

Reforming Education: The Pathway to Equality for Women With Disabilities

Gender inequality and the disadvantages faced by individuals with disabilities have persisted for decades, but with the progression of society, education, especially higher education, has become an integral tool for reducing disparities and helping women and the disabled community achieve success in the work field and society in general. However, the intersection of the two marginalized identities equates to an increase in hindrances and discrimination that women with disabilities face in their pursuit of higher education. These barriers exist worldwide where women with disabilities face social barriers like discrimination from staff members and peers, and systematic barriers like difficulty in gaining accommodations. At the core of the issue, gender discrimination and sexism are the most fundamental obstacles. To improve the accessibility of higher education for women with disabilities, the current situation demands comprehensive and universal regulations from policies to implementations. The effort to close the gap between women with disabilities and higher education is also an important step in advocating for gender equality universally for knowledge is the key to awareness and awareness the start to change.

Women With Disabilities in Higher Education

An estimated [1.3 billion people](#), 16 percent of the world's population experience significant disability, and the percentage of women with disabilities stands at [19 percent](#) compared to [12 percent](#) for men. Despite taking up a greater proportion, the employment rate for women with disabilities of [20 percent](#) is conversely and significantly lower compared to all other groups. The fact that people with a tertiary degree have the [highest employment rates](#) on average proves that higher education is essential to improving job opportunities and social recognition. However, when the global literacy rate for women with disabilities is only [1 percent](#), it is imperative to minimize the barriers for these women in pursuing higher education to best assist them in adapting and gaining financial and social independence.

While [80 percent](#) of people with disabilities reside in developing countries, the issue of discrimination and exclusion of women with disabilities in higher education is evident across the globe, whether the nation is developed or not. In the United Kingdom, a developed nation, women with disabilities in higher education still face significant social and systematic obstacles. Social barriers are rooted in stigma towards disabilities and women. Students with disabilities experience [negative attitudes](#) toward their disabilities from their peers and staff members. Common forms of this hostility are the view of disabilities being troublesome, the assumption that accommodations are unfair, and skepticism regarding the validity of disabilities. This dismissive attitude causes students with disabilities to fear disclosing their condition and request accommodations, consequently leading to an increased possibility of low academic performance and social engagement.

On top of the hindrances female students with disabilities face because of their disability, there is a double discrimination they receive for their female identity. The systems and practices of academia favor those who fit the archetype of the [“rational man”](#) and reward attributes associated with a certain type of hegemonic masculinity. Independence is the central aspect of gaining academic status, and with the [still-existing notion](#) of the female gender being less prone to qualities of critical thinking and reason, female students—with a desire to prove themselves of being independent—are discouraged from asking for assistance. As a result, women with disabilities in higher education experience double the discrimination and barriers to gaining academic success.

At the same time, there are significant systematic barriers towards women with disabilities in academia. In order to gain accommodations to suit their needs, students are required to provide proof of their disability and then go through an application process. This bureaucratic process in the UK is lengthy and [time-consuming](#), causing extra labor for students with disabilities in addition to the physical and mental stress they are already experiencing. Their female identity adds another layer of hardship in this process because of [medical sexism](#). Medical stereotypes make female patients more likely to be assumed to exaggerate symptoms and the severity of their conditions. These systematic barriers demonstrate inherently ableist qualities, shifting the responsibility of providing equal access from the institution to students with disabilities, relying almost completely on the individual student’s self-advocacy.

Over time, as a [result](#) of these social and systematic barriers, female undergraduate students with disabilities are less likely to gain their intended award and more likely to be unable to complete their studies within the expected timeframe in the UK. At the postgraduate-taught level, women with disabilities gain honors at graduation at a lower rate even when they outperform men with disabilities. Whilst the UK is a highly developed country, a great number of obstacles for women with disabilities in higher education are still evident.

Extending Beyond the UK and Collective Actions

Apart from these social and systematic obstacles, the more severe gender discrimination in developing countries hinders women with disabilities from obtaining higher education in an even more fundamental way. For instance, in India, women tend to have a low social status as the victims of [discrimination and oppression](#) for decades, and women with disabilities are excluded and discriminated against even further. Deeply influential sexist stereotypes deem it [unnecessary](#) for women to receive education compared to men, as women are expected to become [wives and mothers](#) while men are responsible for providing financial support. With deep-rooted stigma and more severe issues in accessibility, women with disabilities in developing countries face even more hardships in pursuing higher education.

The majority of the obstacles faced by women with disabilities in academia are universal, signifying the urgent need for action and change. A major issue at the core of the social barriers is the institutions’ [lack of training](#) and support of staff regarding how to treat female students

with disabilities and how to make teaching methods more accessible. With efficient training, faculty would [gain better knowledge](#) of challenges faced by women, recognize accommodations, and reduce stigma and hostility towards disabilities and women with disabilities. To minimize systematic barriers, it is essential to simplify and expedite bureaucratic processes for women with disabilities to request accommodations, as well as [implement and enforce](#) clear policies for accommodations. Although the issue of discrimination and obstacles for women with disabilities in academia has existed for decades, the issue remains unfixed because of the lack of strict and detailed national and international regulations mandating institutions' actions. With universal regulations on higher education institutions, women with disabilities' accessibility to higher education would be ensured. With support, women with disabilities would gain more opportunities and independence, minimizing the disadvantages they face for their identities as women and as members of the disabled community.

From a macro perspective, increasing accessibility for women with disabilities in academia is also another advancement in the bigger battle of fighting for gender equality overall. Women with disabilities are not the only players in this game; in fact, it takes the effort of everyone else, abled and disabled, men and women, individuals and institutions to together bring about positive changes. It is in the process of constructing a more equitable society that humans reembrace humanity.