

*Intellectual
Disability,
Spirituality,
Religion and
Social Inclusion
across Cultures*

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OUTLINE

- Introduction
 - Intellectual Disability
 - Spirituality
 - Religion
- Disability in Religious Traditions
- Concept of ID in various Religions
 - Buddhism
 - Hinduism
 - Islam
 - Judeochristian tradition
- Spirituality of PWID
- Social Inclusion in various Religions
- A brief note on the African continent
- Conclusion



INTRODUCTION

- Intellectual disability is an umbrella term for different conditions characterised by deficits in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour with onset in the developmental period.
- Religion and Spirituality are a central part of many cultures and they play an important role in the lives of many including those with intellectual disability.
- Both terms have overlapping meanings are often used interchangeably but not necessarily the same

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

“A distinctive, potentially creative, and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions.”

“[The] grounding of faith and basis of life to which one regards oneself as being bound for one’s survival, a rope that ties one to God and to other believers.”

DISABILITY IN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

- Diversity. Complexity. Contradictions.
- Perceptions about aetiologies: adultery, witchcraft, juju, etc.
- Attitudes about PWID: special, sacred, bewitched, hopeless, helpless, and harmless.
- Myths impact beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.
- Religion and spirituality are important to people with disabilities in many societies.
- Essentially, spiritual beliefs may greatly influence perceptions of people with disabilities, of themselves, others, and the world.

SPIRITUALITY OF PWID

- Spirituality is not dependent on intellectual functioning, eloquence or powers of expression
 - “Spirituality, in its original and more basic reality, is presence. It is a dialogue, being in relationship with meaningful dimensions without any word being spoken, before any rationalisation, of what is being experienced by the person, takes place.”(Gangemi et al., 2010)
 - “...faith and spirituality are not intellectual concepts, but relational realities [and] a person’s spiritual life should not be evaluated according to intellectual criteria” (Swinton 1997)
- PWID expressed a strong and clear sense of religious/spiritual identity (Turner et al., 2004; Shogren and Rye 2005)
- Belief in God or a higher power gave PWID a sense of security, love and acceptance (Swinton 2002).
- Participants also reported feelings of personal fulfilment through participating in religious services. (Turner et al., 2004)
- Participation in religious/spiritual activities helped PWID to understand moral issues and to remain calm in stressful situations (Shogren & Rye, 2005)



CONCEPT OF ID IN VARIOUS RELIGIONS

BUDDHISM

- Many schools of thought within Buddhism, hence difficult to categorically state what Buddhism says or teaches about disability in general or intellectual disability.
- Karma and rebirth are two central elements of Buddhist thought; based on these, some have said that to be born with a disability is very widely considered a negative condition, indicating 'bad karma'.
- Others argue that implying an obvious and linear causality between karma and disability is extremely insufficient and inadequate.
- Drawing on the Jathaka tales of the Buddha and the story of Pantaka, Bejoian (2006) shows that disability and enlightenment are not mutually exclusive.

HINDUISM

- 'Hinduism' is not the original name of an Indian religion but a nineteenth-century British invention for those who were not Muslims or Christians but followed the teachings of a large body of books called the 'Vedas'.
- In Hinduism, there is no exact word, for the concept of intellectual disability (99).
- Gabel (2004) described a Hindi word, *mundh buddhi*, although no consensus as to its meaning in her research, one prominent meaning of this term suggests PWID are only lazy.
- Hindu texts often understand disabilities as karmic phenomena, but these can be positive (Miles 1995)

ISLAM

- Islamic principles promote the concept of egalitarianism and emphasize the importance of protection of the underprivileged (including the sick and disabled).
- Descriptive terms used for specific disabilities in the Q'uran and the Sunnah, are linguistically neutral (Wentz 2018)
- Disabilities are a normal and acceptable part of humanity
- Disabilities are morally neutral, that is, neither a blessing nor a punishment (Bazna and Hatab, 2005)

JUDEOCHRISTIAN

- The Bible or the Talmud, do not particularly refer to intellectual disability or neurodevelopmental conditions.
- Fool used throughout the Bible is theological, and ethical, not a description of one's IQ
- The Halakhah differentiates between people who have developed normally and those defined as simple-minded (shoteh; plural: shotim)
- Another Hebrew word peti (loosely translated to English as fool), which describes someone of very low intelligence and impaired function.

- Disability often described as existential realities, metaphors or punishments.
- Writings of the North African Fathers (Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Lactantius) promoted the view that all people are created in the image of God and consequently are of equal worth and dignity.
- St Thomas Aquinas, described human intelligence is derivative and the intellectually disabled are qualitatively like all of humanity. Nature vs degree.
- Later, divergent views emerged: while some thought disability was a punishment from God, others believed that those with disabilities were demon possessed, or more pious.



*SOCIAL INCLUSION IN
VARIOUS RELIGIONS*

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN BUDDHISM

- Buddhism as Psychotherapy: 'Jathaka' stories may be useful in psychotherapeutic interventions.
- Rituals in Buddhism: PWID have access to Buddhist temples with important socioreligious icons and can participate in rituals.
- Astrology and intellectual disability
- Traditional Healers
- Human Rights

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN HINDUISM

- Positive representations of disability throughout Indian heritage.
- Age, or acculturation in a more inclusive society, could impact attitudes towards people with intellectual disability.
- Relationship between social inclusion, rural communities and services for PWID.

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN ISLAM

- The mandatory practice of Zakat
- Scarce research findings however Islamic principles and relevant historical examples establish rights and privileges for PWID.
- al Walid ibn Abd al Malik, a caliph in Damascus, Syria, set up the first care home for people with intellectual disability and allocated caregivers.
- Umar ibn Abdul Aziz facilitated the payment of carers for those with disabilities
- National policies outlining the responsibility of both government and the citizens to respect the human rights of people with special needs.

- Lack of mechanism to ensure these principles are implemented.
- Immoral, often illegal and religiously prohibited practices often coexist.
- Examples include occasional reports of infanticide, not registering disabled children at birth, abuse, violent 'cures', and ostracism.
- Experience of MUSLIMS in low-income and high-income settings.
- Universal education with inclusive national policies for PWID
- Practical challenges such as lack of specialist material, skills, trained staff, staffing ratios, etc.
- Cultural beliefs about the profitability of educating FWID.
- Stigma, traditional practices in Muslim countries, and barriers faced by migrant Muslims in Western countries hamper true social inclusion of MWID

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN JUDEOCHRISTIAN TRADITION

- Contradictory rabbinic interpretations,
- Jewish law vs everyday reality,
- Jesus: rabbi, healer, saviour, God.
- medieval Christian beliefs, monasticism,
- L'Arche, Causeway PROSPECTS, Accessible Bible Project.
- Church was viewed by PWID as a place where they were welcomed, recognized, and where they gained a sense of belonging (Minton & Dodder, 2003).
- A lack of deeper relationships between PWID and church members, and little evidence of full inclusion in religious organizations and communities (Sango and Forrester-Jones 2017).
- Autistic people can face negative attitudes within church contexts, researchers face barriers to funding (Waldock and Sango, 2023)

CONCLUSION

- UBUNTU-ethic: 'I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am'.
- Spirituality is a basic human need and a necessary component of both mental and physical health.
- Beware REDUCTIONISM!
- Facilitate access and inclusion.

REFERENCES


Chapter

Intellectual disability, spirituality, religion, and social inclusion across cultures

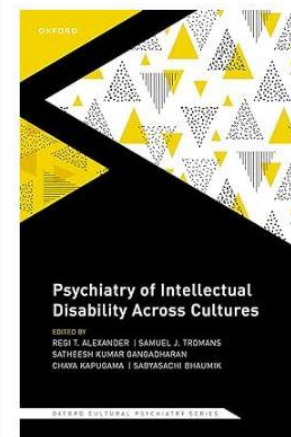
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Intellectual disability is a lifelong condition involving deficits in both intellectual and adaptive functioning. Individuals with intellectual disability experience a greater burden of co-occurring physical and mental illness compared to the general population, and often need a significant degree of support from healthcare professionals and carers, as well as family and friends. Additionally, their lives can be greatly influenced both positively and negatively by the cultures in which they exist, including societal attitudes, belief systems and norms.

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