

Literature Review: The Influence of Social Stigma on Children with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

Social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities has serious impacts, including exclusion, discrimination, and psychological distress. This study applies a Systematic Literature Review approach to analyze 10 selected articles focusing on forms of stigma, its effects, and mitigation strategies. The findings show that stigma affects not only the children but also their families. Effective strategies to reduce stigma include public education, teacher training, social support, and inclusive policy implementation. Cross-sector collaboration is essential to create a more inclusive and stigma-free environment.

Keywords: Stigma, Sosial, Intellectual Disabilities, Impact

Manuscript History

Received: 4 July 2025

Revised: 9 September 2025

Accepted: 24 November 2025

How to cite:

Midiyati, S. H., Izzaty, M., Nufus, N. H., Ramadhani, T. N. A., Intikhon, M., & Maulidina, C. A. (2025). *Literature review: The influence of social stigma on children with intellectual disabilities*. *International Disability Innovation Journal*, 1(2), 73-83.

INTRODUCTION

Social stigma toward children with intellectual disabilities remains a topic of concern in society. Stigma is a form of social response that damages an individual's identity (Kristiyanti, 2019). According to Erving Goffman (1986), stigma is a set of traits, symbols, or characteristics attached to specific individuals in society that devalue, marginalize, discredit, and tarnish their reputations. These characteristics are dynamic and consistent, yet often appear ambiguous (Nisa, 2018).

Zakia (2022) explains that individuals who experience stigma often face several negative consequences, including difficulty obtaining help or support from their surroundings, loss of self-confidence, reduced autonomy, and limited opportunities to engage in daily activities. Furthermore, families of stigmatized individuals may also become targets of social violence or discrimination.

A significant number of people still hold negative perceptions or impose harmful stereotypes on children with intellectual disabilities—such as labelling them as "stupid," "slow," or "incapable." Such social attitudes frequently result in exclusion from both social and educational activities. In fact, Law No. 18 of 2016, Chapter 3, Article 5 of the Republic of Indonesia explicitly states that "Children with disabilities have the right to receive special protection from discrimination, neglect, abuse, exploitation, violence, and sexual crimes."

Therefore, this literature review aims to explore how social stigma toward children with intellectual disabilities manifests in society. It seeks to analyze prior research on intellectual disabilities and social stigma, providing a foundation for understanding the challenges faced by these children and for formulating more inclusive and supportive approaches in the future.

METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify, evaluate, and synthesize prior studies on social stigma toward children with intellectual disabilities. This method was chosen to ensure that the review process is structured, transparent, and highly replicable.

Articles were retrieved from several academic databases, including Google Scholar and other scholarly platforms, using keywords such as “social stigma,” “children with intellectual disabilities,” “parental acceptance,” “inclusion,” and “intellectual disability.” The inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) articles published between 2020 and 2025; (2) written in English or Indonesian; (3) open-access publications; and (4) studies primarily focused on the experiences and impacts of stigma on children with intellectual disabilities.

All selected articles were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and differences among the findings. In addition, some results were compared with empirical observations and group discussions in the context of special education. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive synthesis regarding how social stigma is formed, experienced, and addressed through various strategic responses to mitigate its negative impacts on children and their surrounding environments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stigma toward individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) has far-reaching consequences, particularly in restricting their access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and meaningful social interactions. Studies in Indonesia reveal that such stigma often stems from negative stereotypes, discrimination, and a lack of societal understanding regarding I/DD conditions. Consequently, individuals with I/DD experience social exclusion, increased risks of anxiety and depression, and limited opportunities to reach their full potential.

Efforts to reduce stigma must be comprehensive, involving continuous educational initiatives, increased positive interactions between individuals with I/DD and the broader community, and well-organized social support systems. Structured inclusion campaigns have also proven effective in transforming negative perceptions and expanding opportunities for individuals with I/DD to participate in all aspects of life.

The following table presents a summary of several studies related to stigma against individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Indonesia:

Table 1. Analytical Matrix of Reviewed Articles in the Literature Review

Author(s) & Year, Title	Method	Findings / Results
Alya Hana Zaskia, Citra Ashari Maulidina, Velika Azalia, Anisa Fadila, Tazkia maulidia Harum. (2024). Literatur Review: Pengaruh Stigma Sosial Terhadap Anak dengan Hambatan Intelektual.	A literature study involves collecting and comparing findings from various scientific research to draw overarching conclusions.	In this study, the author conducted a survey using a mixed-methods approach with 892 respondents from the Netherlands. The research aimed to identify existing stereotypes and examine their relationship with discriminatory intentions and the level of personal contact individuals have with people with intellectual disabilities. The findings revealed several prominent stereotypes, including perceptions of individuals with intellectual disabilities as friendly, in need of assistance, disturbed, and unintelligent. These stereotypes reflect underlying discrimination, particularly in the form of restrictions on personal choices and independence.

		This study emphasises the need for new approaches in anti-stigma and public awareness campaigns, as well as educational interventions to inform society about the inequalities experienced by individuals with intellectual disabilities.
Mitro Subroto, Muhammad Sadam Aliyandra. (2024). Peran Masyarakat Dalam mencegah Dampak Buruk Stigma Sosial Terhadap Anak Binaan Pemasarakatan.	The study employed a qualitative descriptive method.	Social stigma refers to negative treatment, prejudice, or unfavourable perceptions toward an individual or group based on characteristics or behaviours considered deviant from societal norms or expectations. In the context of community rehabilitation, social stigma arises because individuals are often perceived as "criminals" or "problematic," even after serving their sentences and making efforts to reform. Social stigma commonly associates juvenile offenders with negative traits such as criminality, untrustworthiness, or social rejection. Furthermore, this stigma significantly affects the psychological Wellbeing of rehabilitated youths, intensifying their feelings of inferiority, guilt, and low self-esteem, which in turn hinders their reintegration process and limits their opportunities to build a better life after release.
SN, I. K. S., Wardany, O. F., & Devita, D. (2025). Parental Acceptance of Children with Intellectual Disabilities at SLB X, North Lampung. <i>Jurnal Orthopaedagogia</i> , 3(1), 18-31.	The study employed a quantitative, descriptive approach using a survey of parents of children with intellectual disabilities.	The results showed that most parents were aged 30–40 years and above, had completed senior high school, and the majority were homemakers. Approximately 65% of parents experienced shock and confusion, 30% felt disappointed, and 10% expressed anger and self-blame upon learning about their child's condition. However, at present, 100% of

		<p>parents have sincerely accepted their child's condition.</p> <p>The most influential factor in parental acceptance was self-belief (80%), while negative societal views toward children (30%) were identified as the most significant barrier to parental approval. Additionally, 40% of parents reported that submission to God's will was their primary coping mechanism in accepting their child's condition.</p> <p>Most parents (85%) reported having experienced stigma related to their child's special needs, with 80% indicating that the stigma primarily came from strangers or people they did not know personally. Overall, parents demonstrated strong and realistic hopes for their children's future. The study concluded that while parents initially face emotional challenges in the acceptance process, personal effort and social support play a crucial role in helping them adapt and accept their children with intellectual disabilities.</p>
<p>Ee, J., Kroese, B. S., Lim, J. M., & Rose, J. (2022). What do specialist mental health professionals think of the mental health services for people with intellectual disabilities in Singapore?. <i>Journal of intellectual disabilities : JOID</i>, 26(4), 972–989</p>	<p>Qualitative method: eight staff members from specialist services were interviewed, and the interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis.</p>	<p>The findings indicate that high levels of stigma significantly affect the efforts of Mental Health Professionals (MHPs) to integrate individuals with intellectual disabilities into their communities. When family members are unwilling to continue providing care, the preferred option often becomes placement in nursing homes, effectively isolating these individuals from society.</p> <p>The literature suggests that a strong cultural preference for placing individuals with intellectual disabilities in residential facilities separated</p>

		<p>from the community contributes to their limited opportunities to have a voice in care planning and decision-making. MHPs in Singapore also reported difficulty challenging these cultural norms, as described under the subtheme "Involving family caregivers during the care process." Instead, they choose to work within cultural boundaries until society becomes more accepting of individuals with intellectual disabilities living in community-based supported housing.</p> <p>MHPs further reported that, in Singapore—as in many other countries—individuals with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues often lack adequate support to facilitate their participation in community life. Stigmatisation creates barriers to accessing community resources, and some individuals are excluded from social services due to their behavioural challenges. Society tends not to support the inclusion of persons with disabilities in public life, preferring that they remain in disability institutions or at home, away from broader social interaction.</p> <p>The majority of MHPs acknowledged that much work remains to shift public perceptions toward this population. However, they also recognised that knowledge and understanding of disability in Singapore are still developing, and they expressed optimism that research and public awareness campaigns will gradually bring about positive changes in societal attitudes and perceptions.</p>
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Aninda Ma'rufatus Tsaniyah, Ummu' Abidah Dzakiyyah Mutmainnah, Siti Azizah, Zulfa Fahmy, Irma Masfia. (2024). The impact of social stigma and adaptation strategies on adolescents with intellectual disabilities at Kinasih Inclusive Disability House.	This study employed a qualitative case study approach.	The researcher conducted interviews with two parents of children with intellectual disabilities and one mentor or special education teacher, aiming to explore the impact of social stigma on children with intellectual disabilities and their adaptation strategies. The findings indicate that social stigma can cause psychological trauma in children and anxiety among parents, particularly when their children are outside the home without supervision. As a result, some parents choose to enrol their children in the Kinasih Inclusive Disability Home, where the inclusive community environment positively impacts children's development and provides greater opportunities for them to maximise their potential.
Melda Rumia Rosmery Simorangkir, Edison Siregar, Risma Ul Manalu, Medyawati Pane, Hendro Prasetyono (2023). PERAN ORANGTUA ANAK BERKEBUTUHAN KHUSUS MENGHADAPI STIGMA SOSIAL	The study implemented strengthening efforts through offline socialisation programs targeting parents, teachers, and orphanage administrators.	The researcher conducted in-person sessions beginning with an explanation of how society generally responds to children with special needs. It was found that some parents still face difficulties in accepting their child's condition, as evidenced by cases where parents no longer visit their children in the orphanage. During the socialisation, the researcher emphasised that children with special needs also possess unique potentials that must be nurtured and developed for their future. The sessions aimed to build trust and awareness among parents, teachers, and caregivers, many of whom initially believed that the children had little hope for growth or independence.
Raden Safira Ayunian Widhiati, Elly Malihah, Sardin Sardin (2022).	This study used a qualitative case study approach.	The findings reveal that children with special needs

<p>Dukungan Sosial dan Strategi Menghadapi Stigma Negatif Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus Dalam Pendidikan. Vol. 9 No. 4</p>		<p>often experience negative stigma, such as mockery or social rejection from their environment. However, social support—especially from the family—plays a crucial role in fostering the child's self-confidence and motivation to grow, particularly in developing life skills.</p> <p>This support may take the form of emotional, informational, or material assistance.</p> <p>Additionally, strategies to cope with stigma include participation in formal, informal, and non-formal education, which helps children feel equal to their peers and achieve a sense of accomplishment.</p>
<p>Novitasari, Amira Zahra Islamiah, Nur Alfiasari (2024). Pengaruh Hubungan Orang Tua-Anak dan Pengalaman Stigma Sosial terhadap Self Esteem Remaja dengan Saudara Kandung Penyandang Disabilitas Intelektual.</p>	<p>This study employed a quantitative, explanatory design and used purposive sampling.</p>	<p>The results showed that the parent-child relationship, according to both perspectives, was categorised as moderate, while social stigma experience and self-esteem were classified as low. Correlation tests revealed a significant negative relationship between the parent-child relationship (as perceived by the child) and social stigma experience, as well as between social stigma experience and self-esteem. Regression analysis further indicated a significant adverse effect of social stigma experience on self-esteem.</p>
<p>Scior, K., Hamid, A., Hastings, R., Werner, S., Belton, C., Laniyan, A., Patel, M., & Kett, M. (2020). Intellectual disability stigma and initiatives to challenge it and promote inclusion around the globe. <i>Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities</i>, 17(2), 165–175.</p>	<p>This study used a descriptive, quantitative method to identify perceptions of stigma and map related initiatives.</p>	<p>Findings indicate that the general public in many parts of the world generally supports the basic principles of inclusion for both children and adults with intellectual disabilities. However, negative attitudes and high levels of stigma persist, and the denial of fundamental rights remains a reality in many contexts.</p>

		Efforts to address stigma appear unevenly distributed, with the least intervention occurring in areas most in need. In many regions, living opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities remain extremely limited, and the burden of support and advocacy still largely falls on their families.
Moraleda Ruano, Á., & Galán-Casado, D. (2024). Stigma toward individuals with intellectual disabilities and severe mental disorders: Analysis of postgraduate university students' perceptions. <i>Advances in Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities</i> , 18(3), 125–139.	This study employed a non-experimental quantitative method with a survey approach to explore stigma toward intellectual disabilities and severe mental disorders among postgraduate students.	The findings revealed no significant differences in stigma based on gender. However, the more frequently individuals interacted with people with intellectual disabilities, the lower their level of stigma. Greater interpersonal closeness was significantly associated with more positive attitudes, which in turn reduced stigma toward severe mental disorders. The study highlights the effectiveness of direct contact in reducing stigma and underscores the importance of deeper, context-based understanding in shaping inclusive attitudes.

Based on the review of ten selected journals, it was found that social stigma toward children with intellectual disabilities remains a serious challenge across various levels of society. This stigma manifests in multiple forms, including negative labelling, social rejection, discrimination, and exclusion from community interactions. The impact is not only experienced directly by the children but also extends to their families and surrounding communities.

In general, social stigma experienced by individuals with intellectual disabilities hinders their access to education, healthcare, employment, and meaningful social participation. In Journals 1, 2, 5, and 7, stigma manifested as mockery, rejection, and open discrimination. As a result, these children suffered psychological trauma, loss of self-confidence, and social isolation. Moreover, Journal 2 described stigma as a multidimensional issue that affects the psychological, social, and economic aspects of life.

The reviewed studies also highlight the crucial role of families, especially parents, in responding to stigma. In Journals 3, 5, and 8, most parents initially experienced phases of denial, including shock, anger, disappointment, and self-blame. However, through acceptance, social support, and spiritual belief, parents gradually learned to embrace their children's condition and develop adaptive strategies to support their growth. In the case presented in Journal 5, parents decided to enrol their children in inclusive disability communities as a form of protection from an unfriendly social environment, while also providing a space for learning and personal development.

From the perspective of professionals, Journal 4 revealed that mental health practitioners face challenges in integrating individuals with intellectual disabilities into society due to cultural norms that still prioritize institutional or segregated care. This indicates the need for structural and cultural transformation to build a more inclusive society.

Meanwhile, Journal 9 reported that, in general, communities across various regions of the world tend to support the fundamental principles of inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities both children and adults. This reflects an increasing awareness of the importance of equal treatment and fair opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities in all aspects of social life. However, despite widespread acceptance of inclusive ideals, negative attitudes and broader societal stigmas persist. Denial of fundamental rights such as education, employment, and social participation remains prevalent, reflecting a gap between normative support for inclusion and its actual implementation in daily practice.

Journal 10 further demonstrated that the frequency of direct interactions with individuals with disabilities is significantly correlated with a reduction in stigma levels. This emphasises the importance of positive social contact in fostering empathy and reducing prejudice.

Journal 9 also pointed out that efforts to combat stigma are often uneven and minimal in regions where interventions are most needed. This suggests a gap in the implementation of inclusion programs and policies, highlighting the necessity for more strategic, locally tailored approaches to address discrimination against individuals with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, Journals 2, 5, and 7 presented various strategies and interventions to reduce social stigma, such as public education campaigns about disability, parental and teacher training, and the inclusion of children in educational and community programs that enhance self-esteem and social skills.

The elimination of social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities must be conducted comprehensively and involve multiple stakeholders, ranging from the general public, educational institutions, and families to the government. One of the most effective strategies for reducing stigma is public education and promoting positive social contact between society and individuals with disabilities. Corrigan and Watson (2002) explain that stigma arises from a lack of knowledge, negative attitudes, and fear all of which can be mitigated through educational initiatives and meaningful direct interaction. Communities that have opportunities for equal and non-discriminatory interaction with individuals with disabilities tend to exhibit lower levels of stigma. Therefore, social inclusion campaigns that dismantle myths and stereotypes through real stories, direct engagement, and shared emotional experiences are crucial steps toward building a more empathetic society.

In the educational sector, teachers play a strategic role as change agents in fostering inclusive school cultures. However, without adequate training, many teachers still feel unprepared or lack confidence in addressing diverse student needs in the classroom. Forlin et al. (2011) emphasise the importance of teacher professional development in meeting the challenges of inclusive education. Such training should include an understanding of intellectual disabilities, differentiated instruction techniques, and social-emotional skills to create fair and welcoming classrooms. Schools must also adopt clear anti-discrimination policies, provide adequate support facilities, and ensure that students with special needs are not only accepted administratively but also socially included in all school activities.

Families also play a significant role in shaping how children perceive themselves and their surroundings. Turnbull et al. (2011) state that emotional, spiritual, and social support for families with children with disabilities can help them navigate complex emotional phases from denial to acceptance. Services such as family counselling, parent support groups, and spiritual mentoring are vital yet often overlooked in current systems. When families receive proper understanding and support, they can become the primary protectors of their children against the adverse effects of stigma and serve as bridges to broader social inclusion.

From a policy perspective, the state bears responsibility for establishing legal and policy frameworks that protect the rights of children with disabilities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) emphasises that every individual has the right to live independently and participate fully in society. Unfortunately, many policies remain symbolic and are not effectively implemented at the local level. Therefore, governments must ensure that inclusion programs are not merely written into legislation but are implemented through community-based funding initiatives, professional training for social and health workers, and the development of inclusive and accessible disability service centres. In addition, companies and workplaces should also be involved in creating disability-friendly employment opportunities to promote long-term economic independence.

Through collaboration among communities, schools, families, and governments grounded in international inclusion principles and global best practices the vision of a stigma-free, equitable, and just society for children with intellectual disabilities can gradually be realised through concrete, targeted, and sustainable interventions.

CONCLUSION

Social stigma toward children with intellectual disabilities remains a significant societal issue. Based on a review of 10 journals, standard forms of stigma include negative labelling, discrimination, and exclusion. These factors have severe consequences not only for the children but also for their parents, often leading to low self-esteem, anxiety, trauma, and psychological distress. The role of families is crucial in helping children cope with and overcome stigma. Although parents often go through an initial stage of denial, they eventually learn to accept and support their children.

This study shows that social stigma can be reduced through several means, including public education, parental awareness programs, teacher training, and support from the surrounding environment. Positive social interactions have been proven effective in transforming social stigma into understanding and acceptance. Additionally, the role of teachers and inclusive school environments is vital in fostering empathy and equality for all children.

However, these efforts must be supported by intense government action to achieve maximum impact. Policies and rights concerning children with disabilities must not remain theoretical but be translated into practical, community-level programs.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening inclusive policies that not only aim to change societal attitudes but also ensure concrete, systematic support in regions still facing significant barriers to social inclusion. Increasing public awareness, promoting inclusive education, and engaging local communities are essential steps toward building a stigma-free society. Through collaboration among families, schools, communities, and government, children with intellectual disabilities can grow up with dignity, equal opportunities, and complete acceptance within society.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Salwa Hanan Midiyati: Conceptualization, Methodology, and Writing Original Draft. Medina Izzaty: Investigation, Data Curation, and Formal Analysis.

Nahla Hayaatun Nufus: Resources, Visualization, and Writing Original Draft.

Tania Nur Anisa Ramadhani: Data Collection, Validation, and Writing Review & Editing. Makhsun Intikhon: Project Administration, Methodology, and Supervision (student coordination). Citra Ashri Maulidina: Supervision and Review.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no known financial conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The authors declare that the research and writing of this manuscript adhere to ethical standards of research and publication, in accordance with scientific principles, and are free from plagiarism.

DECLARATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that Generative Artificial Intelligence and other assistive technologies were not excessively utilized in the research and writing processes of this manuscript.

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