

## Disability, more than a concept, a lifestyle

Disability is a general and complex term that is described as impairments, activity limitations, and restriction of full and effective participation in society<sup>1</sup>. This is the result of the interaction between the physical, intellectual, cognitive or mental deficiencies of the individual with facilitating factors or those that are considered, or seen, as barriers in the environment of the disabled person.

From the Second World War, people with disabilities (PwD) were grouped in different types of organizations to ensure compliance with the rights enshrined in existing international treaties, seeking to be included in society fully and effectively. In 2006, in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities promulgated by the United Nations Organization<sup>2</sup>, the differential approach towards this population was ratified, which ensures that their rights can be fully exercised without discrimination, firmly committing to the protection of the PwD. In the final document of the Convention, all UN member countries were also invited to adopt these precepts.

Talking about disability and all of its biopsychosocial implications in a theoretical way can be relatively simple. There is a large amount of information about this, where different theoretical models, statistics, research and multiple types of documents are discussed. In practice and in the day-to-day life of people with disabilities, however, disability is quite a complex issue to address with families, government entities and many other sectors of society. For a large number of PwD, their reality does not respond to the fulfilment of the rights set forth in the national and international statutes that refer to the subject. These rights should have materialized, but the population with disabilities is a social group that presents great social inequities. In Colombia, a study published by Collazos et al.<sup>3</sup>, undertaken in the national disability observatory, and conducted during 2017 and 2018, shows that more than 50% of the PwD living in the five main cities of the country live in low socioeconomic sectors. They have difficulties accessing education: more than half of the population that was selected had only completed primary school.

The research describes great obstacles to finding a decent and well-paid job, as well as multiple barriers to accessing different health services and low levels of citizen participation. This study, and others, mention that this biopsychosocial behaviour is influenced to a great extent by economic factors characteristic of the same people with disabilities and their families.

Although the country's regulations on this issue are quite broad, being one of the broadest in Latin America, the gaps between the needs of PwD and what is stated in the regulations on disability in Colombia is undoubtedly very large, as can be observed in the aforementioned research, giving rise to a number of reflections

that would be worth addressing in greater depth.

On the other hand, in some sectors of society, there are still stigmas towards this population. The lack of information on diversity and its implications is one of the main causes of this stigma. Ignorance produces fear and this in turn generates rejection. In this order of ideas, and in a very personal way, due to my experience as a person with disabilities, I think that on many occasions exclusion is generated involuntarily by society, through a lack of understanding about what having a disability actually means.

It is of vital importance that as people with a disability and at the same time realising that we have obtained significant achievements in life, we take the initiative to make this population visible, in order to continue demystifying the precepts that are held towards PwD, with a view to getting to the stage where the disability is not an obstacle to achieving professional and personal success and to be able to fully achieve desired life projects. Also, and in addition to knowing the benefits that sharing with a person with a disability brings, new and better opportunities will be generated in order to reduce the gaps so that they lead us towards true equity.

During my birth, due to perinatal hypoxia, which caused me a physical disability, which was not an impediment to be a doctor or even to obtain a Master's degree in epidemiology. Today, I focus my efforts on studying the biopsychosocial phenomena that a subject as broad and complex as disability brings with it.

As part of the many reflections that can be made when reading this text, it is important to highlight that it is the responsibility of governments to ensure compliance with public policies so that a true differential approach is established to meet the needs of the population with disabilities in a timely and efficient manner. If all sectors of society were to unite in favour of the inclusion of the most vulnerable population, these conditions of iniquity could be reduced and a better future for all, in dignified social conditions, could be forged.

### References

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