

Empowering Mothers of Children with Cerebral Palsy through Peer Support and Entrepreneurship: A Case Study from Bangladesh

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The prevalence of cerebral palsy (CP) in rural Bangladesh is estimated to affect 3.4 per 1000 children, equating to approximately 233514 children. However, the existing rehabilitation services for children with CP and their families in Bangladesh are insufficient. The Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP), a not-for-profit organisation, has been providing multidisciplinary rehabilitation services to children with CP for the last 40 years. The organisation has launched an impactful peer support program to empower mothers of children with cerebral palsy. This pioneering initiative involves approximately 20 mothers in a collaborative business endeavour focused on sewing and selling clothes and homemade food to CRP students, staff, patients and visitors. The program provides financial aid and fosters a sense of occupational identity, economic independence, leadership skills and social integration among the participants. This study assesses the influence of this peer support program on the participating mothers and underscores the multifaceted advantages beyond mere economic outcomes. Through qualitative interviews and participatory observations, we have recorded significant improvements in the mothers' financial stability, self-esteem, and social networks. The collective nature of the business venture has established a supportive community where mothers exchange experiences, provide mutual encouragement, and cultivate entrepreneurial skills. The results demonstrate that the program has played a pivotal role in aiding these mothers' transition from financial reliance to economic self-sufficiency. Furthermore, it has facilitated their inclusion in the community, mitigating the stigma often associated with raising a child with a disability. Forming an occupational identity through this initiative has revitalised these mothers' sense of purpose and belonging, elevating their overall quality of life. This model sets a precedent for similar initiatives in other regions, illustrating the profound impact that community-based peer support and entrepreneurship can have on the lives of caregivers of children with CP.

Keywords: cerebral palsy, peer support, entrepreneurship, financial independence, social acceptance, occupational identity, Bangladesh, CRP