

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF

Disability Studies

Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association | Association canadienne d'études sur le handicap

Canadian Journal of Disability Studies

**Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association
Association canadienne d'études sur le handicap**

Hosted by The University of Waterloo

www.cjds.uwaterloo.ca

***Review of Indigenous Disability Studies* by John T Ward, Editor
Routledge, 2024**

ISBN: 9781032656502

Zafar Khan, Ph.D

Lecturer in Sociology Department at the University of Peshawar, Pakistan

Email: drzafarkhan@uop.edu.pk

Indigenous Disability Studies, edited by John T. Ward, is a pioneering academic book that strengthens Indigenous voices in the emerging field of Disability Studies. The book uncovers the cultural meaning of disability in different parts of the world. Ward brings personal and professional insight to this work. This book logically explains the intersection of Indigenous perspectives and disability through the cultural lenses of different indigenous communities. It is a huge academic achievement of Editor John T Ward and all authors contributed to this book. They challenge the colonial frameworks of disability, making it a compelling read for scholars and advocates alike at the global level. This book brought new perspectives into disability studies from different parts of the world.

This is an anthology from Elders, Indigenous scholars, professionals, and community members across 20 countries and 38 distinct Indigenous groups living in the various parts of the world. This book is divided into five parts, and each part of the book addresses the different dimensions of indigenous disability. Each section weaves or piles the academic contributions from the indigenous scholars. For the first time in one book, the various indigenous perspectives of different indigenous people about disability are

available for the readers, researchers, service providers and social workers. Ward stated that “indigenous disability is a rather new field within traditional Disability Studies” (p.1). Grassroots voices worldwide are exploring topics like the colonial education system's impact on Indigenous children with learning differences, the role of traditional knowledge in understanding disabilities, and the reclamation of Indigenous epistemologies. For example, Elder Annie Smith St-Georges discusses teaching Indigenous children with learning differences, while Ward himself examines dyslexia through an Indigenous lens. The anthology spans diverse perspectives, from Mohawk to Taiwanese Indigenous communities, highlighting global Indigenous resilience in the face of systemic inequalities. The strength of the anthology lies in its diversity of contributors, from Elders like Tom Dearhouse to first-time authors, which creates a rich tapestry of lived experiences. Thomas Dirth proposes innovative, culturally grounded disability support models, demonstrating practical applications of Indigenous knowledge.

This book logically explains with cogent examples how the colonial interpretation of disability impacted the knowledge system of indigenous people. Ward stated that “colonialism was not just the subjugation of people, but it also reared its head in policies, direction, and forcible relocation” (p.9). Further, the importance of indigenous knowledge for understanding the different aspects of indigenous disability is highlighted. This book elaborates on the intersectional effects of colonial history on indigenous disability (p. 267). Ward explains how colonial barriers cause intersectional effects. Kui Kasirisir stated in this book that “indigenous people with disability often face a form of double discrimination due to their indigenous identity and their disability” (p.214). Colonization has a significant

ableist effect on disability in indigenous societies. Further, this book emphasizes a distinctions-based approach, weaving traditional knowledge, academia, and grassroots perspectives to explore disabilities through spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental lenses. Indigenous healing plays a pivotal role in the resilience of indigenous people with disability in different parts of the world. This book covers culturally entrenched aspects of indigenous disability. It gives insight into understanding the cultural perspectives of indigenous people about disability.

This book gives us fresh perspectives on an emerging field of Indigenous Disability Studies. Indigenous Disability Studies offers a fresh approach to understanding disability through the eyes of Indigenous scholars and communities. This book highlights the intersection of socio-cultural beliefs, traditional governance, and lived experiences to challenge dominant narratives shaped by colonial and administrative authorities. This book shines in its commitment to centering Indigenous voices, and its uniqueness in traditional Disability Studies dominated by non-Indigenous academics. The distinctions-based approach of this book—emphasizing unique cultural, spiritual, and social frameworks—offers a refreshing departure from Western disability models. Ward's editorial vision ensures a balance between academic rigour and accessible storytelling, making complex ideas approachable without diluting their depth. The book does justice to the very concept of indigenous disability, and the author is highly appreciated for giving voice to the most neglected people in the academic colonial culture of Western Countries. This provides an opportunity for the neglected indigenous voices in mainstream academia. Ward's narrative, rooted in his struggles with dyslexia in a colonial education system, adds

authenticity and emotional resonance. This chapter explores the different aspects of language-based disabilities. This perspective is both empowering and intellectually provocative, urging readers to rethink disability classifications.

Moreover, while some scholarly works uncover the different dimensions of indigenous disabilities, I found *Indigenous Disability Studies* to be a transformative read, particularly for its ability to interlace traditional knowledge with contemporary theories. The book explores the different aspects of decolonizing disability narratives. It is indeed offering a blueprint for more inclusive frameworks in education and policy, and taking into account indigenous voices from various parts of the world. However, some of the terminologies of the local culture occasionally slowed my reading or made it difficult to understand the culturally rooted concepts. The book's global scope occasionally sacrifices depth for breadth, as some chapters feel brief and could benefit from more detailed exploration. Additionally, the academic tone may challenge casual readers, though it suits its target audience of students and professionals in Indigenous studies, social work, and health. Sometimes, culturally embedded terminologies cause difficulties in reading.

Despite this, the powerful stories of resilience and cultural reclamation of different indigenous communities kept me engaged. *Indigenous Disability Studies* bring the original stories from the ground about disabilities. It is an essential text for anyone interested in dismantling colonial mindsets and amplifying marginalized voices. *Indigenous Disability Studies* is a pioneering work that fills a critical gap in disability and Indigenous scholarship. John T. Ward has curated a collection that is both scholarly and deeply human, offering

insights that challenge conventional narratives and celebrate Indigenous wisdom. This book is highly recommended for students, educators, and professionals in disability studies, Indigenous studies, and social work, as well as anyone seeking a deeper understanding of Indigenous resilience.