Investigating Social Stigma of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

Social stigma towards children with intellectual disabilities is a complex issue that impacts the psychological, social, and educational aspects of children and their families. Society often labels them negatively, excludes them, and judges them as incapable of developing due to a lack of understanding and awareness of these children's potential. This literature review aims to systematically examine how social stigma is formed, its impact on children and families, and strategic efforts to reduce it. This study employs a systematic literature review, drawing on 10 scientific articles published between 2020 and 2025, sourced from national and international databases. The analysis was conducted descriptively to identify patterns, forms of stigma, and relevant intervention strategies. The results show that social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities remains strong, both in schools, the general community, and the workplace. The impacts include low self-confidence, social isolation, limited access to education and public services, and emotional pressure on parents. However, there are also positive efforts, such as inclusive school programs, social communities, and initiatives by the government and social institutions that are beginning to build public awareness.

Keywords: Intellectual Disability, Stigma, Inclusion, Impact, Social, Children, Parents

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INTRODUCTION

Social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities has become a complex issue in social and psychological studies. Society's view of children with intellectual disabilities is often influenced by negative perceptions that develop due to ignorance or misunderstanding of the condition. Children with intellectual disabilities are often seen as individuals who are less capable or unable to function optimally in various aspects of life, such as education, social interaction, or future employment. The importance of family social support for children with special needs lies in the family's role as the first environment to provide natural support. People in their environment also desperately need social

support from those around them. They need the confidence that they can be accepted by their environment (Widhiati et al., 2022).

Social perceptions of children with intellectual disabilities have a significant impact on the children themselves, not only affecting their mental health but also their access to education, health care, and opportunities to participate or socialize with the surrounding community. In various regions of Indonesia, the community still views children with intellectual disabilities with contempt. They still consider children with intellectual disabilities to be helpless, disabled, and some even say that children with intellectual disabilities are cursed. This is because the behavioral and physical characteristics of children with intellectual disabilities differ from those of typically developing children (A. Rakhmania et al., 2019).

This stigma generally consists of negative views from the local community towards children and families with intellectual disabilities. A lack of knowledge about intellectual disabilities can lead to negative views from the surrounding community. These negative views are not only directed at children with intellectual disabilities, but also at their parents and families. Parents are often blamed for their children's intellectual disabilities, considered incapable of educating them, and even subjected to unpleasant treatment from the community and their surroundings.

In reality, children with intellectual disabilities have the same potential as other children. They have the right to receive an education equal to that of their peers, which aims to develop their interests and talents, enhance their ability to adapt to their environment, and improve their quality of life. With appropriate education, they can become independent children, develop social skills, and actively participate in their daily lives.

There have been many studies that examine how society's view of children with intellectual disabilities is primarily based on ignorance, beliefs about cultures whose origins are unknown, and society's lack of awareness of the needs and potential of each child with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, in-depth research is needed to understand the origins of these perceptions, the impact they have on children, and the strategic steps that can be taken to reduce or even eliminate negative perceptions of children with intellectual disabilities.

Strategic measures to reduce or even eliminate negative perceptions of children with intellectual disabilities. This literature review aims to synthesize researchers' findings on social stigma and social perceptions of children with intellectual disabilities. It aims to provide information on the community's and government's views regarding children with intellectual disabilities. It hopes to create an inclusive, safe, and comfortable environment for children with intellectual disabilities.

METHOD

This literature review employs a systematic approach, collecting data from multiple journals and articles based on scientific research findings. We then conclude these journals or articles to identify the issues discussed in them. Subsequently, we compare these conclusions with the actual field conditions, using descriptive analysis as the conclusion of our journal review.

We obtained the literature from various sources, including Google Scholar and other academic databases, and supported our findings with discussion. The criteria for articles used in this literature study were those published in the last five years, from 2020 to 2025. This literature study aims to determine how society views or stigmatizes children with intellectual disabilities, both domestically

and internationally. With that in mind, we selected 10 articles, including one international and nine national articles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stigma against children with intellectual disabilities exists. Various literature and studies show that children with intellectual disabilities still face significant social stigma in various environments, including school, community, work, and family. The literature identifies forms of stigma against children with intellectual disabilities, such as negative labeling, exclusion, discrimination, internalized stigma, and social stigma. Stigma against children with intellectual disabilities is not only emotionally damaging but also impacts their access to education, health services, and social and economic participation. The literature shows that social stigma is a significant barrier to an inclusive environment. The following table summarizes several related studies:

Table 1. Data analysis matrix for articles used in the literature review

No	Author, Year, Title,	Method	Research result
1	Tracey Smythe, Jaimie D Adelson, Sarah Polack. (2020). Systematic review of interventions for reducing stigma experienced by children with disabilities and their families in low- and Middle-Income countries: State of evidence	Systematic Strategy Review	Research findings Indicate That Most interventions focused on community education (47%), individual empowerment (15%), and social contact (12%). Interventions were often conducted at the community level (88%) and were of short duration (half a day to a week). Printed materials and films were the primary media in interventions targeting children. Evaluations showed
2	Nursholichah, K. U., Mufarrohah, A. F., & Setyo, B. 2024. Community stigma towards children with disabilities. Qualitative	Qualitative	Stigma Found: The results of the study show that stigma against children with disabilities is still powerful. This stigma appears in the form of negative labels such as "stupid child," "naughty child," and "family burden." These negative views are influenced by a lack of education and understanding about disabilities in society. Impact of Stigma: Stigma not only affects these children but also their families, who often feel isolated and discriminated against. the impact can lead to mental health problems for children with disabilities and hinder

			their access to education and health services.
3	Zaskia, A. H., Maulidina, C. A., Azalia, V., Fadilah, A., & Harum, T. M. 2025. The research findings indicate that social stigma toward children with intellectual disabilities encompasses several aspects.	Qualitative	Impact of Stigma: The emergence of feelings of inferiority among children. Social isolation hinders their interactions with peers. Difficulties in accessing inclusive education, which impact their academic and social development
4.	Melda Seprina Harnin & Damri. 2022. Community Social Concern for Children with Special Needs Category C (Intellectual Disabilities)	Qualitative	The community still accepts children with special needs in their environment, but some members of the community do not accept them. When children with special needs experience misfortune, the community comes together to support one another, either through financial assistance or volunteer labor. Furthermore, the village or sub-district itself supports children with special needs, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, by providing capital or employment opportunities. The assistance received is first recorded by the sub-district for reporting to the social services agency. This assistance is provided to make life easier for these children. Children with special needs should receive greater attention because they are integral to the community. The village or sub-district government should guide the community to ensure that children with special needs are embraced without discrimination.
5.	Latifa Zahra. (2023). Building an Inclusive Community (Government Communication Strategy	Qualitative	The Yogyakarta City Government has been working toward making Yogyakarta an Inclusive City by 2022, but the reality on the ground remains far from ideal. There is no categorization of disability types.

			Therefore, there is also no clear communication strategy in place. According to gatra.com (2020), civil servants in DIY are still unaware of the rights of people with disabilities. This study demonstrates that the activities undertaken have not had a maximal impact.
	of Yogyakarta City in Raising Awareness of Intellectual Disabilities)		
6.	Simorangkir, M. R. R., & Siregar, E. 2023. The Role of Parents of Children with Special Needs Parents of children with intellectual disabilities face various forms of social stigma. Facing Social. Journal Community Service to the Batasa Community.	Qualitative	From the surrounding environment. Forms of Stigma: Parents often receive cynical looks, negative comments, and are shunned by the community because they have children with special needs. They also experience social pressure and feel judged as "failed" parents. Impact of Stigma: Stigma causes emotional distress among parents, reduces self-confidence, and leads to shame and social isolation. Children are also indirectly affected by limitations on their participation in social activities. Strategies for Dealing with Stigma: Parents can develop mental resilience, seek support from fellow parents, foster open communication within their community, and educate the community to understand their children's conditions better. These strategies help them remain strong and fight for their children's rights.
7.	Shelomita,N., Mulya, D., & Abadi, Reza Febri. (2021). Social Interaction between regular students and students with intellectual disabilities in junior high schools implementing inclusive education.	Qualitative approach with descriptive method	Based on observations and interviews, several behaviors were observed among regular students in junior high schools implementing inclusive education, particularly in relation to children's social interactions with peers with intellectual disabilities. It was found that there was no discrimination in the social interactions between regular students and students with intellectual disabilities. This study concludes that regular students and

			students with intellectual disabilities are equal in terms of social interaction; regular students do not discriminate against or avoid students with intellectual disabilities.
8	Mustika, Ella Ayu Septia; Hadi, Ella N.; Anharudin, Anharudin; Rofi'i, Aziz; and Dewi, Siti,Nurmala (2022) "Stigma Against Workers Towards Persons with Disabilities in the Workplace," Behavior and Health Promotion	Descriptive research with a cross-sectional research design	Based on the research results, workers with disabilities experience stigma and discrimination in the workplace, including differences in physical appearance, and exclusion of workers with intellectual disabilities. Efforts to eliminate workplace stigma against persons with disabilities include providing education and training for employers, disseminating information to improve the literacy and understanding of non-disabled workers, and involving workers with disabilities in office operations and routine company activities.
9.	Dian Permatasari, Ahmad Guntur Alfianto, Miftakhul Ulfa. (2020). Perceptions and Stigma Toward People With Disabilities Among High School Students.	Quantitative with a descriptive correlational research design and approach cross-sectional.	Based on the results in Table 2, the perceptions and stigma of students towards people with disabilities in Sidoarjo City High School are positive. At the same time, the respondents also have low stigma towards persons with disabilities at SMA Kota Sidoarjo.
10	Putri Arpani, Majda El Muhtaj. (March 2023). Child-Friendly School Child-Friendly For Students With Intellectual Disabilities (Case Study Case Special Needs Schools Melati Aisyiah, Deli Serdang Regency)	Qualitative	The social stigma in this study is the discriminatory treatment still experienced by students with intellectual disabilities and children with intellectual disabilities. Children with intellectual disabilities are often considered incapable of developing or achieving, when in fact they can demonstrate their potential if given the proper support. This stigma highlights the importance of implementing the concept of Child-Friendly Schools (SRA) to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and ensure the fulfillment of the rights of children with disabilities in the education system.

After reviewing 10 scientific articles from the Google Scholar platform, several similarities were found regarding social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities. In general, social stigma hurts various aspects of the lives of children with intellectual disabilities, especially in terms of emotional, social, and educational aspects.

Journals 1 to 6 found that social stigma against people with intellectual disabilities highlighted that social stigma against children with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities or intellectual disability, is still powerful in society because this stigma often leads to social exclusion, such as discrimination, and difficulties for children with disabilities to participate in social and educational activities.

Journal 1 found that stigma against children with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries is still powerful and poses a significant barrier to social participation, education, and the well-being of children and their families. The most common type of stigma addressed in interventions is enacted stigma, which refers to discriminatory treatment from the surrounding environment. Stigma-reduction interventions remain limited in scope and quality, as many focus on only one social level. Stigma against persons with disabilities and their families is a complex issue that requires a cross-level, contextual, and evidence-based approach. Future research should involve the active participation of children and families, develop culturally relevant stigma measurement tools, and evaluate interventions using robust methodological designs to ensure reliable and widely replicable results.

In the second journal, we found that social stigma in the community towards children with intellectual disabilities is still powerful. The community considers children with intellectual disabilities to be stupid, idiots, and even a burden on the family. This stigma has an impact on individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families, who often feel isolated and discriminated against. The second journal article identifies the factors that cause this social stigma, namely the community's lack of knowledge about individuals with intellectual disabilities and a lack of empathy towards fellow human beings.

The third journal discusses the impact of stigma on children with intellectual disabilities, such as feelings of inferiority, hindering interaction with peers, and difficulty accessing or obtaining inclusive education.

Journal 4 differs from the previous journals, which describe negative stigma. Journal 4 explains that while some members of society accept individuals with intellectual disabilities, others do not. Local communities often organize assistance for children with special needs so that children with disabilities can be embraced without discrimination.

The fifth journal examines the social stigma faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities in the Yogyakarta area, to make Yogyakarta an inclusive city. However, in reality, the city is far from inclusive. Discrimination against individuals with intellectual disabilities is still widely found there, due to a lack of understanding of individuals with special needs.

Furthermore, journal number 6 explains that parents of children with intellectual disabilities receive negative views from their surroundings, such as cynical looks, negative comments, and being excluded from their neighborhood because they have children with intellectual disabilities. Parents who have children with special needs are also often considered to be failed parents. The emergence of this social stigma can cause parents to become stressed, lose confidence, and isolate themselves from their surroundings. Usually, in dealing with this, parents seek support from other parents who have children with intellectual disabilities to build open communication about the problems they experience.

In journals 7, 9, and 10, we find social stigma against children with intellectual disabilities in the school environment, especially among teenagers, particularly high school students. Lack of education and experience interacting directly with people with intellectual disabilities is one of the leading causes. It is necessary to implement a curriculum and school program that introduces the values of equality and diversity in depth so that there is no discrimination or bullying against people with intellectual disabilities.

In journals 7 and 9, there is a similarity in the social views of the school, with no discrimination found against children with intellectual disabilities. The study states that Individuals With intellectual disabilities did not experience any negative aspects of their environment.

Journal 10 shows differences in the school environment, where there is still discriminatory treatment of children with intellectual disabilities, such as being considered less developed and less accomplished than other children. In reality, children with intellectual disabilities have the same potential as other children if they receive special training and support.

In addition to the community and school settings described in journals 1 to 6 and journals 7, 9, and 10, journal 8 found social stigma in the workplace, such as physical discrimination and isolation by coworkers toward individuals with intellectual disabilities. Forms of discrimination in this environment include the assumption that people with intellectual disabilities are unproductive at work and in carrying out their jobs, because people with intellectual disabilities are considered incapable of doing their jobs.

Social stigma is a complex issue that frequently arises in modern society. When stigma grows, it creates an unsupportive environment, causing individuals with intellectual disabilities to feel isolated and unaccepted. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that stigma is not merely a personal issue but a social problem that necessitates collective attention.

Education plays an essential role in overcoming social stigma. By increasing understanding of what people with intellectual disabilities, who are often stigmatized, experience and feel, we can change the negative perceptions that have been formed. Programs such as education through schools, workplaces, and communities can foster awareness of the importance of inclusivity and empathy. When society has a better understanding of the experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities who are constantly subjected to social stigma, they are more likely to be supportive and accepting of their presence.

We propose an educational strategy to reduce social stigma against individuals with intellectual disabilities, namely by bringing individuals with intellectual disabilities into contact with environments that still have a strong stigma against them. This strategy allows them to interact directly and learn about individuals with intellectual disabilities, thereby reducing the stigma that exists in those environments.

CONCLUSION

Social stigma against individuals with intellectual disabilities still exists today. Although some communities and environments have a positive and inclusive view, the emergence of social stigma causes individuals with intellectual disabilities to be discriminated against by their surroundings. Not only that, but this social stigma can also be experienced by parents who have children with intellectual disabilities, as the surrounding community assumes that these parents are "cursed" and makes other hurtful statements. The emergence of this social stigma can hinder children's growth and

development, as well as lead to low self-confidence, social isolation, and limited access to inclusive education.

Social stigma can occur due to a lack of understanding among the surrounding community in understanding individuals with intellectual disabilities. To reduce this social stigma, it is hoped that the entire community will receive education and special training for teachers to create an inclusive environment, as well as policies from the government/related parties, so that all elements of society are aware of intellectual disabilities and there is no social discrimination against individuals or parents with intellectual disabilities.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Hana Ainiyah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing and Finalization; Mochamad Ramadhan Gunawan: Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing and Validation; Amanda Aulia Husna: Formal Analysis, Resources, Writing; Ketrin: Formal Analysis, Resources and Data Curation; Hani Khairunnisa: Resources, Formal Analysis, Data Curation.

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 PROCCESS

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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