensohn

DEFINITIONS

When discussing childhood disability, it can be helpful to define a few terms. Disability may be used as an overarching term to describe motor, sensory, cognitive, or emotional differences that present challenges during activities of daily living. Disabilities are often thought of as conditions that limit movement, senses, or activities. However, disability is not only a physical or biological construct; it is the interaction between medical conditions, development, and the environment. Some children are born with an impairment or medical diagnosis affecting health and function, whereas others acquire disability as a result of injuries, poor nutrition, adverse experiences, or illness.¹⁶ Some children have a single impairment and others may have multiple

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