

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Definition of Myths and Misconceptions

Myth: Refers to a traditional narrative that embodies the values, beliefs, and cultural norms of a society. It often involves supernatural beings or events and explains natural phenomena, historical events, or societal practices. They are deeply embedded in the social and psychological fabric of a culture, offering insights into collective identity and existential questions.

Misconception: Refers to a belief or understanding that is incorrect or flawed, often arising from cognitive biases, incomplete knowledge, or misinterpretations of information.⁴⁷ It involves deeply held, yet erroneous, assumptions that resist change due to their integration into existing cognitive frameworks.

Myths and misconceptions about disabilities and special needs

Myths and misconceptions about disability and special needs are the incorrect assumptions that are often triggered by fear, lack of understanding and/or prejudice. Promoting negative images of disability is a form of discrimination because it creates barriers to full enjoyment of individual rights. These myths include:



Myth: Persons with disabilities are sick and in constant pain. Many people perceive persons with disabilities as being in constant agony and pain. They perceive disability as a sickness that needs to be fixed, a condition to be corrected or cured




Myth: Persons with disabilities are special and should be treated differently.





Fact: It should be noted that Persons with disabilities are like Persons without disabilities, they get sick on occasion or sometimes may be in pain.


Fact: The label of "special" about persons with disabilities does not convey equality. Expectations for success should not be underestimated to accommodate the "special" label that is associated with Persons with disabilities.




 **Myth:** Most persons with disabilities cannot have sexual relationships.

 **Myth:** Persons with Disabilities are an outcome of witchcraft or bad omens.

 **Myth:** Persons who are visually impaired acquire a sixth sense.

 **Fact:** Persons with disabilities are sexual beings, can get married, have children naturally or through adoption.

 **Fact:** Disability is not as a result of witchcraft; widespread superstitions about disability exacerbates the exclusion of persons with disabilities in Africa.


 **Fact:** Although most persons who are visually impaired develop their remaining senses more fully, they do not have a 'sixth sense.'




Myth: Disabilities and special needs are inherited.


Fact: Disability and special needs is not always inherited. Some forms of disabilities that are inherited are determined by genes for instance albinism, down syndrome etc. Other disabilities can be caused by traffic accidents, illness or medical complications at birth etc.




 **Myth:** Certain body parts of persons with disabilities are medicinal and can cure diseases.

 **Fact:** These are traditional outdated beliefs and superstitions, which are not true.

Note: These are illegal practices and punishable by law.

 **Myth:** Persons with disabilities are brave and courageous

 **Fact:** Persons with disabilities like any other persons have resilience and determination to navigate daily challenges. The society should provide reasonable accommodation.



Myth: Persons with disabilities are comfortable with their own kind – same with those having same disability



Fact: People with disabilities, like anyone else, have unique social preferences and may form friendships and connections based on a wide range of factors, not just their disability.



Myth: Disability is a personal tragedy and deserves our pity.



Fact: Disability is often viewed as an unending burden. Persons with Disabilities are often viewed as tragic figures whom society should pity. Disability does not mean a poor quality of life. It is often the negative attitudes of society and the lack of accessibility within the community that are the real



Myth: Persons with disabilities are dependent and always need help.



Fact: All of us may have difficulty doing some things and may require assistance. Persons with disabilities may require help on occasion; however, disability does not mean dependency. It is always a good strategy not to assume a person with a disability needs assistance.



Myth: Persons with disabilities want to associate with each other.



Fact: Relationships and friendships are a matter of personal choice. Persons with Disabilities may share similar characteristics; however, it should not be assumed that everyone wants to associate or develop friendships with each other.



Myth: Persons with severe disabilities need to live in institutions, rehabilitation hospitals or under constant supervision so that they do not hurt themselves.



Fact: Unfortunately, this myth has created a system of long-term care in our nation that relies on institutions such as homes and other facilities. Even those with the most severe disabilities could live in their own home given adequate community-based service, and at the very least, they should be given that choice.



Myth: Persons with Disabilities have a poor quality of life.



Fact: This is one of the most common and damaging stereotypes, because it discourages social interactions and the development of mature relationships. Persons with disabilities have needs just like those without disabilities, and they strive for a high degree of quality of life as other individuals. Society handicaps individuals by building inaccessible schools, workplaces, homes, buses, etc.



Myth: People with disability can only do basic unskilled jobs

Fact: Persons with disabilities bring a range of skills, talents, and abilities to the workplace. They work in all sorts of jobs and hold a range of tertiary and trade qualifications. People with disabilities have a clear understanding of their abilities and are unlikely to apply for jobs they cannot do.



Misconception 1: Disability means inability

One of the most common misconceptions about disability is that it means inability. While the words may be close, conceptually these concepts could not be further apart. Disability is a variation in human functioning. People with disabilities can and do engage in the world in a wide variety of ways. While some of these ways may be different, people with disabilities are more than capable of learning, teaching, working, and thriving in higher education. Additionally, all people have far more strengths than they do weaknesses. While people with disabilities may have functional limitations in some areas, they excel in many others.

Misconception 2: Disability is a personal “problem”

Some people associate disabilities as being some sort of personal “problem”. Disability certainly influences an individual’s life in different ways depending on the individual and their circumstance. However, disability is not a problem that needs to be “fixed.” Disability should be understood, celebrated, and centered. All people are continually growing, learning, and improving, and it is more important and valuable to address inaccessible environments that limit the participation and progress of

people with disabilities.

Misconception 3: People with disabilities need your “help”

It is a common misconception that people with disabilities need help from the temporarily able bodied. The reality is that people with disabilities want to be independent and want to achieve individual success. Whether or not someone has a disability, we all need help sometimes. As with anyone else, if you feel like someone might need help, it is best to ask before providing any help. Another variation of this misconception is that people with disabilities need more help than other people. While it is true that people with disabilities may need different types of support, much of the time the assistance they need is related to navigating inaccessible environments.

Misconception 4: All people with the same disability label will have the same experiences and characteristics

Many people overgeneralize what they have learned about a specific disability by applying it to all individuals they meet with that label. They believe that all people with the same label will have the same characteristics and have common experiences. The reality is that people with disabilities are diverse and hold many different identities, and experiences are equally diverse. It is important to understand the lived experience of each individual. As is commonly said in the disability community, when you have met one person with a disability... you have met one person with a disability.

Misconception 5: Disability is a bad word

Sometimes people are nervous about saying the word “disability.” Being thoughtful and considerate with the words you choose to use when talking about disability and people with disabilities is a good thing, but avoiding the term disability altogether is not helpful. Disability is not a bad word or something that should be hidden. Consideration of disabilities should be central to our decision-making and central to how we provide access to all individuals. That means we need to think critically about disability, actively work toward stigmatization, incorporate accessibility and inclusion into our planning, and talk about disability openly. Of course, how we address and understand disability is critical. We need to understand what it means to have a disability and, importantly, the barriers people with disabilities face are often within culture and environments. Disability is not a bad word, but inaccessible practices and ableism are not acceptable.

Misconception 6: Disability is contagious

The belief that disability is contagious is a misconception that undermines the understanding of disabilities and fosters unnecessary fear and stigma. Disabilities are generally not infectious and arise from a variety of non-contagious factors. Promoting accurate information, empathy, and inclusion helps dispel these myths and supports the integration and acceptance of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of society.