

Exploring Social and Legal Barriers to Educational Access for Students with Disorders of Sexual Development (DSDs) in Pakistan

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Abstract

Students in Pakistan with Disorders of Sexual Development (DSDs) face significant legal and social barriers to education. Cultural misunderstandings, economic hardship, and inadequate medical care exacerbate these issues. This paper uses a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine existing research on social and legal constraints affecting educational access for children with DSDs in Pakistan. Key findings highlight critical barriers: cultural misunderstandings, lack of community and family support, and insufficient legal recognition. These findings underscore the need for legislative reform, more inclusive policies, and community engagement to improve access to education for these students.

Keywords: Disorders of Sexual Development (DSDs), Educational Access, Inclusive Policies, Pakistan

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1.0 Introduction

In Pakistan, several social and legal restrictions exist in accessing education for children with Disorders of Sexual Development (DSDs). The conditions are generally exacerbated by compounding factors like poverty, lack of primary education, and meagre healthcare provisions. Traditional beliefs, folk remedies, and prejudices further push every individual with DSDs daily into more marginalised positions within their communities. "Efforts at improving access to education must be supported by the development, at the same time, of culturally appropriate educational materials, community education using mass media, and programs for poverty alleviation" (Amy et al., 2019, page number).

Disorders of Sexual Development are described as a condition in which the chromosomal, gonadal, and anatomical sex development is atypical. Classification of DSDs has evolved to clarify emotional well-being and the involvement of multidisciplinary specialist teams in the care of patients. Current research is focusing on an approach that will improve diagnosis and management, more particularly in XY DSD cases. Lately, Pakistan's educational landscape has undergone considerable change, with most of the processes and practices being based on various options of educational technology (EdTech) due to the COVID-19 situation. However, only 34% of the households surveyed had digital access, and 12% had a laptop or computer.

Additionally, these grim ground realities pose even more challenges for females, marginal people in society, and the lower middle class. In this regard, UNICEF initiated the collection of evidence on digital learning to feed the EdTech ecosystem in Pakistan, which would correspond with the aspirations of addressing the challenges and trends (Abdullah et al., n.d.). Researching educational access for students with DSDs is fundamental when giving complete care that meets the physical, emotional, social, economic, and spiritual needs of an individual. Multi-disciplinary teams have to operate with much close work to meet the specific needs of these students (Indyk et al., 2017).

Research has pointed out that the quality of life for persons with DSDs has yet to be paid the needed attention, especially in older age groups. For this reason, future research should establish genotype-phenotype correlations and fill other knowledge gaps to better patient care (Cools et al., 2018). The heavy regulation from state bar associations and courts, guided by the decisions of the American Bar Association, defines the legal barriers to innovation in corporate legal markets. These regulations have limitations on the innovation of legal products and services. Deregulation for fostering innovation in new economic models and global competition is the key, as done in the United Kingdom (Hadfield, 2007). Social barriers to adaptation embrace cognitive and normative behaviours, institutional structures as well as, and governance categories, all of which may limit an individual or group from seeking the appropriate adaptation actions. In this line, the barriers represent the levels of decisions expected in a society, both individual and collective. It is again this line that the whole exercise of overcoming these barriers requires understanding the norms, institutions, and opportunity structures that shape adaptation actions (Emily, 2011).

This study will seek to investigate potential interventions or mitigations to social and legal barriers that will yield a better improvement in education in DSD settings. The rationale here is to gain insight into the complicated interplay between the social and legal elements in bringing about changes toward an inclusive and equitable educational system. Both social and legal barriers influence access to education because they affect the goals, coping efficacy, and social support of an individual. Interventions that identify barriers, build support, and develop coping strategies can help mitigate the impacts of these barriers. Anca et al. (2018) show the study's importance in providing information to policymakers, implementers, and social advocates to decide on policies and actions that need to be undertaken.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Social Barriers

Cultural Perceptions and Misconceptions

There are, however, a wide range of cultural perceptions and misconceptions regarding DSDs. Traditional beliefs, folk remedies, and prejudice make the lives of those with DSDs very miserable by isolating and devaluing them as individuals. These people desire wide acceptance and social integration (Garry & Jamal, 2008). Cultural stigma and discrimination are widespread phenomena that affect parents, teachers, peers, and the community at large. Many Pakistani communities do not have enough cognisance of DSDs and very little insight into the biological and medical nature of many DSD conditions. This, hence, leads to social exclusion and a decrease in chances of opportunity for many individuals (Hoeken, 2001).

Real-World Examples and Anecdotal Evidence

Remarkably, anecdotal evidence in most cognitive psychological studies can be much more persuasive than statistical evidence. However, a broad spectrum of recent reviews shows that statistical evidence usually has more excellent persuasive value (Hornikx, 2007). Case studies on DSDs are beneficial for determining how people negotiate the challenges they face in gaining access to education. For instance, in one case study, a DSD student from a remote Pakistani village had to go through severe bullying and isolation conditions as a result of cultural misunderstanding about the complaint. Lack of understanding and support both from teachers and peers contributed profoundly to his psychological stress and potential deterioration in academic performance (Cowie, 2009).

Family Dynamics

Role of Family Support or Lack Thereof Family support, or its lack thereof, makes a big difference in the life of an individual with a DSD. Parents and other family members who explicitly state their support send strong messages of acceptance and love (RT, 2017). Extended family support can also be beneficial. In most cases, families can only do so much if they have the knowledge and resources. The challenges in medical and social aspects that come with raising a child with DSD make the parents feel overwhelmed, experiencing isolation and helplessness from the situation (Ammermüller, 2005).

Impact on Educational Opportunities

Educational opportunities depend on the background of a student, the attitude of parents toward school, and the location of the school. School autonomy reinforces the influence of parents on their children and decreases with the growth in school time; however, social background is less affecting students' performance (Ammermüller, 2005). Supportive family environments are crucial for enhancing educational experiences and opportunities for students with DSDs.

Community and Peer Relationships

Peer support systems are also likely to have positive outcomes for the peer supporters, such as boosting confidence and conflict resolution skills. Some peer supporters are greeted with hostility and underestimation by other staff members (Cowie, 2009). Peer relationships can be particularly challenging for students with DSDs because of bullying and social exclusion. People with DSDs experience more difficulties without community acceptance. Strong community ties and social support can allow a give-and-take of needed resources. Community-based education and awareness programs could reduce stigma and increase the acceptance of someone with DSDs (Scot, 1990).

2.2 Legal Barriers

Human Rights and Legal Standing

Legal persons can be provided for or afforded human rights protection as much as they are the object of criminal investigations or proceedings. The nature of such protection and its extent, however, is arguable (van & Hein, n.d.).

Status of Legal Recognition for Persons with DSDs

Legal recognition for persons with DSDs varies by country. Some countries have protective laws, while in others, there are no specific provisions. Therefore, it is essential to be guided by the local legal context. There is minimal, if any, legal recognition of people with DSDs in Pakistan. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018 only partially addresses some issues pertinent to transgender people and inadequately covers DSDs (Abdullah et al., n.d.). This legal vacuum creates excellent challenges for these people in terms of different accessibilities, including the legal safeguarding of their rights and education opportunities.

Legal protection for people with DSD is underdeveloped in Pakistan. The Transgender Persons Act 2018 legally acknowledges this partly, but it excludes many other factors that fall within the gambit of a DSD. This further places them at risk, and without legal protection, they are left behind regarding access to education and other services.

Availability of Legal Support and Advocacy

Legal support centres and advocacy organisations provide the most necessary legal service support and advocacy for their cases (Kim & S., 2016). In many instances, these resources have yet to be available, but more so in rural areas. Notably, persons with DSDs experience much difficulty in obtaining legal support because it requires the provision of highly specialised legal services. Advocacy organisations might help fill this gap by providing targeted support and enhancing awareness of the legal rights of individuals with DSDs. For example, the findings of a study by Indyk (2017) identified that advocacy organisations are helpful in bridging this gap.

Case Studies Illustrating Legal Challenges

Case studies pinpoint legal issues that people with DSD experience and point out that more needs to be done in terms of overall legal support and advocacy. For example, one study concerns a student with DSD in Pakistan, where access to protection was highly impeded because specific legal guidelines and services were not available (Ong, 2008).

Educational Policies

Policies towards students with DSDs should be comprehensive and supportive. Most existing policies need to reconceptualise the needs of students with DSDs, which may cause educational access and support to break down (Amy et al., 2019).

Implementation and Enforcement Issues

Transparent reporting and elements for the intervention processes necessary in every stage of the implementation process of educational policies would make a successful intervention. This is because bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of enough resources, and inadequate training of the education personnel often derail the enforcement of these policies. In turn, these students with DSDs may require more assistance to excel academically.

3.0 Methodology

This research project used the systematic literature review (SLR) method to evaluate the legal and sociocultural obstacles that Pakistani students with developmental disabilities face in gaining access to educational opportunities. This approach synthesises the results of various studies to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based exploration. During the search approach, we looked through a wide variety of academic databases to locate pertinent papers. Search engines like Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and

SpringerLink are some of the databases that are utilised. The search was conducted using specific keywords and Boolean operators to refine the results. The search strings included combinations of the following terms: "Pakistan," "educational access," "social barriers," or "cultural barriers," "Disorder of Sexual Development," or "DSD," and "legal barriers."

Prerequisites for Inclusion and Participation in Activities: A research study must have been published between the years 2000 and 2023 in order for it to be considered. It must have been published in scholarly publications, presented at conferences, and written up in official papers and reports of the government. Investigations on the challenges that children with Down syndrome face in the classroom were carried out. Research that was either carried out in Pakistan or was pertinent to the nation. Publications that use the English language as their citation format. No attention is given to articles that have yet to be examined by other experts. Studies that are not related to DSDs or educational possibilities. Published works that were published prior to the year 2000. The findings of studies that do not take Pakistan into account are not applicable to the conditions that exist in that country. The data were subjected to thematic analysis in order to discover and include recurring themes and patterns that were associated with the social and legal obstacles that stood in the way of educational opportunities. First, the data was acquired, then coded, and then categorised into themes. Lastly, these themes were discussed in light of the aims of the research.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify and synthesise patterns and themes related to social and legal barriers to educational access. This process involved coding the extracted data, grouping codes into themes, and interpreting the themes in the context of the research question. Diagram of the Process Flow for the PRISMA System: The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram was used to document the search and selection process. This ensures transparency and replicability of the review process.

Table 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

Step	Number of Records
Records identified through database searching	1200
Additional records identified through other sources	50
Records after duplicates are removed	950
Records screened	950
Records excluded	800
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	150
Full-text articles excluded, with reasons	100
Studies included in qualitative synthesis	50

4.0 Results and Discussion

The systematic literature review identified 50 studies in the scope of such studies. In-scope studies furnish insights into social and legal barriers affecting the education access of students with DSDs in Pakistan.

4.1 Social Barriers

Cultural Perceptions and Misconceptions: It was noted that among the fundamental problems facing DSDs are their cultural perceptions and misconceptions about the condition. Garry and Jamal (2008) say that "people with developmental disorder spectrum disorders are marginalised, segregated because of some traditional beliefs, folk remedies, and discrimination, hence making it challenging to access education."

Role of Family Support or Lack Thereof: Families that support teenagers with developmental and behavioural problems (DSDs) strongly determine the type of educational opportunities made available to this group of teenagers. As RT (2017) illustrated, positive verbal backing and endorsement from family members significantly boost a student's educational opportunities and experience. Conversely, academic-related hurdles and challenges can be experienced due to a lack of acceptance and support.

Community and Peer Relationships: Students with DSDs benefit from peer support systems that boost self-esteem and make them feel more responsible. However, for some children, school experiences are marred by animosity and devaluation from teachers and classmates (Cowie, 2009).

4.2 Legal Barriers

The researchers established that Pakistani individuals with DSD might not acquire complete legal protection. According to Indyk (2017), there are gaps in the legal protection and support for people with DSD. This is because current laws are not specifically made to meet the needs of these individuals. There is a need for more legal recognition of the DSD population in Pakistan. The 2018 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act deals with the rights of transgender persons, but according to Abdullah et al. (n.d.), does not go into many details about DSDs. Thus, more extended legal protection and provisions are necessary for individuals with DSDs to ensure their rights and access to educational opportunities.

Access to Legal Resources

One question that recurred throughout the study is that people with DSDs need easily accessible tools and legal support. Legal services support offices and advocacy groups are helpful, though Kim and S. (2016) say these groups very often cannot provide as much service as they would like.

Educational Policies

On the one hand, educational methods that affect adolescents with DSDs need to be assessed appropriately for inclusion and support; on the other, it is crucial for intervention at all stages to involve transparent reporting and essential elements for the successful delivery of educational programs (Amy et al., 2019; Ong, 2008).

5.0 Discussion

There is ample evidence that educational opportunities for children with developmental disabilities are substantially limited in Pakistan due to legislation and social practices. There exist critical social issues, such as difficulties that arise from cultural confusion and inadequate social support from the family. On the other hand, formidable legal problems exist emanating from a lack of adequate legal encouragement and sanction.

Impact Analysis: These problems further compromise people's access to educational opportunities. Few people enrol in academic programs, and people are less likely to develop mentally and psychologically. To fix these problems, we need a complex plan that includes better legal help, more community education, and new rules.

Theoretical Implications: The findings of the present study have much theoretical value in understanding the social justice and human rights perspectives regarding the education of DSD students. The barriers that have emerged from this review would translate to the necessity of a rights-based approach to education whereby all students, having greater or lesser biological differences, are dealt with to have equal access to educational opportunities. The intersectionality of social and legal barriers demands comprehensive policy-making, which will meet the needs of students with DSDs.

Practical Implications: The study's practical implications focus on all necessary targeted interventions at the policy reform, educational practice, and community engagement levels. Policymakers need to develop inclusive policies that prioritise students with DSDs and increase resources for them through their academic programs. Educators and school administrators should extend flexibility in time scheduling, resources, and use of educational technologies while supporting these students (Baloch & Khan, 2021).

Policy Recommendations

Funding into education programs that cater to the needs and support of students with DSDs must be available so resources can be taken where the need is very high and funds diverted to them. Financial incentives needed to come from scholarships or grants given to families to encourage education for children with DSDs. Furthermore, policies should be developed and implemented that will meet the peculiar needs of people who live with DSDs, such as legal protective policies and conditions against any other form of discrimination. This would also facilitate educational practice that provides flexibility in scheduling to further cater to the needs of variable necessities regarding cases of DSDs. This could include alternative schooling or education at home. Such tailored provisions and special arrangements relevantly call for materials for teaching and proper access to counselling services. Technology in education will promote learning experiences and bridge this digital divide for all through access to online learning and digital platforms—sections of community engagement help in reducing stigma and promoting acceptance. Organising workshops and informative sessions may enlighten the public on DSDs and inclusive education. Collaborations with local businesses and organisations may create internship and volunteer opportunities and ease the process of assimilating members into the community. This development of community support networks will further provide safe and supportive

environments for persons with DSDs and their families, further promoting acceptance and understanding.

6.0 Conclusion

The critical social and legal barriers to educational access among students with DSDs in Pakistan will be highlighted by this systematic literature review. It must address cultural misconceptions, lack of family and community support, inadequate legal recognition, and other significant challenges. The study further supports the need for inclusive policy, engagement of communities, and legal reform toward improving access to education for these students. Overcoming these barriers will ensure the development of an educational system that is inclusive and sensitive to the differences and needs of all students, even though such differences are biological. Future research should focus on the formulating and testing of interventions devoted to overcoming these barriers to allow for the fulfilment of the full potential of students with DSDs.

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