

## Analyzing the Impact of Social Stigma on Children with Intellectual Disabilities: Causes, Consequences, and Strategies for Reduction

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### *Abstract*

*Social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities is a serious issue that is still often encountered in various aspects of life, from education to social involvement. This stigma manifests in the form of social avoidance, negative labeling, discrimination, and violence, which have a significant impact on the growth and well-being of the child and their family. This article aims to analyze the various forms, causes, and consequences of social stigma faced by children with intellectual disabilities and to explore ways to reduce that stigma. This analysis was conducted using a literature review method that includes context, methodology, and theory. Data were obtained from scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025, accessed via Google Scholar; a total of 10 articles were analyzed. The findings of the analysis indicate that stigma remains a significant barrier for children with intellectual disabilities in obtaining their rights fairly, especially in the fields of education and social welfare. Nevertheless, approaches such as family and community support and the implementation of inclusive education have proven effective in reducing that stigma. Through collaborative efforts from various parties, an inclusive environment free from discrimination for children with intellectual disabilities can be realized.*

**Keywords:** *Social Stigma, Intellectual Disability, Causes, Consequences, Strategies.*

### **Manuscript History**

Received: 15 July 2025

Revised: 10 September 2025

Accepted: 25 November 2025

### **How to cite:**

Nugroho, P. M., Nisa, K., Kirana, N. C., Amalia, F., Syahrani, H. A., Maulidina, C. A & Taboer, M. A. (2025). *Analyzing The Impact Of Social Stigma On Children With Intellectual Disabilities: Causes, Consequences, and Strategies For Reduction*. *International Disability Innovation Journal*, 1(2), 53–62.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Stigma, or in Greek, "mark." In general, stigma refers to a set of negative beliefs about individuals who possess specific characteristics. This definition applies to the stigma that has historically been attached to children with intellectual disabilities. In many cultures, disability is associated with curses, disease, dependence, and helplessness. This stigma manifests itself in various ways, including social avoidance, stereotyping, discrimination, condescending attitudes, and even crime, hatred, and violence against individuals with intellectual disabilities. Social avoidance of individuals with intellectual disabilities occurs because society is hesitant to make eye contact or initiate conversation. Stereotypes exist because of the assumption that individuals with intellectual disabilities are incapable of taking care of themselves and are helpless. Discrimination against individuals with intellectual disabilities occurs when individuals want to work, as many companies refuse to hire employees with intellectual disabilities. This is due to two inhibiting factors: external and internal. The external barriers faced arise from society, the government, and, in particular, employers. External barriers from society in the form of stigmatization are significant obstacles to employment access for people with disabilities (Benoit, Jansson, Jansen Berger, & Phillips, 2013).

Stigma causes people with disabilities to be generally looked down upon and underestimated by society (Afriany & Hakim, 2018); treated permissively by their own families (Surwanti & Hindasah, 2013); and also in the form of parents who tend to overprotect their children, making them even more helpless (Kristiyanti, 2019). There are numerous issues regarding social stigma experienced by individuals with intellectual disabilities. Some of these issues include the use of the term "suffering from mental or intellectual disabilities." The word "suffering" positions children with disabilities as victims and reinforces negative stigma among the community. This is reflected in the criticism of the Criminal Code Bill, which uses the word "suffering" for people with disabilities, which should be replaced with a more respectful term, such as "people with disabilities."

There are many cases of bullying against individuals with intellectual disabilities, and news reports about the abuse of individuals with intellectual disabilities are also standard. Stigma in society makes it difficult for individuals with intellectual disabilities to develop or express their talents. This hurts the morale of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Individuals with intellectual disabilities should have the right to be accepted by those around them, to be protected, to have the opportunity to play like other children, to be respected, to receive a good education, and to participate in society without discrimination. Society should not only accept them but also provide them with the same opportunities as other children to play, participate in society, and have a supportive environment. They also have the right to a high-quality, inclusive education that develops in accordance with their potential.

According to Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is responsible for ensuring the survival of every citizen, including persons with disabilities. Every individual, without exception, has equal legal status and human rights within Indonesian society and as a citizen of Indonesia. This is both a mandate and a gift from God Almighty, which requires us to live in a progressive, just, and dignified manner. Furthermore, they are entitled to inclusive education, which is fair and non-discriminatory education for all. To change the stigma against children with intellectual disabilities that they have been subjected to, such as discrimination and negative labeling. Several efforts can be made to change this so that there is no longer any social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities. These include providing social support and assistance to people. Parents and children also require interventions through inclusive education and increased social awareness to address these problems. Social support from family and community is critical, especially from parents, who provide children with the confidence to learn and try new things and help them develop their potential to reach their full potential. Meanwhile, the community plays a crucial role in promoting acceptance without discrimination or differentiation among children. To reduce social stigma, children must also participate in formal, informal, and non-formal education to develop their full potential. With the proper education, children with intellectual disabilities can grow better and be accepted in society without discrimination.

## **METHOD**

This article was compiled through a literature review, based on the premise that existing knowledge is an accumulation of prior work and that we can learn from and build on what other researchers have studied (Neuman, 2014). According to Neuman (2014), there are four objectives of conducting a literature review. First, to demonstrate familiarity with the knowledge and establish credibility. Second, to show the path of previous research and how the topic has developed recently. Third, to integrate and summarize what is known on a particular research topic. Moreover, fourth, as a means of learning and to spark new ideas.

Based on type, Neuman (2014) categorizes literature reviews into six categories: context review, historical review, integrative review, methodological review, self-study review, and theoretical review. This article employs three types of literature reviews: context, methodological,

and theoretical. The literature review commenced with a search of the Google Scholar database from March to April 2025, utilizing the keywords "Social Stigma for Children with Intellectual Disabilities," "The Stigma of Individual Disability," "Social Stigma of Children with Intellectual Disabilities," and "Social Stigma." This search yielded 10 pieces of literature on social stigma against children with Disabilities. The research period ranged from 2020 to 2025.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This review looked at 10 studies about stigma faced by children and people with intellectual disabilities (ID). It examined the origins of this stigma, its effects on individuals, and the efforts undertaken to reduce it. Table 1 shows details about the articles reviewed.

**Table 1. Summary of Research on Social Stigma Toward People with Intellectual Disabilities.**

These studies demonstrate how stigma still prevents individuals with intellectual disabilities from participating equally in the workforce, in education, and in community life. Stigma is a persistent global issue because, despite the implementation of inclusive policies in many countries, social attitudes frequently lag policy development.

No	Author, Year, Title	Method	Research Findings
1	Safitri, H, & Solikhah, U. (2020). <i>The relationship between social support and social interaction skills of children with special needs in SLB C Yakut Purwokerto</i>	Descriptive quantitative method with a cross-sectional approach	The study results indicate a significant relationship between social support and social interaction skills among children with special needs at SLB C Yakut, Purwokerto. Children with good social support tend to have better social interaction skills. Most of the respondents in this study were male and around 10 years old, with all participants experiencing intellectual disabilities (intellectual disability). Of the 79 respondents, 77.2% received social support, and 72.2% also demonstrated social interaction. The most dominant form of social support provided is informational support.
2	Jansen-van Vuuren, J., & Aldersey, H. M. (2020). <i>Stigma, Acceptance and Belonging for People with IDD Across Cultures. Current Developmental disorders reports</i>	Systematic literature review	Research findings indicate that stigma remains a significant barrier to the acceptance and inclusion of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) across cultures. This study reviews the latest literature since 2017 and finds that individuals with

			<p>IDD and their families still experience widespread stigma, despite various efforts and approaches to promote acceptance in their communities. Several emerging approaches involve culturally and socially sensitive interventions, as well as raising awareness of the importance of directly involving individuals with IDD in designing and prioritizing interventions. In addition, researchers increasingly recognize the critical role of culture and local context in shaping experiences and reducing stigma.</p>
3	<p>Alvaro Moraleda Ruano, Diego Galán-Casado. 2024, <i>Stigma toward individuals with intellectual disabilities and severe mental disorders: analysis of postgraduate university students' perception</i></p>	Qualitative	<p>The study results show no difference in stigma by gender. However, direct interaction with people with intellectual disabilities (ID) or severe mental disorders (SMD) is very important in forming positive attitudes and stopping prejudice. Higher education alone is not enough to eliminate stigma. Real-life experiences are also needed to form more inclusive attitudes.</p>
4	<p>Kurnia Utami Nursholichah, Amilia Febrian Mufarrohah, Bono Setyo, 2024, <i>Community Stigma Toward Children with Disabilities</i></p>	Qualitative	<p>This study confirms that stigma against children with disabilities stems from a lack of education and understanding among the public. Many people still hold negative views about children with disabilities, such as "children born out of wedlock," "a burden on their parents," "stupid children," "cursed children," and so on. Negative views or stigma that arise in the community also stem from discomfort or unease towards children with</p>

			disabilities in their environment.
5	Hannah A. Pelleboer-Gunnik, Jaap van Weeghel, & Petri J. C. M. Embregts, 2021, <i>Public Stigmatization of people with intellectual disabilities: a mixed-method population A survey into stereotypes and their relationship with familiarity and discrimination</i>	Mixed methods in a representative sample	The study's results show that stigma is not associated with high levels of explicit discrimination. However, given the valence of positive and negative stereotypes, subtle forms of discrimination can be expected, including limited opportunities to shape one's destiny. This can affect opportunities for rehabilitation and may be opposed by protest components in anti-stigma efforts.
6	Katrina Scior, Aseel Hamid, Richard Hastings, Shirli Werner, Catherine Belton, Adebisi Laniyan, Maya Patel, Maria Kett (2020). <i>Intellectual disability stigma and initiatives to challenge it and promote inclusion around the globe</i>	Quantitative Descriptive	Stigma and denial of their fundamental rights remain prevalent in many contexts. Efforts to overcome this stigma have not been effective enough, and evidence indicates that it is often implemented less frequently in places where it is most needed. In many places, life opportunities for people with ID are still minimal, and almost all support and advocacy depend on their families. Much remains to be done at the global level to reduce stigma against ID and promote more active social involvement and interaction between people with ID and the general public.
7	Tsaniyah, AM, Mutmainnah, UAD, Azizah, S., Fahmy, Z., & Masfia, I. (2024). <i>The Impact of Social Stigma and Adaptation Strategies on Adolescents with Intellectual Disabilities at Kinasih Inclusive Disability House</i>	A qualitative approach using The case study method.	The social stigma experienced by adolescents with intellectual disabilities takes the form of labeling, segregation, and discrimination, which harm adolescents with intellectual disabilities. This impact encourages adaptive behavior through various adaptation strategies. The main goal is to create an inclusive society. Adolescents with intellectual

			<p>disabilities experience social stigma in various forms. Social stigma impacts the lives of adolescents with intellectual disabilities and their parents, who are also affected by existing social stigma. These impacts encourage them to implement adaptation strategies that begin with self-acceptance, education, and the formation of an inclusive society.</p>
8	<p>Vyda Mamley Hervie, 2023, <i>Social inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in Accra, Ghana: Views of parents/guardians and teachers</i></p>	<p>Qualitative</p>	<p>The findings show that children with intellectual disabilities face challenges related to beliefs about intellectual disability, parental neglect, financial difficulties, and labeling and stigma.</p>
9	<p>Sara Zamorano, Ana Belen Santos-Olmo, Ivan Sanchez-Iglesias, I Munoz-Lara, Manuel Munoz, 2024, <i>The Stigma of Intellectual Disability In Spain: A Nationally Representative Survey</i></p>	<p>Quantitative descriptive, representative survey</p>	<p>From this study, it can be concluded that the level of stigma is divided into two levels: moderate in the cognitive and Emotional dimensions, and moderate-low in the behavioral dimension. These results emphasize that there is still a need for Continuous efforts to reduce negative stigma in Spain, with anti-stigma policies and campaigns tailored to sociodemographic groups.</p>
10	<p>Eka Mayang Sari, Opi Andriani, 2024, <i>Community Stigma Towards Children with Special Needs in Public Schools</i></p>	<p>Qualitative descriptive</p>	<p>The results of the study show that public stigma towards children with special needs in Public schools are already good; the public already understands the characteristics of children with special needs in the learning process and when interacting.</p>

The review included ten studies focused on how social stigma affects children and people with intellectual disabilities. It examined the reasons for stigma, its impact, and the steps taken to address it. Table 1 gives an overview of the studies included in this review.

The analysis identified three main points. First, stigma often arises due to a lack of understanding and limited interaction with people with intellectual disabilities. Research shows that many people hold negative views based on myths or misconceptions, which result in stereotypes, such as the assumption that people with intellectual disabilities are incapable, a burden, or are even cursed. Even educated individuals who have not met someone with an intellectual disability can still hold these views. (Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey, 2020; Ruano et al., 2024; Mufarrohah et al., 2024.

Second, stigma harms the feelings and social lives of children with ID and their families. Studies show that stigma can lead to exclusion, feelings of self-deprecation, and avoidance of social situations. Some children also experience parental neglect, often due to shame or financial hardship (Hervie, 2023; Tsaniyah et al., 2024). Families also experience stress, loneliness, and reduced social support.

Third, inclusive schools have demonstrated strong outcomes. When children with intellectual disabilities are in schools that include them, receive help from teachers, and take part in planned group activities, stigma begins to go down. Support from classmates and teachers helps them develop better social skills and feel more accepted (Safitri & Solikhah, 2020; Sari & Andriani, 2024). Overall, the findings show that stigma against children with ID is not just a personal or family issue, but a larger social and cultural problem. More contact, awareness, and inclusive practices can help reduce negative attitudes.

There are connections between these three findings. Stigma is maintained by ignorance, which in turn creates social and emotional barriers. However, inclusive environments can serve as corrective spaces in which individuals without disabilities learn to understand and accept diversity. This suggests that direct social contact plays a transformative role in reducing prejudice.

## **RESULT and DISCUSSION**

The findings from this review indicate that stigma toward children with intellectual disabilities remains a significant challenge across countries. Stigma against children with intellectual disabilities remains a major difficulty in many nations. Because of entrenched societal beliefs, limited knowledge, and insufficient understanding of intellectual impairment, this stigma persists. Goffman (1963) argues that the stigma process develops when society labels a certain group, hence causing major problems—the gap between ‘we’ and ‘they’. The studies in this review support this idea, showing that children with intellectual disabilities are often perceived as incapable, overly dependent, or burdens to their families and society. (Jansen-van Vuuren dan Aldersey, 2020); Mufarrohah et al. 2024). This accords with Allport's contact theory, which posits that people from different groups tend to hold more negative attitudes toward one another. Do not interact directly.

This review also supports the idea of Mitter et al. (2019) that there are three types of stigma: public stigma, which occurs when society has prejudices against a group; self-stigma, when a person has negative views about their own condition; and affiliation stigma, which arises when family members or caregivers feel ashamed or tend to withdraw socially due to prejudice.

Public stigma can generate prejudice and discrimination by society, but connected stigma might cause parents to feel humiliated or reject social contact. Studies have revealed that stigma results in a range of issues, including person avoidance, low self-esteem, and fewer opportunities to engage in community activities (Hervie, 2023; Tsaniyah et al., 2024). Sometimes, social pressure and stress due to stigma can trigger parents not to take good care of their children. These findings are in line with the opinion of Ali et al. (2012), who stated that stigma prevents individuals with intellectual disabilities from obtaining their fundamental rights.

Stigma also prevents individuals from being accepted by other persons and from receiving quality education. For example, because of the deep-seated prejudices and institutional structures in Ghana and Spain, children with intellectual disabilities cannot attend school or engage in community life. (Zamorano et al., 2024; Hervie, 2023). Scior et al. (2020) argue that attempts to eliminate

prejudice have not been adequately implemented, particularly in regions with entrenched cultural stereotypes, thereby sustaining stigma across generations.

In this regard, the studies reviewed indicate that stigma takes different forms depending on the context. While in Western countries, stigma assumes subtle forms characterized by exclusion or lowered expectations, in Asian and African contexts, it is usually overt and bound to a cultural or religious belief system. This indicates the need for culturally sensitive interventions that consider local values and family dynamics. Furthermore, few studies have examined the impact of long-term anti-stigma programs on community attitudes, underscoring the need for longitudinal research in this area.

The absence of long-term evaluation of anti-stigma interventions is another feature noted in various studies. Most programs focus on temporarily changing attitudes, but there is little data on long-term behavioral effects. Therefore, future studies should examine how public campaigns and inclusive education influence community behavior over time.

### **Implications**

These results point to the need for action at several levels to reduce stigma: individual, community, and systemic. Increasing opportunities for participation and support can reduce discrimination and increase the self-esteem of children with intellectual disabilities. Public awareness and education campaigns are essential for dispelling myths and battling cultural beliefs. Enhancing inclusive education at the systemic level requires policies and training to guarantee equal rights and involvement.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that stigma is a genuine obstacle to social inclusion and human rights, not merely a matter of perception. Schools, families, community organizations, and legislators must collaborate to establish a nurturing environment in which children with intellectual disabilities can succeed.

### **CONCLUSION**

Social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities is a complex and deep-rooted problem, both historically, culturally, and structurally. Stigma manifests in various forms, such as social avoidance, negative stereotypes, discrimination, and even violence, which not only affect children but also their families. However, some findings also show progress, especially in inclusive education environments that are beginning to provide space for children with intellectual disabilities to grow and develop.

Several interventions are necessary to reduce these social stigmas, including educating the community and families, implementing inclusive education in schools, conducting mass media campaigns, and engaging in direct interaction with children. With a comprehensive approach that involves all elements of society, social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities can be reduced, and a more inclusive and supportive environment can be created for them to continue to develop.

### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Putri Mayang Nugroho: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing and Finalization; Khairun Nisa: Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing and Validation; Nayla Candra Kirana: Formal Analysis, Resources, Writing; Hanina Aulia: Formal Analysis, Resources and Data Curation; Farhah Amalia: Resources, Formal Analysis, Data Curation. The Authors must state all of the contributions to this research/manuscript.



## **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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