

Critical Appraisal of Guidelines for Evaluation and Certification of Specified Neurological Disabilities As Per Newer Disability Guidelines- 2024

AUTHORS: DR. BHAWNA SANDHIR, DR. INDER PURI, DR. JAGDEESH CHANDRA KOOKNA
Department of Neurology, SPMC Medical College, Bikaner

AIMS

- To analyze how effectively the guidelines recognize, certify and assess neurological disorders.
- To highlight gaps in existing frameworks, especially for cognitive, behavioral, and episodic disorders.
- To propose recommendations for improving disability assessment and implementation in neurology practice.

MATERIALS

- Government of India's Guidelines for Assessment of Specified Disabilities, 2024.
- ICMR Neuroepidemiology Task Force Report (2021).
- Prior national guidelines including RPwD Act 2016 and 2018 notifications.
- Critical reviews and expert commentaries (Puri et al., 2019; Gourie-Devi, 2018; Kumar et al., 2019).
- WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF, 2001).
- Articles on implementation challenges and cognitive assessment tools (Das & Patra, 2020; Srivastava et al., 2022).

METHODS

- Narrative review of official government notifications and Disability Guidelines 2024 and Comparative analysis with earlier frameworks including RPwD Act 2016 and 2018 guidelines.
- Categorization of findings into: Strengths, Challenges/Limitations, and Recommendations.
- Critical interpretation of gaps related to episodic, cognitive, and behavioral disorders.

RESULTS

- Strengths:
 - Explicit inclusion of epilepsy, MS, Parkinson's disease, muscular dystrophies, episodic and progressive disorders.
 - Uniform disability certification templates across states ensuring fairness
 - Flexibility for fluctuating/progressive illnesses through reassessment provisions
 - Integration with UDID system to reduce duplication and improve accessibility.
- Challenges/Limitations:
 - Percentage-based scoring poorly reflects real-life disability, esp. episodic disorders like epilepsy.
 - Cognitive, behavioral, and language deficits remain under-represented.
 - Episodic and hidden disabilities (e.g. epilepsy, ataxia) lack clear quantification.
 - Lack of trained neurologists, poor awareness and training among certifying authorities and patients.

Recommendations:

- Adopt function-oriented assessments based on WHO ICF framework.
- Develop validated cognitive and language assessment tools in Indian languages.
- Mandatory neurologist involvement in certification boards, training programs for physicians on guidelines.
- Periodic/dynamic certification for fluctuating and progressive disorders.
- Expand rehabilitation entitlements: physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, assistive devices.
- Use UDID data for policy refinement and planning of services.

CONCLUSION

- The 2024 guidelines are a significant step forward in recognizing neurological disabilities.
- However, over-reliance on percentages and neglect of cognitive/episodic conditions limit impact.
- Multidisciplinary, function-based, and patient-centric approaches are needed.
- Neurologists have a central role in ensuring fair certification, training, advocacy, and policy refinement.
- With reforms, the guidelines can evolve into a transformative framework improving lives of millions in India.