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New WHO Report Shines Light on People Living With Disability

by Lindsay Lee and Andrew Dugan

As the world observes the International Day of Persons With Disabilities on Tuesday, a new study from the World Health Organization (WHO) and Gallup finds sizable portions of the population in Laos, India and Tajikistan are living with a disability severe enough that it limits their participation in family, community or work.

In Laos, nearly one in four adults (23%) are living with severe disability, the highest percentage in the three-country study conducted in 2018. Sixteen percent of adults in India also report this level of disability. In Tajikistan, slightly fewer than one in 10 (8%) live with severe disability. This amounts to nearly 150 million people across these three countries who are affected by severe disability, with India accounting for most of the total.

Severe Disability Rate in India, Laos and Tajikistan

Percentage of the adult (15+) population and estimated number of people affected

	Living with severe disability	Population projection
	%	Estimate
Laos	23	1,011,000
India	16	145,317,000
Tajikistan	8	412,000

Note: "Severe disability" is defined as a disability that limits one's participation in family, community or work.

GALLUP/WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, 2018

These findings come from a joint WHO/Gallup study that seeks to provide high-quality disability data that not only provide a fuller, more comprehensive picture of the physical challenges that people with disability face, but also identify what actions policymakers and others can take to improve the lives and wellbeing of this vulnerable population.

The study employed a validated, state-of-the-art question scale -- known as the Brief Model Disability Survey (B-MDS) -- to measure disability. The B-MDS defines disability as a continuum, ranging from no disability to very high levels of disability. With the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the B-MDS was included as part of the [Gallup World Poll](#) in Laos, India and Tajikistan in 2018. To better understand the lives and experiences of persons with disability, Gallup conducted an oversample in Laos and Tajikistan. For this study, Gallup interviewed approximately 3,000 people in India and in Tajikistan, and over 2,500 in Laos.

Demographic Characteristics of People With Disability

The forthcoming report on the findings -- *Brief Model Survey on Disability and the Gallup World Poll* -- takes a detailed look at how the disability rate varies among key demographic groups.

Some of the key findings that emerged from the report:

Age

In all three countries, the oldest age group -- individuals aged 60 and older -- are substantially more likely than their younger counterparts to experience severe disability. This dynamic is particularly striking in Tajikistan, where those aged 60 and older are three times as likely as those aged 40 to 59 to live with severe disability, and more than 10 times as likely as those in the 15-to-39 age group.

Severe Disability Rate, by Country and Age Cohort			
% Living with severe disability			
	15 to 39	40 to 59	60+
	%	%	%
Laos	19	25	40
India	10	21	31
Tajikistan	3	10	34
GALLUP/WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, 2018			

Gender

In India, 18% of women experience severe disability, compared with 13% of men. In Tajikistan, the gender difference is smaller, though still statistically significant (9% of women vs. 6% of men). This trend, however, is not observed in Laos, where equal rates of men and women experience severe disability.

Individuals With Disability More Negative About Financial Situation

The study finds that people with disability tend to see different aspects of their life in a more negative light than other individuals do. For example, individuals with severe disability in all three countries report lower satisfaction with their personal financial situation, as measured by the Gallup World Poll Financial Life Index. The index is scored between 0 and 100, with a higher score indicating greater economic or financial optimism.

In Tajikistan, the average index score among people living with severe disability is 22 points lower than among those without severe disability; this difference is smaller in India and Laos.

Gallup World Poll Financial Life Index, by Country and Disability Type

Index scored zero to 100, with higher score indicating more positive responses

	Severe disability	No severe disability	Difference
	Average score	Average score	Points
Laos	33	40	-7
India	28	38	-10
Tajikistan	40	62	-22

GALLUP/WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, 2018

The full report also explores the other ways people with disability tend to report worse life outcomes -- including their personal wellbeing, economic opportunity and sense of optimism.

Social and Community Barriers Facing People With Severe Disability

People living with severe disability tend to rate key aspects of their community -- including the environment, housing and infrastructure -- worse than those without severe disability. This is evident when comparing the scores of the Gallup World Poll Community Basics Index by disability level in each of the three countries. The Community Basics Index evaluates overall satisfaction with everyday life in a community, including environment, housing and infrastructure; higher index scores indicate greater satisfaction.

In all three countries, people with severe disability have an index score about 10 points lower than those without severe disability. Looking at the individual questions included in the Community Basics Index reveals that there is a larger divide between the two groups regarding satisfaction with public transportation, roads and highways, and the educational system; people with severe disability tend to be less satisfied than other people with these things. Notably, these institutions and infrastructures can play an important role in people's lives and can be a gateway to opportunity or new experiences.

Gallup World Poll Community Basics Index, by Country and Disability Type

Index scored zero to 100, with higher score indicating more positive responses

	Severe disability	No severe disability	Difference
	Average score	Average score	Points
Laos	65	72	-7
India	67	78	-11
Tajikistan	76	85	-9

GALLUP/WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, 2018

Bottom Line

Although this study focuses on results for three countries, it yields important insights with broader implications. The first is of a technical or methodological nature -- this study demonstrates the feasibility of collecting these data with a national survey. Scaling up this approach would make it possible to have a global picture of the

situation of people with disability around the world. WHO and Gallup ultimately hope to be able to collect these data in the more than 140 countries that the Gallup World Poll surveys.

The second insight speaks to something even bigger. These data provide a fuller picture of the different barriers and challenges people with disability face, in different parts of life. It goes beyond physical limitations -- which are known -- and looks at how their lives are different through an emotional, social and economic lens. This more detailed, well-rounded understanding of the lives and experiences of people with disability can be used to design effective, targeted policy measures so that persons living with severe disability can participate in society on an equal basis.

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