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Quality of life of persons with disabilities in rural Tamil Nadu

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Abstract
The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize inclusion and equality, ensuring that persons with disabilities are not left behind in global development efforts. The present study examined the quality of life (QoL) of persons with disabilities in selected panchayats of Athoor block, Tamil Nadu, and explored the influence of socio-demographic factors. A total of 101 respondents were surveyed to gather information on their socio-demographic factors. Standardized tools were used to assess quality of life, and statistical analyses, including t-tests and ANOVA.

The findings revealed that age significantly influenced quality of life, with younger and older respondents showing variations in QoL scores. In contrast, factors such as gender, marital status, type of disability, percentage of disability, and pension provision did not show a significant effect. The study also highlighted that the majority of respondents possessed UDID cards and received monthly pensions, indicating access to government support. The study assessed the quality of life (QoL) of persons with disabilities across various domains, which include physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment. Overall, the findings indicate that persons with disabilities have a moderate quality of life, with social relationships being the most impacted, highlighting the need for enhanced support and community involvement.

The study concluded that while most socio-demographic factors do not significantly affect quality of life, age plays a pivotal role in shaping the well-being of persons with disabilities, and social relationships being the most impacted. Based on the findings, it is recommended to implement age-specific interventions, improve awareness, accessibility of benefits, promote social inclusion and counselling programs to enhance overall quality of life.

Keywords: Quality of Life (QoL), socio-demographic factors, persons with disability, quality of life domains, sustainable development goals

Introduction

A person with a disability is someone who has a lasting physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that, together with environmental or social barriers, restricts their ability to participate fully and equally in society [1]. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, implemented in India, seeks to protect the dignity of individuals with disabilities and eliminate discrimination, replacing the earlier 1995 Persons with Disabilities Act [2].

Approximately 1.3 billion people worldwide live with significant disabilities, accounting for 16% of the global population, or roughly one in every six individuals [3]. According to the 2011 Census, 2.21% of India's population (26.8 million) had disabilities [4, 5]. More recent data from the 76th round of the National Sample Survey (2018) reported a slight increase to 2.3% [5].

Quality of life (QoL) describes the overall well-being of an individual or group, reflecting the positive and negative dimensions of their life at a particular point in time [6]. A disability alone doesn't define quality of life; it depends on self-perception, coping ability, social and environmental factors [7, 8].

Several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize disability inclusion. Goal 4 ensures equitable quality education and training access; Goal 8 promotes decent work for all; Goal 10 reduces inequalities; Goal 11 fosters accessible, inclusive cities; and Goal 17 calls for collection of data and ensure effective monitoring [9]. Making the SDGs inclusive and accessible for individuals with disabilities is a key priority [10].

The objective of the study was to assess the quality of life of persons with disability across physical health, psychological health, social relationship, and environment domains. The study also aimed to examine the influence of socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, type of disability, percentage of disability and pension benefits on the quality of life of persons with disabilities in the rural areas of Athoor block, Tamil Nadu.

This study holds considerable significance as it provides empirical insights into how socio-demographic characteristics affect the quality of life among persons with disabilities in rural settings. By focusing on the Athoor block of Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu, South India, the research contributes localized evidence that can inform region-specific policies and interventions aimed at improving living standards and promoting social participation. The findings will be valuable to policymakers, rehabilitation professionals, and community-based organizations in designing inclusive programs that address the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, this study adds to existing research by exploring how different socio-demographic factors influence the well-being of persons with disabilities, providing useful insights for future studies and policy development

Methodology

The study employed a purposive sampling technique, selecting five panchayats from Athoor block in Dindigul district from Tamil Nadu. The panchayats included in the study were Gandhigram, Kalikkampatti, Chettiyapatti, Thoppampatti, and Alamarathupatti. A total of 101 persons with disabilities (PwDs) aged 19 years and above who were willing to participate in the study were selected for interviews, comprising 48 males and 53 females. Among the Panchayats, Chettiyapatti had the highest number of respondents, totalling 38, followed by Thoppampatti with 30, Alamarathupatti **(**15**),** Gandhigram **(**14), and Kalikkampatti **(**4**).** The gender distribution was fairly balanced across the Panchayats, with some variations in the number of male and female respondents in each area. The WHOQOL-BREF scale was used to assess the quality of life. Data were collected using a structured interview with respondents in the selected panchayats of Athoor block. The data were carefully organized and analysed using SPSS software. The mean, standard deviation, t-test, and ANOVA (F-test) were used to analyse the data.

Results and Discussion

The section presented the findings of the study, focusing on the socio-demographic profile of persons with disabilities, the assessment of various domains of quality of life and the comparison of socio-demographic variables with overall quality of life. The results are analysed to identify patterns and key factors influencing the well-being of the participants.

The Socio-Demographic Profile of Persons with Disabilities

The socio-demographic profile of persons with disabilities is presented under five headings:

Personal Profile, Family Details, Education and Occupational Status, Disability Profile, and

Benefits Received.

Table 1: Personal Profile of the Respondent

S. No.	Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	**Gender**	Male	48	47.5
		Female	53	52.5
2	**Age (in years)**	19–40	17	16.8
		41–60	48	47.5
		61–80	24	23.8
		81–100	12	11.9
3	**Religion**	Hindu	95	94.1
		Christian	6	5.9
4	**Community**	Scheduled Caste (SC)	35	34.7
		Backward Caste (BC)	32	31.7
		Most Backward Caste (MBC)	31	30.7
		Others	3	2.9

Table 1 depicted the personal details of the 101 respondents across four variables such as Gender, Age, Religion, and Community. The gender-wise distribution indicated a balanced representation of both genders, with a slightly higher proportion of females. Nearly half (47.5%) belonged to 41-60 years age group, indicating a predominance of middle-aged adults. Most respondents were Hindus (94.1%), about one-third (34.7%) of the participants belonged to the Scheduled Caste, followed by the Backward Class (31.7%) and the Most Backward Caste (30.7%).

Table 2: Family Details

S. No.	Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	**Marital Status**	Married	58	57.4
		Unmarried	43	42.6
2	**Type of Family**	Nuclear	81	80.2
		Joint	20	19.8
3	**Family Size**	2	11	10.9
		3	18	17.8
		4	51	50.5
		Above 4	21	20.8

Table 2 presented the family details of the respondents, including their marital status, type of family, and family size. The findings indicated that more than half of the respondents were married, while 42.6 percent were unmarried. Majority of

the respondents lived in nuclear families, with about one-fifth belonging to joint families. Over half of the respondents reported having four members in their family. In summary, the results highlighted that over half of the respondents were married, had four members in their family, and the majority belonged to nuclear families.

Table 3: Education and Occupation Status

S. No.	Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Education	Primary	7	6.9
		Middle	22	21.8
		Secondary	6	5.9
		Higher Secondary	4	4.0
		Degree	3	3.0
		Illiterate	59	58.4
2	Occupation	Unemployed	29	28.7
		Coolie	68	67.3
		Student	2	2.0
		Private Sector	2	2.0
3	Monthly Income (in Rupees)	Less than 1000	4	4.0
		1000–2000	24	23.8
		3000–4000	7	6.9
		Above 5000	66	65.3

Table 3 outlined the respondent's educational level, occupation, and monthly income. The findings indicated that 58.4 percent were illiterate, 21.8 percent had completed middle school and three percent held a degree. In the case of occupation, 67.3 percent worked as coolies, 28.7 percent were unemployed, and two percent of the respondents were students and employed in the private sectors. Regarding monthly income, 65.3 percent of the respondents earned above Rs. 5,000 per month, while 6.9 percent earned between Rs. 3,000 and Rs. 4,000. About 23.8 percent reported earning between Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 2,000 per month, and 4 percent had a monthly income of less than Rs. 1,000.

Overall, the findings indicated that the majority of respondents with disabilities have low educational attainment and limited employment opportunities**.** These results collectively emphasize the need for targeted educational, vocational, and income-generation programs at the panchayat level to enhance the socio-economic inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Table 4: Disability Profile

S. No.	Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Type of Disability	Locomotor Disability	43	42.6
		Muscular Dystrophy	3	3.0
		Cerebral Palsy	7	6.9
		Intellectual Disability	19	18.8
		Hearing Impairment	22	21.8
		Visual Impairment	7	6.9
2	Percentage of Disability	40–50	29	28.7
		51–60	38	37.6
		61–70	13	12.9
		71–80	11	10.9
		81–90	2	2.0
		91–100	8	7.9

Table 4 revealed the disability profile of the respondents. Disability profile categorization was based on the disability type and percentage of disability. About 42.6 percent of the respondents had locomotor disabilities, 21.8 percent were hearing impaired, 18.8 percent had intellectual disabilities, and three percent had muscular dystrophy. While in the case of percentage of disability, 37.6 percent had disabilities ranging from 51 to 60 percent, 28.7 percent had disabilities ranging from 40 -50 percent and two percent had disabilities ranging from 81 to 90 percent.

The study revealed that most of the respondents had a locomotor disability and about one- third of the respondents had a disability percentage between 51 to 60 ranges.

Table 5: Benefits Received

S. No	Variables	Respondents (N = 101)	Frequency	Percentage
1	Received UDID Card	Yes	80	79.2
		No	21	20.8
2	Provision of Pension	Beneficiaries	75	74.3
		Non-beneficiaries	26	25.7

Table 5 presented the details of government benefits received by the respondents. The findings show that a large majority (79.2 percent) possessed UDID cards issued by the Government of India, while the remaining 20.8 percent had applied but not yet received them. Most respondents (74.3 percent) received a monthly pension.

In summary, the analysis indicated that most respondents held a UDID card and received a monthly pension from the government. The UDID card serves as a crucial document for accessing government welfare schemes for persons with disabilities. Although rural people had some awareness of the UDID card, there remains a significant need to increase awareness regarding the various schemes available for persons with disabilities.

Quality of Life among Persons with Disabilities

Assessment of the quality of life of persons with disabilities was conducted across four domains: physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment. In addition, a comparison of socio-demographic variables, including age, gender, marital status, type of disability, and pension benefit, was conducted to determine whether any significantdifferences exist between these variables and the overall quality of life of persons with disabilities. ANOVA (F-test) and t-test were used to analyse the data.

Table 6: Assessment of Various Domains of Quality of Life of Persons with Disabilities

S. No	Domains of Quality of Life	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1	Physical Health	23.52	8.770	9	45
2	Psychological Health	13.29	5.967	6	30
3	Social Relationship	6.61	2.481	3	15
4	Environment	18.31	7.138	7	35

The table 6 presented the mean scores, standard deviations, and score ranges for the four domains of Quality of Life assessed among Persons with Disabilities.

The Physical Health domain recorded the highest mean score (Mean = 23.52 ± 8.77), indicating that persons with disabilities generally perceived a moderate level of physical well-being, though variations in scores suggest differences in individual health status.

The Psychological Health domain showed a mean score of 13.29 ± 5.97**,** reflecting moderate psychological well-being among persons with disabilities. This suggests that emotional stress or anxiety may affect their mental health. In context, it may imply the need for psychological support or interventions for those with lower scores, even if the overall group shows moderate levels.

The Social Relationship domain had the lowest mean score (6.61 ± 2.48), indicating that persons with disabilities experience limited social interaction and support. This suggests that social engagement is a significant area impacting their overall QoL, potentially due to factors such as social stigma, mobility challenges, or barriers to community participation

The Environmental Quality of Life domain showed a mean score of 18.31 ± 7.14, indicating a moderate perception of environmental conditions among persons with disabilities. This may indicate their experiences with factors such as safety, accessibility of health services, use of assistive devices and availability of financial resources, which collectively influence their overall quality of life

Overall, the findings revealed that Persons with Disability experienced a moderate level of overall quality of life, with notable variations across domains. Social relationships were the most affected area, indicating the need for better social support and community engagement.

Table 7: Age vs. Quality of Life

Variable (Age in years)	N	Mean	SD	Inference
19–40	17	65.47	9.83	
41–60	48	73.14	16.96	
61–80	24	80.70	14.75	
81–100	12	76.25	15.02	
ANOVA				F(3,97) = 3.459; p = 0.019*

The table 7 examined the differences in quality of life across four age groups: 19-40, 41-60, 61-80, and 81-100 years old. The sample size for each group was 17, 48, 24, and 12 respectively. Mean scores varied across age groups, with younger individuals (19-40 years) reporting a mean score of 65.47 ± 9.830, while older individuals aged 61-80 years and 81-100 years reported mean scores of 80.70 ± 14.748 and 76.25 ± 15.021, respectively. An F-test was conducted to assess the significance of differences among the age groups, resulting in an F-value of 3.459 and p-value of 0.019, indicating statistical significance. This also, indicates that age has a significant role in determining the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

Table 8: Gender, Marital Status vs. Quality of Life

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Inference
Gender	Male	48	74.29	17.27	
	Female	53	73.77	14.51	t(99) = 0.164; p = 0.870
Marital Status	Married	58	73.05	15.88	
	Unmarried	43	75.32	15.78	t(99) = 0.713; p = 0.477

Table 8 compared the overall quality of life between male and female respondents, consisting of 48 males and 53 females. The mean score for males was 74.29 ± 17.268, and for females, it was 73.77 ± 14.505. The t-test produced a t-value of 0.164 with a p-value of 0.870. Since the p-value exceeds the 0.05 significance level, this indicates no difference between the two groups. Therefore, the analysis concluded that gender does not have a significant influence on the quality of life, and no notable difference was found between males and females in this regard.

The study also examined the difference between marital status and the quality of life of persons with disabilities. Among the respondents, 58 were married and 43 were unmarried, allowing for a comparison of QoL scores based on marital status. The mean quality of life score for married individuals was 73.05 ± 15.88, while for unmarried individuals it was 75.32 ± 15.77. A t-test produced a t-value of 0.713 with a p-value of 0.477. Since the p-value exceeds the 0.05 significance level, it indicates no significant difference in the quality of life between married and unmarried individuals. Therefore it can be concluded that marital status does not have a significant impact on the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

Table 9: Disability Profile vs. Quality of Life

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	Inference
Type of Disability	Locomotor Disability	43	73.88	13.39	
	Muscular Dystrophy	3	84.00	16.70	
	Cerebral Palsy	7	61.86	12.71	
	Intellectual Disability	19	70.68	15.56	
	Hearing Impairment	22	79.23	19.71	
	Visual Impairment	7	75.43	14.36	F(5,95) = 1.797; p = 0.121
Percentage of Disability	40-50	29	74.24	16.86	
	51-60	38	73.13	16.11	
	61-70	13	77.92	14.76	
	71-80	11	71.00	13.70	
	81-90	2	94.50	10.61	
	91-100	8	70.13	14.69	F(5,95) = 1.035; p = 0.402

Table 9 compared the quality of life scores across six types of disability. The highest mean score was recorded for Muscular Dystrophy (84 ± 16.703), while the lowest was for Cerebral Palsy (61.86 ± 12.707). The F-test yielded an F-value of 1.797 and a p-value of 0.121, indicating no significant difference. Thus, the type of disability does not have a significant impact on the quality of life of the respondents.

The difference between the percentage of disability and quality of life was considered using six categories: 40-50percent, 51-60 percent, 61-70percent, 71- 80percent, 81-90percent, and 91-100 percent. The sample sizes varied across the disability percentage groups, were 29, 38, 13,11,2 and 8, respectively. The highest mean score of 94.50 ±10.607 was obtained by 81-90 percent disability group and the lowest mean score of 70.13±14.691 was obtained by 91-100 percent disability group. The F-value of 1.035, and a corresponding p-value of 0.402, indicated that the percentage of disability does not influence the quality of life of people with disability.

Table 10: Pension Benefit vs. Quality of Life

Provision of Pension	N	Mean	SD	Inference
Beneficiaries	75	74.11	15.283	t (99) = 0.196; p =.926
Non beneficiaries	26	73.77	17.523	

Table 10 reported the results of a t-test examining quality of life among pension beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. The sample included 75 beneficiaries and 26 non-beneficiaries. The mean quality of life score was 74.11 ± 15.283 for beneficiaries and 73.77 ± 17.523 for non-beneficiaries, indicating that individuals who receive a pension tend to report a slightly higher level of satisfaction with their quality of life. A t-test yielded a t-value of 0.196 with a p-value of 0.926, confirming that pension provision does not have a significant effect on the quality of life of the respondents.

Conclusion

The analysis of socio-demographic factors affecting the quality of life of persons with disabilities revealed that most variables, including gender, marital status, type of disability, percentage of disability and pension provision did not show significant difference on quality of life. This indicates that these factors do not independently determine how individuals perceive their well-being and life satisfaction. However, age was found to have a significant impact on the quality of life, suggesting that as individuals grow older, their experiences, coping mechanisms, and access to support systems may vary, influencing their overall quality of life. The assessment of various domains of quality of life among persons with disabilities highlights the need to strengthen social support systems to improve their overall quality of life.

In summary, while most socio-demographic characteristics had no significant effect, age emerged as a key determinant, highlighting the importance of considering life-stage-related needs and supports when planning interventions to enhance the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

Recommendations for the study

- Provide age-specific support programs for different age groups of persons with disabilities.
- Focus on overall well-being, including social inclusion and empowerment.
- Ensure better access and awareness of government benefits like pensions and UDID cards.
- Encourage community participation and peer support to improve social interaction.
- Offer counselling and life skills training to enhance coping and self-confidence.
- Formulate inclusive policies and conduct further research on factors affecting quality of life.

Limitations of the Study

- The study was conducted with a limited number of respondents from selected panchayats of Athoor block, which may not represent the entire population of persons with disabilities in other regions.
- Findings are specific to rural Athoor, Tamil Nadu, and may not be generalizable to urban areas or other states.
- The study captured data at a single point in time, limiting the ability to examine changes in quality of life over time.

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