

Higher Education and Employment of Women with Disabilities in Japan and India

Hiroko Furuta¹ (Professor, Faculty of Child Education, Shokei University),

Hitomi Yoshida² (Professor, College of Humanities and Sciences, Nihon University),

Upali Chakravarti³ (Associate Professor, Miranda House College, University of Delhi)

| 1

1. Introduction

This study seeks to elucidate the conditions of higher education and employment among women with disabilities in Japan and India through a comparative analysis grounded in two perspectives—disability and gender—drawing on policy frameworks and measures, higher education statistics, and questionnaire-based survey data.

In Japan, the rate of progression to higher education institutions (including junior colleges and vocational colleges) reached 83.3 percent of the age cohort in 2024 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, n.d.). Meanwhile, across Asian countries more broadly, higher education has been undergoing rapid quantitative expansion. In India, which is examined as the comparative case in this study, the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education reached 28.4 percent of the age cohort in 2021–22 (Department of Higher Education, n.d.^b).

Along with the increase in the number of students entering higher education institutions, the number of students with disabilities who require support (hereafter referred to as “students with disabilities”) has also grown. In Japan, students with disabilities accounted for 7,103 individuals or 0.22 percent of the total student population in academic year 2009; by academic year 2024, this figure had risen to 55,510 students, representing 1.71 percent of all students. Both the absolute number of students with disabilities and their proportion of the total student body have thus increased markedly over the past fifteen years (JASSO, 2019; JASSO, 2025). In contrast, in India, while the number of students with disabilities increased from 65,552 in 2011–12 to 88,748 in 2021–22, their share of the overall student population has remained constant at 0.2 percent throughout this period (Department of Higher Education, 2014; Department of Higher Education, n.d.^b).

The definition of “students with disabilities” employed in this study is as follows: In Japan, in accordance with the definition used by the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), an independent administrative institution, the term refers to students who possess a Physical Disability Certificate, a Mental Disability Welfare Certificate or a Rehabilitation (Intellectual Disability) Certificate as well as students whose disability has been identified through health examinations or similar assessments (JASSO, 2025). In India, the term denotes students who have been officially recognized as having one of the twenty-one categories of disability stipulated under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and who hold a disability certificate or a Unique Disability

¹ Overall Authorship

² Joint Authorship of Chapters 2 and 5

³ Joint Authorship of Chapter 5

Identity (UDID) card¹⁾.

In countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereafter, the CRPD), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, the provision of reasonable accommodation²⁾ for students with disabilities in higher education has become mandatory, requiring a fundamental shift from previous principles and practices of support. Japan ratified the CRPD in 2014, and India in 2007. In Japan, this led to the enactment of legislation such as the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities and the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (EDPD Act), while in India the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 was established. As a result, with respect to students with disabilities enrolled in higher education, the provision of reasonable accommodation has become a legal obligation whenever required by the individual student.

| 2

Article 6 of the CRPD specifically addresses women and girls with disabilities. Article 24 of the Convention concerns education and provides, with respect to higher education, that the government shall “ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others”.

Drawing on Articles 6 and 24 of the CRPD, this study examines the extent to which the support needs of women are recognized in higher education institutions and translated into the provision of necessary reasonable accommodation. Moreover, for students in higher education, support that encompasses not only academic study but also prospects for employment after graduation is of critical importance. Accordingly, this study focuses on whether women with disabilities enrolled in higher education receive adequate support throughout their academic learning, student life and transition to employment. Through a comparative analysis of the situations in Japan and India, the study seeks to clarify the state of affairs and to identify the challenges that remain.

It should be noted, of course, that students with disabilities do not constitute a homogeneous group but rather a highly diverse population. When discussing the diversity of persons with disabilities, attention is often directed toward differences in types of disability, such as visual, intellectual or developmental disabilities. However, it is frequently overlooked that within the population of students with disabilities there also exist diverse social groups, including women, foreigners and LGBTQ+ individuals. Thus, to accurately identify the needs of diverse students with disabilities and to provide appropriate reasonable accommodation, an intersectional perspective is indispensable (Collins & Bilge, 2021). From the perspective of gender and intersectionality—dimensions that remain insufficiently examined in existing research—this study therefore focuses on women students with disabilities (hereafter, “women students with disabilities”), who face compound forms of discrimination arising from the intersection of disability and gender.

To bring into sharper relief the issues faced by women with disabilities, who are at risk of experiencing multiple forms of discrimination, it is essential to develop disability-inclusive gender statistics—that is, statistics disaggregated by sex and capable of capturing gender-related issues (Yoshida, 2024). Comparative examination with other Asian countries is effective in illuminating points of divergence among nations situated within a broadly shared cultural sphere, including common perspectives on family and disability. In this regard, India was selected as an appropriate

comparative case because, while higher education has been expanding rapidly, the country has also witnessed a growing accumulation of advocacy initiatives and research on women with disabilities, as exemplified by Hans (2015).

Based on these considerations, this study undertakes a comparative examination including policies, surveys and statistics of the realities of higher education and employment among women with disabilities in Japan and India, who are exposed to the dual disadvantages of disability and gender.

2. Review of Previous Studies

Recent studies in Europe and North America on the support needs of female students with disabilities in higher education institutions have highlighted the following two points. First, related to the situation in higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, Meadows-Haworth (2021) reports that the level of academic success among female students with disabilities is lower than that of their male counterparts. Second, León-Larios et al. (2024), focusing on Spain, demonstrate that although female students with disabilities are not necessarily subject to direct discrimination, the scarcity of social resources tailored to their specific needs results in greater difficulties than those faced by male students with disabilities in accessing academic study and adapting to the university community.

In Japan, Yoshida (2024) examined the “Survey on the Status of Learning Support for Students with Disabilities” published by JASSO. Yoshida points out that while the survey discloses data disaggregated by type of disability, it lacks a gender category, thereby precluding gender-based analysis.

Regarding the challenges faced by women with disabilities in accessing higher education in India, Halder (2009) identifies several barriers associated with parents enrolling their daughters with disabilities in higher education institutions. In addition, at the “Women and Disabilities in India” conference held in Tokyo in 2019, organized by Sandhya Limaye of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences pointed out that women with disabilities are often assigned a lower priority within the family when it comes to opportunities for higher education (Furuta & Kanazawa, 2019).

3. Overview of Higher Education for Persons with Disabilities in Japan and India

(1) Japan

In Japan, higher education institutions are defined under the School Education Act as “universities, graduate schools, junior colleges, colleges of technology, and specialized technical colleges (excluding agricultural colleges), as well as ministerial colleges, namely the National College of Nursing, the Polytechnic University (University of Vocational Development), and the National Fisheries University.”

In 2016, the EDPD Act came into force, with the aim of promoting the elimination of all forms of discrimination in society on the grounds of disability, based on the recognition that persons with and without disabilities share the same fundamental human rights. Under this Act, the provision of reasonable accommodation in higher education institutions was initially mandated for national and public educational institutions. Following a partial revision of the Act in 2021, this obligation has been extended, and since 2024 the provision of reasonable accommodation has also been mandatory for

private universities and other private higher education institutions.

(2) India

Higher education institutions in India are broadly classified into three categories: (a) universities; (b) colleges, many of which are established through affiliation with universities; and (c) “stand-alone institutions,” which confer professional qualifications in fields such as engineering, nursing, and teacher education. Comprehensive data on India’s higher education institutions are collected through the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), conducted by the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education. Information on students with disabilities enrolled in higher education, though limited, is included annually in the AISHE survey results.

Article 32 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, entitled “Reservation in Higher Education Institutions,” stipulates reservation quotas for students with disabilities. Specifically, it provides that all public higher education institutions as well as other higher education institutions receiving government aid must reserve not less than five percent of their seats for persons with benchmark disabilities³).

4. Government Surveys on Students with Disabilities and Gender Statistics in Both Countries

This section compares and examines, from the perspective of gender statistics, the current state of government-conducted surveys in both countries concerning students with disabilities enrolled in higher education institutions.

(1) Japan

Regarding the actual conditions of students with disabilities enrolled in higher education institutions, the results of the annual *Survey on the Status of Learning Support for Students in Higher Education Institutions* published by the JASSO are widely reported. This survey is limited in scope to universities, junior colleges and specialized vocational high schools. In 2024, a complete census survey was conducted, with responses obtained from 1,169 institutions, yielding a response rate of 100 percent (JASSO, 2025).

Disabilities are classified into three broad categories: (a) physical disabilities; (b) developmental, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities; and (c) multiple and other disabilities. These categories are further subdivided into 11 types under category (a), 13 types under category (b), and 3 types under category (c). The survey results are presented primarily in the form of data cross-tabulated by type of institution, field of study, students’ support needs and post-graduation pathways on the horizontal axis and by type of disability on the vertical axis. No classifications are provided based on other attributes, such as age, gender or foreign background.

(2) India

According to the annual AISHE reports from the inception of the survey in academic year 2011–12 through the most recent available year-2021–22-when examined in terms of proportions, the share of female students in the total student population increased from 44.5 percent in 2011–12 to 47.8 percent in 2021–22. By contrast, while the total number of students with disabilities rose from 65,552 in 2011–12 to 88,748 in 2021–22, the proportion of women among students with disabilities remained

largely unchanged, declining slightly from 43.3 percent in 2011–12 to 42.1 percent in 2021–22 (Department of Higher Education, various years; 2020; Department of Higher Education, n.d.^a; Department of Higher Education, n.d.^b).

A distinctive feature of AISHE statistics is that, for all survey items, they are disaggregated not only by the proportions of specific social groups stipulated in the Constitution of India—namely Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC)—but also by the number and proportion of women. From academic year 2021–22 onward, AISHE has further added sex-disaggregated data on the number of students with disabilities by state and Union Territory. Also included are questions regarding the extent of the disability and quotas for disabled students.

5. Learning in Higher Education and the Transition to Employment among Women with Disabilities in Japan and India

(1) Overview of the Questionnaire Survey: Participants and Survey Items

To elucidate the realities of learning in higher education and the transition to employment among women with disabilities in Japan and India, and to examine related issues through a comparative analysis of the two countries, the research team conducted a questionnaire survey using Google Forms.

Based on recent changes in education and labor systems as well as working environments—including revisions to the Act on Employment Promotion of Persons with Disabilities, the introduction of reasonable accommodation, work-style reforms, and policies promoting work–life balance—the survey targeted women belonging to age cohorts particularly affected by these changes. Accordingly, the participants were limited to women with disabilities who were born in or after 1990 and who had graduated from (or completed) higher education institutions. In addition, the survey targeted women with disabilities who were currently employed or had previous work experience (including those currently on leave). Regarding disability type, the survey focused on physical disabilities, given that many individuals obtain a disability certificate upon entering higher education. Specifically, the participants were women with visual impairments, hearing impairments, physical disabilities, or multiple disabilities in which one of these constituted the primary impairment.

The questionnaire items were originally developed in Japanese and subsequently translated into English. In February 2025, a pilot survey was conducted in Tamil Nadu, India, with one woman with visual impairments and two women with hearing impairments who had completed higher education. Based on their feedback, revisions were made to the questionnaire items. Thereafter, a final review of the questionnaire was conducted in Japan by one woman with a disability.

The Indian version of the questionnaire was prepared in English, one of India’s official languages and a language frequently used as the medium of instruction in higher education institutions. In the Indian version, several questions differed from those in the Japanese version to reflect local conditions such as regions, types of disability, degrees of disability, social groups and pathways to entry into higher education.

The survey was conducted in both countries between June and August 2025. Participants were recruited in Japan through mailing lists related to gender studies and women with disabilities as well as through personal networks by requesting cooperation in securing respondents. In India, the first

author sought assistance from acquaintances with connections to young disabled women in the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, while in the National Capital Region of Delhi the third author requested support from an NGO which trains people with disabilities for employment.

In Japan, all respondents completed the survey using Google Forms, except for one woman with visual impairments who reported difficulty using the platform. In India, the pilot survey revealed that a certain proportion of potential respondents (1) were not sufficiently proficient in reading and writing English and (2) were unfamiliar with using Google Forms. Accordingly, reasonable accommodations were provided as needed, including assistance from sign language interpreters and proxy handwriting on paper questionnaires by support staff from organizations for women with visual impairments.

It should be noted that this study did not exclude transgender women who self-identify as women; however, it did not undertake a focused analysis specifically addressing students at the intersection of LGBTQ+ identities and disability.

The questionnaire survey was conducted with the approval of the Institutional Review Board for Life Ethics of Shokei University and Shokei University Junior College (Approval No. 2024-Bioethics-21).

(2) Results and Discussion of the Questionnaire Survey

(a) Japan

(i) Profile of Respondents

Responses were obtained from 16 women with disabilities. Of these, 15 respondents (93.8%) completed the questionnaire online, while one respondent (6.3%) provided a paper-based response. The respondents' places of origin were distributed across a wide geographical range, from the Tōhoku region to Kyūshū; however, those from the Kantō region predominated, accounting for nine respondents (56.3%). The locations of the higher education institutions attended by the respondents included Tokyo (four respondents; 25.0%) and Ibaraki Prefecture (two respondents; 12.5%), with one respondent each from a variety of other prefectures. One respondent had studied both in Japan and overseas. At the time of the survey, respondents resided in ten different prefectures, with Tokyo accounting for seven respondents (43.8%), and one respondent each residing in each of the remaining prefectures. Regarding age, three respondents (18.8%) were in their early twenties, six (37.5%) in their late twenties, and seven (43.8%) in their early thirties. In terms of type of disability, two respondents (12.5%) had visual impairments, nine (56.3%) had hearing impairments, four (25.0%) had physical impairments and one (6.3%) had an internal disability. Disability certification levels ranged from Grade 1 to Grade 5, with Grade 2 being the most prevalent, reported by 11 respondents (68.8%).

The types of higher education institutions attended by the respondents were universities (12 respondents; 75.0%), graduate schools (three respondents; 18.8%) and vocational schools (one respondent; 6.3%). Six respondents (37.5%) had attended national or public institutions, while ten (62.5%) - private institutions. Fifteen respondents (93.8%) were enrolled in coeducational institutions, none had attended women-only universities and one respondent did not answer this question. Two respondents (12.5%) had attended higher education institutions exclusively for students with disabilities, while the remaining 14 respondents (87.5%) had attended mainstream higher education

institutions. The fields of study pursued in higher education were primarily in the social sciences (nine respondents; 56.3%), followed by the humanities (four respondents; 25.0%), with three respondents (18.8%) in other fields.

At the time of the survey, 12 respondents (75.0%) were employed, while the remaining respondents had previous work experience but were not employed at the time of the survey. With respect to current and past employment status, 15 respondents (93.8%) had been employed as wage earners, and one respondent (6.3%) was self-employed. Among those who were wage earners, ten respondents (62.5%) held permanent positions, while five respondents (31.3%) were in fixed-term employment. The self-employed respondent reported work as a “sign language entertainer, performer, and sign language instructor, among other roles.” The sectors of employment, in descending order of frequency, were education and learning support services (four respondents-25.0%), “industries not elsewhere classified” (three respondents-18.8%), and construction, finance and insurance, and health and welfare with two respondents each.

(ii) Support Received in Higher Education Institutions

Of the 16 respondents, 12 (75.0%) reported having received reasonable accommodations during their enrollment in higher education institutions, while 4 (25.0%) reported that they had not. Among those who received support, levels of satisfaction with the support ranged from “very satisfied” to “dissatisfied.” None of the respondents indicated that, at the time of admission to higher education, they had felt constraints or difficulties arising from being women in addition to having a disability.

Regarding forms of support that respondents felt “would have been helpful” during their time in higher education as students with disabilities, 12 respondents (75.0%) provided answers. These included environmental measures such as the installation of elevators; information accessibility support such as interpretation by sign language interpreters; the establishment of consultation services staffed by specialists in reasonable accommodation; and opportunities to build peer relationships among students with disabilities. At the same time, only two respondents (12.5%) identified forms of support that they felt would have been helpful specifically as women with disabilities during their enrollment in higher education. These included the presence of female faculty members who were easy to consult and awareness-raising initiatives or lectures addressing the “double minority” status resulting from invisible gender discrimination and invisible discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Regarding support for transition to employment while enrolled in higher education, 4 respondents (25.0%) reported having received such support, whereas 12 (75.0%) reported that they had not. Among the four who reported receiving support, three indicated that they had received disability-sensitive assistance, including introductions to companies offering employment quotas for persons with disabilities; arrangements enabling individual consultations with staff in career services offices; participation in job-hunting seminars accompanied by note-takers; and the provision of information on employment seminars specifically for students with disabilities. No respondents reported having received support that considered both disability and gender. Furthermore, none of the respondents indicated that being women in addition to having a disability had constituted a barrier in their transition

to employment.

As for employment-related support that respondents felt “would have been helpful” during their enrollment in higher education as students with disabilities, 8 respondents (50.0%) provided answers. These included an expansion in the quantity of information available for persons with disabilities; information on retailers selling clothing that is easy for persons with disabilities to wear; and opportunities to interact with role models with disabilities. Only one respondent (6.3%) identified support that would have been helpful specifically as a woman with a disability, namely, courses on methods of applying makeup.

(iii) Summary

Although the survey conducted via Google Forms in Japan did not yield a sufficiently large number of respondents, it is believed to have captured a partial picture of the experiences of women with disabilities who have pursued higher education. Given that personal outreach efforts were primarily directed toward women with hearing impairments, responses from this group were comparatively higher.

A notable characteristic of the Japanese women with disabilities who responded to the survey is that they did not perceive being female as a constraint either when entering higher education institutions or during the transition from education to employment. This suggests that the potential disadvantages associated with being female remain largely invisible even to women with disabilities themselves. However, two respondents did mention specific forms of support they would have found helpful as female students with disabilities, indicating that some individuals may only recognize the need for gender-sensitive support after entering broader society. Additionally, one respondent commented that they became interested in “examples of difficulties arising from being both disabled and female,” highlighting the current scarcity of information regarding the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities.

(b) India

(i) Profile of Respondents

Responses were obtained from 44 women with disabilities. Of these, 13 respondents (29.5%) completed the survey online, while 31 (70.5%) responded using paper-based questionnaires. Regarding the region of origin, 34 respondents (77.5%) were from northern India, 6 (13.6%) from the south, 2 (4.5%) from the central region and 5 (11.4%) from the east, indicating a marked concentration in the northern region. The states in which the respondents had been enrolled in higher education institutions largely corresponded to their places of residence at the time of the survey. Specifically, 34 respondents (77.3%) had attended institutions in the National Capital Region of Delhi, 5 (11.4%) in Tamil Nadu, 3 (6.8%) in Karnataka, and one respondent each (2.3%) in West Bengal and Jharkhand respectively. In terms of age, 4 respondents (9.1%) were in their early twenties, 10 (22.7%) in their late twenties, and 29 (65.9%) in their early thirties; one respondent (2.3%) did not provide an answer. According to the disability categories defined under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, 15 respondents (34.1%) were classified as totally blind; 19 (43.2%) as having low vision; 9 (20.5%)

as having hearing impairments, and 1 respondent (2.3%) reported having both low vision and a hearing impairment. Regarding the degree of disability, 19 respondents (43.2%) reported a severity level of 100% (severe); 4 (9.1%) reported 80% or above; 8 (18.2%) reported 60% or above, and 13 (29.5%) reported 40% or above. In terms of social group affiliation, 16 respondents (36.4%) belonged to Scheduled Castes (SC); 4 (9.1%) to Scheduled Tribes (ST); 10 (22.7%) to Other Backward Classes (OBC), and 14 (31.8%) to the General and Other categories.

As for the type of higher education institution attended, 37 respondents (84.1%) had been enrolled in universities; 6 (13.6%) in graduate schools, and 1 (2.3%) in other types of institutions. With respect to institutional management, 37 respondents (84.1%) had attended public (central or state) institutions, while 6 (13.6%) had attended private institutions. Regarding institutional type, 15 respondents (34.1%) had studied at coeducational institutions; 28 (63.6%) at women's universities, and 1 (2.3%) did not respond. Four respondents (9.1%) had attended higher education institutions exclusively for persons with disabilities, whereas 40 (90.9%) had attended general higher education institutions. The fields of study pursued in higher education were predominantly in the arts, with 41 respondents (93.2%) majoring in arts-related disciplines; 2 (4.5%) in science, and 1 (2.3%) providing no response. Finally, 39 respondents (88.6%) had gained admission through disability reservation quotas, while 5 (11.4%) had entered through standard admission procedures.

At the time of the survey, 35 respondents (79.5%) were employed; 8 (18.2%) had previous work experience, and 1 respondent (2.3%) did not answer. Regarding current and past employment, 41 respondents (93.2%) were salaried employees, while 2 (4.5%) were self-employed. Among salaried employees, 11 respondents (25.0%) held permanent positions, whereas 31 (70.5%) were engaged in fixed-term or contract-based employment. The self-employed respondents reported occupations such as private tutoring and work in the arts. In terms of occupational sectors, the most common was the information and communications industry, with 16 respondents (36.4%), followed by education and learning support services with 7 respondents (15.9%), and manufacturing with 6 respondents (13.6%), among others.

(ii) Support Received in Higher Education Institutions

Of the 44 respondents, 34 (77.3%) reported that they had received reasonable accommodations while enrolled in higher education institutions, whereas 10 respondents (22.7%) indicated that they had not. Among those who received reasonable accommodations, levels of satisfaction with the support varied: 21 respondents (47.7%) reported being "very satisfied," 10 (22.7%) "somewhat satisfied," 1 (2.3%) "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied," and 2 (4.5%) "somewhat dissatisfied." Regarding admission to higher education institutions, 6 respondents (13.6%) reported that they had experienced constraints or difficulties not only because of their disabilities but also because they were women, while 38 respondents (86.4%) reported that they had not experienced such difficulties.

Regarding forms of support that respondents felt "would have been helpful" during their enrollment in higher education as students with disabilities, 9 respondents (20.5%) provided answers. These included the provision of (sign language) interpreters, peer groups, information on post-graduation vocational training courses for persons with disabilities, and courses directly linked to employment

opportunities for persons with disabilities. By contrast, 8 respondents (18.2%) identified forms of support that they felt “would have been helpful” specifically as female students with disabilities. These included an increase in the number of female students with disabilities, the establishment of safe spaces and support groups for women students with disabilities; measures to enable female students with disabilities to participate in class trips; access to female mentors, and information on courses designed for women students with disabilities.

With respect to support for the transition from education to employment while enrolled in higher education institutions, 31 respondents (70.5%) reported that they had received such support, whereas 13 respondents (29.5%) reported that they had not. Among those who reported receiving disability-related support (23 respondents-52.3%), examples included sign language interpretation, instruction in writing emails, English composition, and career counseling. In addition, 17 respondents (38.6%) reported that they had received support that not only considered disability but also their status as women with disabilities. Such support included access to role models, internships and career counseling specifically for women with disabilities and opportunities for networking.

By contrast, 35 respondents (79.5%) stated that being a woman in addition to having a disability constituted a barrier in the transition to employment, while 9 respondents (20.5%) indicated that they did not view it as a barrier. Among the 35 respondents who perceived such barriers, reasons cited included difficulties in finding employment; challenges associated with bus transportation; societal perceptions of women as dependent, and concerns about ensuring the safety of women with disabilities.

Regarding support related to the transition to employment that respondents felt “would have been helpful” during their time in higher education as students with disabilities, 37 respondents (84.1%) provided responses. Examples included scholarships, advice on career choice, information on how to obtain support in the workplace and courses directly linked to employment. Similarly, 37 respondents (84.1%) identified forms of support that they felt “would have been helpful” specifically as female students with disabilities during their time in higher education. These included scholarships and women-focused transition support, such as mentoring by professional women, networking with employers in inclusive workplaces, and assistance in identifying safe and accessible workplaces.

(iii) Summary

In India, the number of respondents was increased through the provision of active response support, such as sign language interpretation and proxy note-taking. Nevertheless, there were some instances in which responses did not correspond to the intended questions, likely due to insufficient proficiency in English. Even so, although the sample is skewed toward respondents residing in metropolitan areas, the findings are considered to capture at least part of the actual realities of a broad range of women with disabilities who have completed higher education. Regarding disability type, respondents with visual impairments accounted for just under 80 percent of the sample⁴). In addition, approximately 60 percent had attended women’s universities, and the vast majority had gained admission to higher education institutions through the disability reservation system—features that may be regarded as characteristic of the Indian respondents.

Among Indian women with disabilities who had completed higher education and responded to this survey, notably while just over 10 percent reported having felt constraints associated with being

women at the point of entering higher education, a large majority—approximately 80 percent—recognized gender-related constraints in the transition from education to employment. These constraints were concretely perceived by the women themselves as stemming from their status as women with disabilities, including issues related to transportation and mobility. Nearly 40 percent reported having received support that considered their status as women with disabilities during their studies, such as access to role models and career counseling. Furthermore, in response to the question of what forms of support would have been desirable during their time in higher education, “women-focused transition support” was frequently cited. Taken together, these findings suggest that women students with disabilities are situated in an environment in which social resources that foster awareness of gender-related issues are, to some extent, accessible.

(3) A Japan–India Comparison

The results of the questionnaire surveys conducted in Japan and India cannot be subjected to straightforward statistical comparison. This is because of differences in survey implementation between the two countries as well as the fact that some Indian respondents were not fully fluent in the language used to complete the questionnaire, which appears from their responses to have constrained their ability to articulate their views in sufficient detail.

Both commonalities and substantial differences were observed between the two sets of findings. One shared feature is that approximately three-quarters of respondents in both countries reported having received reasonable accommodations during their enrollment in higher education. The first major difference concerns the institutional characteristics of higher education. Whereas none of the Japanese respondents had attended women’s universities, such institutions accounted for roughly 60 percent of the Indian respondents’ affiliations. In 2021–22, women-only universities in India numbered 17, representing 1.5 percent of all universities, while women-only colleges totaled 4,470, accounting for 10.4 percent of all colleges (Department of Higher Education, n.d.^b). These figures suggest that women students with disabilities in India may be more inclined to enroll in women’s universities, where safety is more readily ensured; however, this issue warrants further examination.

A second major difference lies in how women with disabilities in the two countries perceive the constraints arising from being both disabled and female. Among Japanese respondents, challenges associated with being women tended to remain invisible, whereas Indian respondents demonstrated a clear awareness of such difficulties. One possible background factor is that, although none of the Japanese respondents reported receiving support that explicitly considered both disability and gender, approximately 40 percent of Indian respondents recognized that they had received support in higher education that addressed not only disability but also their status as women with disabilities. This suggests that some form of explanation or information may have been provided during their studies. In addition, Indian women with disabilities are likely to have a heightened awareness of the compounded difficulties stemming from disability and gender because they directly confront realities in which even commuting safely and independently to school or work is far from easy.

Thus, a clear difference was observed between women with disabilities in Japan and India in terms of how they perceive their own positionality—namely, whether they understand their circumstances

primarily as an individual issue or as a structural problem rooted in society.

6. Conclusion

This study first outlined the general landscape of higher education and higher education for persons with disabilities in Japan and India, and then examined the status and challenges of policies and measures related to women with disabilities by analyzing each country's review proceedings on the implementation of the CRPD. Through this analysis, the study clarified the need for policies specifically aimed at protecting the rights of women with disabilities. A comparison of the Committee's concluding observations for the two countries revealed a marked contrast: in Japan, perspectives addressing discrimination against women with disabilities have not yet permeated society, whereas in India such discrimination is recognized as a serious social issue, in part due to the sustained activities of organizations of women with disabilities.

Next, the study examined higher education statistics in both countries from the dual perspectives of disability and gender. While both countries provide abundant statistical data disaggregated by type of disability, a clear difference emerged in the availability of gender statistics. In India, data disaggregated by sex are provided alongside data on specific social groups, whereas in Japan gender-disaggregated statistics are absent. In the former case, such data allow for diverse forms of analysis and open pathways toward evidence-based policy formulation and implementation. In the latter case, however, there is not even a starting point for examining the issues faced by female students with disabilities, resulting in the invisibilization of these problems. Tsuchiya (2023) has pointed out the overwhelming lack of data on the realities of intersectional discrimination faced by women with disabilities in Japan; the present study suggests that the absence of relevant data in higher education statistics constitutes a particularly serious challenge.

Furthermore, the results of the questionnaire survey conducted in this study revealed divergent tendencies in the responses of women with disabilities in the two countries. In India, most respondents recognized that being female constituted a constraint in the transition from education to employment, and many were able to articulate both the necessity of as well as concrete forms of support tailored to women with disabilities. In contrast, none of the Japanese respondents perceived being female as a constraint in the transition to employment. While they tended to recognize difficulties arising from disability itself, they showed a limited awareness of the challenges specific to being women with disabilities.

These differences may be partly attributable to social factors in India, such as the widely acknowledged reality of violence against women with disabilities as well as cultural factors, including practices of restricting women with disabilities from leaving the home in the name of ensuring their safety. In addition, a crucial point is that in India, social resources enabling female students with disabilities to recognize gender-related issues—such as academic writings on the positionality of women with disabilities, support organizations and information on available support—appear to have been accumulated and are more readily accessible than in Japan. However, in Japan, although disability itself is visible, the compounded gender-related issues arising from being both disabled and female tend to be rendered invisible in society and are often framed as individual problems. While a

small number of organizations of women with disabilities, such as DPI Women with Disabilities Network, a division of the non-profit organization DPI Japan, which has published a groundbreaking report on the realities of multiple and intersecting discrimination (DPI Women's Network in Japan, 2012) and research groups are active, they face significant constraints in providing comprehensive information across multiple domains.

The absence of gender-disaggregated statistics on female students with disabilities in Japanese higher education not only obscures perspectives on the support required by these students, but also hampers the formulation of policies and the design of measures aimed at supporting the lifelong development of women with disabilities.

It has also been noted that most of the complex, gendered issues related to disability have not been taken up as central subjects of discussion within feminist scholarship and activism (Hans, 2016). In order to share and address the compounded gender issues arising from being female, the development of deaf women's studies as proposed by Kobayashi (2021) as well as feminist disability studies or disability studies grounded in a gender perspective, as discussed by Hans (2016), can be regarded as indispensable for rendering the issues faced by female students with disabilities and women with disabilities more broadly visible.

Notes

1. UDID refers to a disability identification card issued online to individual persons with disabilities by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. <https://swavlambancard.gov.in/faqs> (Accessed September 10, 2025)
2. ““Reasonable accommodation” means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities-Article 2-Definitions, United Nations, 2013. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/article-2-definitions>
3. Persons with benchmark disabilities are defined as those who have been medically diagnosed as having a disability specified under the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016*, with a degree of disability of not less than 40 percent (National Human Rights Commission, 2021).
4. As AISHE does not present data disaggregated by type of disability, the proportion by disability category is unknown; however, the large number of students with visual impairments in Indian higher education institutions is consistent with the authors' own experience.

Acknowledgements

This study constitutes part of a research project funded by the Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women (KFAW) under the “2024/25 KFAW Visiting Researcher Program.” The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the members of the KFAW for their generous support and valuable advice throughout the research process. The authors are also grateful to the anonymous reviewer(s) for their valuable and insightful comments, which significantly improved the clarity of the argument. We are

also deeply thankful to the many women with disabilities in Japan and India who cooperated in the questionnaire and interview surveys as well as to those who assisted in facilitating contact with participants. In addition, we gratefully acknowledge the guidance provided by Ms. Kumiko Usui (Association for the Abolition of Disqualifying Clauses for Persons with Disabilities) in the development of the questionnaire items. We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation to all those who contributed to this study.

References

- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020) *Intersectionality 2nd edition*. Policy Press.
- Department of Higher Education (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019). All India Survey on Higher Education 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19. Ministry of Human Resources Development. (accessed September 10, 2025)
- Department of Higher Education (2020). All India Survey on Higher Education 2019-20. Ministry of Education. <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s392049debbe566ca5782a3045cf300a3c/uploads/2025/06/20250604434323531.pdf> (accessed September 10, 2025)
- Department of Higher Education (n.d.^a). All India Survey on Higher Education 2020-21. Ministry of Education. <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s392049debbe566ca5782a3045cf300a3c/uploads/2025/06/20250604161270008.pdf> (accessed September 10, 2025)
- Department of Higher Education (n.d.^b). All India Survey on Higher Education 2021-22. Ministry of Education. <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s392049debbe566ca5782a3045cf300a3c/uploads/2025/06/2025060466438560.pdf> (accessed September 10, 2025)
- Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities- Article 2-Definitions. United Nations. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/article-2-definitions> (accessed August 10, 2026)
- DPI Women's Network Japan (2012). Living Difficulties of Women with Disabilities - Multiple Difficulties as Lifelong Struggle - A Report on Current Status of Multiple Discrimination. DPI Women's Network Japan. <http://dpiwomennet.choumusubi.com/houkokusyo.html>
- Furuta, H. & Kanazawa, M. (2019). Women and disability, education in India: A report from symposiums in Kumamoto and Tokyo 2019. Bulletin of the Faculty of Education, Kumamoto University, 68, 55-60. (Japanese)
- Halder, S. (2009). Prospects of Higher Education of the Challenged Women in India. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13(6), 633-646.
- Hans, A. (2015). Introduction: Gendering the disability framework. In Hans, A. (ed.) *Disability, gender, and the trajectories of power*. Sage Publications India.
- Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO). (2019). *Analytical report on surveys of learning support for students with disabilities at universities, junior colleges, and technical colleges (Survey years: FY2005–FY2016; revised edition)*. https://www.jasso.go.jp/gakusei/tokubetsu_shien/chosa_kenkyu/chosa/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2019/03/19/analysis2016.pdf (accessed September 10, 2025)
- Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO). (2025). *Report on the FY2024 survey on learning support for students with disabilities at universities, junior colleges, and technical colleges*.

https://www.jasso.go.jp/statistics/gakusei_shogai_syugaku/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2025/08/08/2024_houkoku.pdf
(accessed September 10, 2025)

Kobayashi, Y. (2021). Introduction to deaf women's studies: Towards gender-inclusive society where no one is excluded. Seikatsu-Shoin. (Japanese)

Leon-Larios, F., et al. (2024). Bridging Gaps, Fostering Inclusion: A Gendered Look at Disability Support for Women in Higher Education. *WOMEN*, 4, 241-253. <https://doi.org/10.3390/women4030018> (Accessed: September 10, 2025)

| 15

Meadows-Haworth, C. (2021). The Intersectional Disadvantages for Disabled Women Students in UK Higher Education. *International Journal of Disability and Social Justice*, 3, 2, 49-70. DOI:10.13169/intljofdissojus.3.2.0049 (accessed September 10, 2025)

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (n.d.). Press release: 2024 School Basic Survey (Final Figures). https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20241213-mxt_chousa01-000037551_01.pdf (accessed September 10, 2025)

National Human Rights Commission (2021) Disability Rights (Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act & National Trust Act) and Mental Healthcare Act (33516/2022/MCP). National Human Rights Commission. <https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/DisabilityRights.pdf> (accessed September 10, 2025)

Tsuchiya, Y. (2023). Introduction. In Tsuchiya, Y. (ed.) *On a person with disabilities and a woman: Difficulties of living revealed from their life histories*. Gendai Shokan, p. 4. (Japanese)

Yoshida, H. (2024). *The potential of gender statistics on persons with disabilities: Toward visualizing realities and empirically clarifying challenges*. Horitsu Bunkasha. (Japanese)