

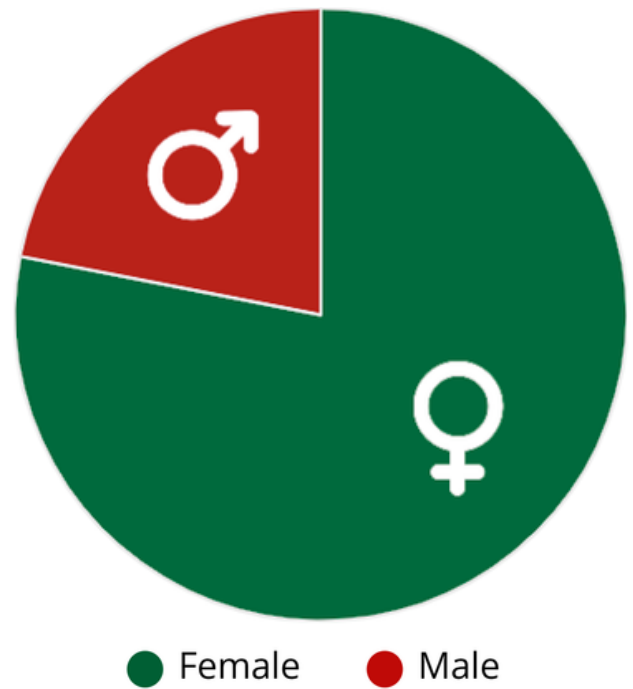


CARER-CENTERED APPROACHES TO DISABILITY SUPPORT: A CASE STUDY FROM BANGLADESH

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

In Bangladesh, family members, particularly women, often serve as carers for relatives with disabilities. Despite the significant emotional, physical, and financial impacts they experience, family carers frequently receive limited recognition and support. This study explored how carer-focused initiatives delivered through a partnership between Carers Worldwide and the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) respond to these challenges by strengthening both formal and natural supports for family carers. Formal supports include structured services, often paid, provided by governments, non-governmental organizations, or trained professionals, while natural supports involve unpaid help from family, friends, and community members. The researchers spoke with family carers, people with disabilities, organizational staff, and reviewed program documents to understand how these initiatives support carers' well-being, promote empowerment. The findings demonstrated that recognizing carers as individuals with their own needs and placing them at the centre of program design can strengthen disability support systems and contribute to more sustainable and inclusive supports for families.

RATIO OF GENDER IDENTITY IN INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED



OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to better support family carers of people with disabilities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It examined disability supports delivered through Carers Worldwide and CDD, and identified opportunities to strengthen formal and natural support systems. There were three main objectives of the study:

1. Examine disability-related supports for carers of individuals with disabilities in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
2. Explore the unique features of these initiatives that strengthen and sustain formal and natural supports.
3. Identify opportunities for Carers Worldwide and CDD to further develop support for family carers and enhance support systems.

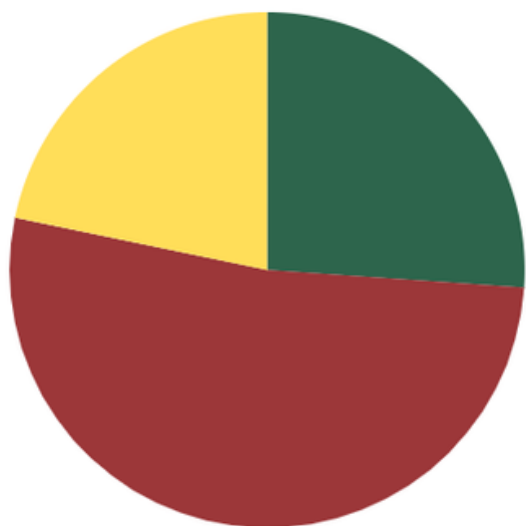
WHAT THE RESEARCHERS DID

Researchers explored disability support initiatives focused on family carers through Carers Worldwide and CDD. They reviewed organizational records and interviewed 7 individuals with disabilities, 23 family carers, and 5 organizational staff. Family carers were also involved as co-researchers, helping to collect and interpretate the information. The researchers then reviewed the information to identify key themes and findings.

WHETHER FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS' HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO LIVE ON

The graph presents participants' responses to the interview question about whether their family had enough money to live on. Responses ranged from "not at all" to "always", reflecting the range of financial circumstances experienced by the families and caregivers who participated in the interviews.

● Not at all ● Sometimes ● Most of the time



KEY FINDINGS

This study found that addressing the needs of family carers alongside those of people with disabilities leads to more sustainable and effective disability support. Three key findings emerged:

Recognizing carers as individuals with their own needs:

Carers benefited when their own physical, mental, social, and financial needs were addressed alongside the needs of the person with disability. For example, CDD provided "barefoot counsellor" training that helped carers understand the connection between physical and mental health. Carers Worldwide and CDD also provided financial support through livelihood skills training for caregiving households, including supports to start small businesses and other ways of earning income, such as raising cattle and sewing. One participant said:

"Their meetings and advice have given us hope and financial stability. With money from CDD we bought cows and goats; raising them has improved our family income and helped us build a future." (Person with a disability)

Long-term investment is needed to sustain carer support:

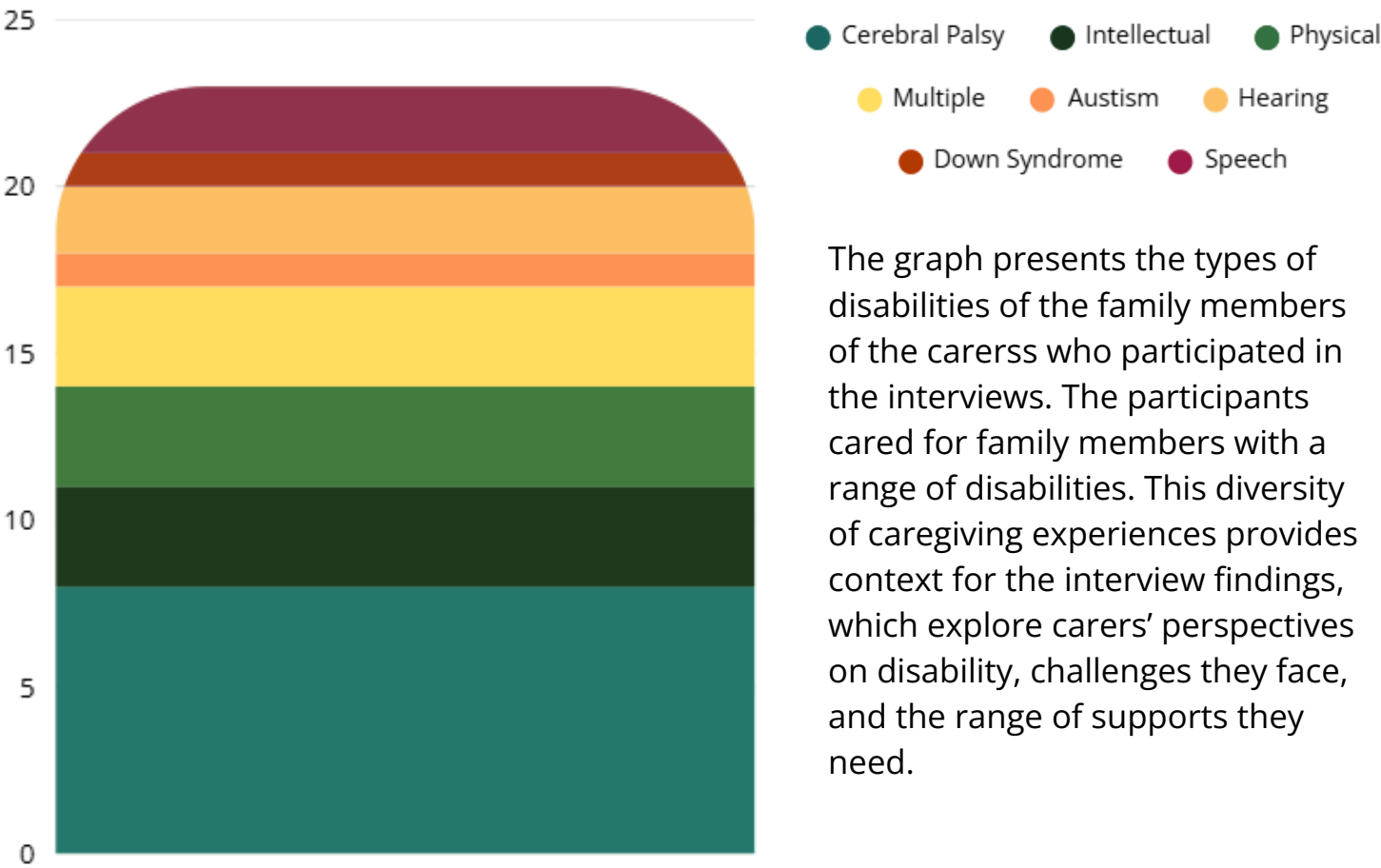
Participants identified ongoing challenges, including limited resources, service gaps in transition planning, and barriers within public systems. The findings highlighted the need to strengthen the bond between carers and government services, and establish programs that acknowledge carers, and improve access to social protection.

Empowerment and advocacy strengthen caregiving:

Training, Community Caring Centres, self-help groups, and advocacy initiatives helped carers build confidence, knowledge, and leadership skills. Training focused on carers’ rights, the rights of persons with disabilities, strategies for building rapport, and respectful communication with institutions and authorities. Self-help groups and Community Caring Centres provided spaces where carers could connect with others and reduce isolation that can come with being a carer. One family member said:

“Before, we just thought - oh, we’re just the parents of a child with disabilities. But now, we know we are “carers.” That gives us confidence. Now, when we go places, we know we have rights. We know we have responsibilities. We can now speak up with courage... That awareness and empowerment - this is what CDD has given us.” (Family Member)

**DISABILITY TYPES OF FAMILY MEMBERS
REPORTED BY CAREGIVERS**



The graph presents the types of disabilities of the family members of the carers who participated in the interviews. The participants cared for family members with a range of disabilities. This diversity of caregiving experiences provides context for the interview findings, which explore carers’ perspectives on disability, challenges they face, and the range of supports they need.

Through CDD’s training, my mother has benefited in her business, and with the money she earns from it, she can now support herself. Before, she used to fear that if she spent money on medical treatment, she wouldn’t have enough for her disabled child. So, she didn’t prioritize her own treatment. But through CDD, she has received free treatment, free medicines, and during the pandemic, she received food assistance along with sanitizers.
(Person with Disability)

WHY THE RESEARCH MATTERS

This study shows that supporting family carers should be part of disability support, rather than treated as separate from supporting people with disabilities. Based on these findings, organizations might consider the following strategies:

Bringing support into the community:

Community-based services can make support more accessible while helping bridge the gap between formal supports and the natural supports carers already rely on. Expanding community supports, such as self-help groups and Community Caring Centres, through existing networks of disability services across Bangladesh will provide carers to peer support within their own communities.

Addressing carers' as a whole:

Carers may need support across several areas of their lives, including physical, mental, social, financial, and access to government services. Providing these services together, or making it easier for carers to find and access different services, can help address their needs more comprehensively. Rather than focusing only on their role in supporting a person with disabilities, programs should recognize carers as individuals with their own needs.

Planning for lifelong support needs:

In this study, families identified gaps when young people with disabilities reached adulthood and expressed concerns about who would provide care when carers were no longer able to. Strengthening transition planning, adult services, and longer-term support could help families prepare for these changes and provide more continuous support throughout the lives of people with disabilities and their families. One participant says:

"When parents are no longer alive, what happens to these children? Many parents themselves become paralyzed or incapable of caregiving - who will take care of their child then? Who will take care of the mother? These concerns should be addressed. What can be done for those families? CDD could work on establishing a solution for such families, and I believe it would be very beneficial." (Family Member)

GAPS IN RESEARCH

This study examined one partnership between Carers Worldwide and CDD, limiting understanding of how carer-focused approaches may operate in other contexts. Future research could explore similar initiatives with families in rural, remote, or underserved regions of Bangladesh, particularly families with limited access to formal disability services. Future research could also explore how carer-centered approaches can be communicated, integrated within existing family and community support systems, whether these support programs continue to be helpful over time, and how they affect carers and people with disabilities in the long term.

MEET THE RESEARCH TEAM

Reshma P. Nuri¹, Aleminew A. Mekonen¹, Afolasade Fakolade¹, Xiaolin Xu¹, Mary Wickenden³, Tom Collier², Heather M. Aldersey¹

¹Department of Rehabilitation Science, School of Rehabilitation Therapy, Queen's University, Kingston, Canada

²International Centre for the Advancement of Community Based Rehabilitation, Queen's University, Kingston, Canada

³Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex, Falmer, United Kingdom

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CONTACT

icacbr@queensu.ca

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