PORTRAYAL OF DIFFERENTLY-ABLED PERSONS IN PAKISTANI TV DRAMAS

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ABSTRACT

People with disabilities have long been marginalized in media, but recent efforts toward inclusivity have led to more authentic portrayals. This study used quantitative content analysis of Pakistani TV dramas (2018–2022) featuring differently-abled characters to examine their roles, demographics, and types of disabilities. Findings showed most characters were young, elite, and portrayed with cognitive disabilities (e.g., depression, schizophrenia). Interestingly, males were more often shown with cognitive disabilities while females were more often shown with physical disabilities. Depictions were largely positive, though physical disabilities were more often shown negatively. Encouragement was the most common response from family members, while verbal abuse and non-verbal pity were also present.

Key Words: People with disabilities, Differently-Abled, Representation, Portrayal, Media

INTRODUCTION

The representation of differently abled persons in Pakistani dramas remains problematic, despite increasing attention to inclusivity. According to the 2017 Pakistan Census, around 2.7% of the population—about 5.3 million people—are differently abled. While some dramas depict disability positively, many reinforce harmful stereotypes, portraying disabled individuals as helpless, burdensome, or lacking agency (Al-Zoubi & Al-Zoubi, 2022). These portrayals evoke pity and perpetuate marginalization. Disabled characters are often used as plot devices or for comedic effect, rather than being portrayed as empowered individuals with their own narratives (Wallin, 2014). Positive representations exist but are rare. Moreover, the range of disabilities shown is narrow, with most portrayals focusing on physical or intellectual disabilities. Conditions like visual or hearing impairments and mental health issues remain largely invisible. This selective representation contributes to the erasure of many lived experiences. To foster more inclusive and accurate portrayals, it is crucial that the voices and experiences of disabled individuals be included in the storytelling process. Writers and producers should educate themselves on disability issues and strive to challenge stereotypes. By doing so, Pakistani dramas can become a powerful medium for promoting awareness, inclusion, and respect for differently abled individuals in society.

Despite ongoing advocacy by disability rights groups, the representation of differently abled persons in Pakistani dramas remains stereotypical and lacking in diversity. Television dramas play a powerful role in shaping public opinion in Pakistan, and their negative or one-dimensional portrayals can reinforce societal stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion.

Disability is still heavily stigmatized in Pakistan, and individuals with disabilities often face significant barriers to education, employment, and social participation (Hussain, 2022). These challenges contribute to both their under-representation in media and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes when they are included.

Globally, numerous studies have explored how media influences public attitudes toward disability, showing that representations can shape perceptions either positively or negatively (Wang et al., 2021). However, there is a lack of similar research in the Pakistani context, particularly concerning television dramas. Given the reach and influence of Pakistani dramas, the way differently abled individuals are portrayed can deeply affect public attitudes and social inclusion. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the representation of differently abled persons in Pakistani dramas. It considers the socio-cultural context of disability and aims to encourage more inclusive, accurate, and empowering media portrayals that reflect the diversity and agency of this marginalized group.

The research was mainly aimed at finding out what demographic characteristics are associated with differently-abled persons and what were the most common types of disabilities the characters were shown to be having. Further, the research explores whether the differently-abled persons shown in positive or negative roles and how differently-abled persons are treated by those around them.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Conceptual Framework

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of disability. Globally, representations of differently-abled persons have often been marked by exclusion, negative stereotyping, and limited visibility. Haller (2023) observed that media typically emphasizes disability as a problem of the individual, portraying differently-abled persons as helpless, dependent, or objects of pity, rather than acknowledging their contributions to society. Further, disabled characters are placed into the storylines of literature, film, and television to bolster themes of tragedy, villainy, inspiration, cure, etc. Similarly, Greenberg, Mastro & Brand (2002) found limited scholarly focus on disability compared to other minority groups and noted inconsistencies in how disability is defined and portrayed. Gardner and Radel (1978) observed that media primarily focuses on physical disabilities such as blindness, deafness, and mobility impairments. Klobas (1988) expanded on this by examining portrayals of wheelchair users, amputees, and individuals with developmental disorders in film and TV.

Longmore (1987) identified five recurring portrayals of differently-abled persons in Western media: villains, monsters, maladjusted figures, heroes, and individuals devoid of sexual agency. Nelson (1996) further added six media stereotypes, including the disabled victim, the supercrip hero, the burden, and the asexual. These patterns dehumanize individuals and obscure their real-life challenges and capacities. Similarly, Elliot and Byrd (1982) as well as Donaldson (1981) had found that differently-abled persons are often shown as poor, unemployed, or socially isolated. They are rarely depicted in ordinary roles such as bystanders or professionals. Farr (1994), as cited in Norwich (2019), argued that charity ads often depict differently-abled persons as passive dependents, reinforcing public perceptions of helplessness.

Nelson (1996) described differently-abled persons as the invisible minority on television, absent from normal familial and societal roles. Henderson and Heinz-Knowles (2003) confirmed this trend by reporting that only 0.6% of characters in prime-time U.S. entertainment programming were disabled, a stark contrast to their actual population share. Japanese media similarly underrepresents disability, Saito and Ishiyama (2005) found that just 1.7% of characters in Japanese dramas were disabled, mostly young individuals with visible disabilities. These findings echo the global pattern of underrepresentation and narrow portrayal. In a latest research by Conroy, Espinoza and Walker (2024), it was observed that just 3.9% of

characters have a disability. The share of characters with disabilities on TV ranged from a low of 2.6% in 2020 to a high of 4.7% in 2021. Further, 21.0% of characters with a disability were authentically cast by actors with the same (or similar) disability. Also, white characters are about one-and-a-half times as likely to be portrayed as having a disability than characters of color (4.4% of all white characters compared with 3.1% of all characters of color). The study also found that almost 57% of the characters with a disability who were 20 years and older were shown to be working or known to have a job, compared with 67.8% of characters without a disability who were 20 and older. This suggests that differently abled adult characters are less likely to be shown working than adult characters without a disability.

Bennett et al. (2021) stressed the role of drama in shaping public understanding of disability. They called for accurate, stereotype-free depictions that reflect the lived experiences of differently-abled persons. Mitchell and Snyder (2000) introduced the concept of cripping up, where non-disabled actors portray disabled characters—often winning awards for these roles, as seen with Oscar recipients in the U.S., while disabled actors remain underrepresented. Parrott (2019) noted that only one Deaf actor, Marlee Matlin, had won an Oscar, underscoring structural exclusion in the entertainment industry. Radio and print media fare no better.

Research has indicated that biases begin early in life and are reinforced by peer pressure, beauty standards, and media. Maftei and Merlici (2023) noted that deviations from physical norms, including disability, often trigger negative emotions. Holzinger et al. (2022) advocated for inclusive educational tools like toys that reflect physical limitations, to foster empathy and social integration from a young age.in this regard, Media can also be a tool for empowerment. Amoako et al. (2020) suggested that dramas and multimedia storytelling can educate society about the experiences of differently-abled persons and inspire inclusion. Wahl (1992) highlighted the effect of entertainment portrayals—particularly of mental illness—on public perceptions and treatment attitudes. Technological advances have furthered accessibility for differently-abled persons. Features like speech-to-text, adjustable content formats, and video calling enable greater autonomy (Suárez-Iglesias et al., 2021). Mainstream media has the potential to portray such technological inclusions, contributing to normalization and equity.

Theoretical Framework

Erving Goffman's framing theory posits that individuals interpret life through pre-existing frames shaped by past interactions and media narratives (Goffman, 1974). These frames influence how disability is perceived—either as tragedy or triumph. Media often reinforces harmful frames that are difficult to shift, even when contradicted by facts. For example, Rothenberger and Schmitt (2024) found that international news framed female refugees as passive victims, reinforcing gendered and vulnerable imagery. Similarly, Sun and Cheung (2022) showed how headlines in *The Economist* shaped international perceptions of China during COVID-19, revealing the power of language and structure in media framing.

Taking the concept of framing further, Cedric Clark (1969) outlined four stages of minority representation in media: Non-recognition**,** Ridicule**,** Regulation, and Respect**.** Initially, minorities are absent. Later, they appear but are mocked. Over time, they are depicted in supporting or subordinate roles before finally being treated as equals. Using the same typology, Fitzgerald (2010) found that Native American characters were typically portrayed as law enforcers of dominant groups, fitting Clark's regulation stage. Colston (2013) extended Clark's model to groups including people with disabilities, finding that many were still trapped in early stages. Clark's model is especially relevant for analyzing disability in Pakistani dramas, where differently-abled persons are beginning to emerge from non-recognition into more visible, though still often stereotyped roles.

The Social Model of Disability also provides an apt theoretical foundation for the present research. This model developed in contrast to the Medical Model, shifts the focus from

individual impairments to societal barriers (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 1994). This model emphasizes that people are disabled not by their conditions but by inaccessible environments and discriminatory attitudes. According to Thomas, Gradwell, and Markham (2012), the social model redefines disability as the consequence of systemic exclusion rather than bodily dysfunction. It challenges media to portray structural issues—such as lack of mobility aids, ableist language, and absence from leadership roles—rather than dramatizing impairment. By adopting the social model, media can contribute to dismantling stigma and normalizing the presence of differently-abled persons in all aspects of life.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative content analysis of Pakistani prime-time dramas (2017–2022) to examine the portrayal of differently-abled persons. Using purposive sampling, dramas from major channels featuring disabled characters were selected. The unit of analysis for each drama was the character who was being portrayed as a differently-abled person. Each character was analyzed for demographics, type of disability, and portrayal—positive, negative, or neutral—using a coding sheet. The study also assessed how other characters treated the disabled individual. Data were analyzed at both the drama and character level, focusing on themes and interactions. The findings were processed using SPSS through descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations to identify patterns in representation.

RESULTS

The research was aimed at exploring the representation of differently abled persons in Prime-time drama in Pakistan. findings of the study revealed that the eight dramas included in the sample contained 2381 scenes portraying a character as a person of disability. Following are the essential details about the dramas.

Table 1

Frequency of scenes of differently-abled characters

Drama	Character	Frequency of Scenes
Balaa	Nigaar	284
Ranjha Ranjha Kardi	Bhola	265
Yeh Dil Mera	Amaan	262
	Aina	249
Ishq Zahe Naseeb	Sameer	550
Seraab	Hoorain	343
Sabaat	Meraal	208
Aik SItam AUr	Ushna	190
Teri Rah Mein	Emaan	30

Table 3 details the frequency of scenes featuring key differently-abled characters across eight dramas. "Ishq Zahe Naseeb" stands out with Sameer appearing in 550 scenes, indicating a central focus on his character. "Seraab" follows with Hoorain in 343 scenes, and "Balaa" highlights Nigaar in 284 scenes. "Ranjha Ranjha Kardi" features Bhola in 265 scenes, and "Yeh Dil Mera" splits its focus between Amaan and Aina with 262 and 249 scenes respectively. "Sabaat" portrays Meraal in 208 scenes, while "Aik Sitam Aur" includes Ushna in 190 scenes. Lastly, "Teri Rah Mein" has the least representation with Emaan in 30 scenes.

RQ 1: *What demographic traits are commonly associated with differently-abled persons in Television representations?*

The first research question pertained to the demographic characteristics that the characters are shown to be having. The data in Table 2 indicates the age distribution of characters portrayed

as differently-abled across the sampled dramas. The majority of these characters are young, with 2125 scenes, accounting for 89.2% of the total. Mature characters are featured in 190 scenes, making up 8.0%, while child characters are the least represented, appearing in 66 scenes, or 2.8% of the total. This distribution suggests that the portrayal of differently-abled characters predominantly focus on young individuals, reflecting a potential narrative preference or societal emphasis on the experiences and challenges faced by younger people with disabilities.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of differently-abled characters shown

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	1107	46.5
Female	1274	53.5
Age		
Child	66	2.8%
Youth	2125	89.2%
Mature/ Elderly	190	8.0%
Marital Status		
Single	1041	43.7
Married	1316	55.3
Divorced/Separated	23	1.0
Literacy Status		
Literate	2116	88.9
Semi-Literate	265	11.1
Occupational Status		
Student	275	11.5
Housewife	190	8.0
Own Business	1060	44.5
Unemployed	856	36.0
Socio-Economic Class		
Elite	1773	74.5
Middle Class	608	25.5

With relation to gender, it was observed that female characters constitute the majority, with 1274 scenes, representing 53.5% of the total, while male characters appear in 1107 scenes, making up 46.5%. This data suggests a relatively balanced but slightly female-skewed portrayal of differently-abled characters, reflecting an effort to include diverse gender perspectives within the narratives.

With relation to marital status, it was observed that the majority of these characters were married, with 1316 scenes, accounting for 55.3% of the total. Single characters appear in 1041 scenes, making up 43.7%, while divorced or separated characters are the least represented, featuring in only 23 scenes, or 1.0% of the total. One case is missing from the data.

With relation to literacy levels, it was observed that a significant majority, 2116 characters, are depicted as literate, making up 88.9% of the total scenes. In contrast, 265 characters are shown as semi-literate, accounting for 11.1%. This distribution highlights a strong emphasis on literate characters within these narratives, suggesting that the dramas

predominantly focus on differently-abled individuals who have access to education and literacy.

With relation to occupational status, it was observed that a significant proportion, 1060 characters, are depicted as having their own business, making up 44.5% of the total scenes. Unemployed characters account for 856 scenes, or 36.0%, indicating a substantial focus on the challenges faced by those without employment. Students are featured in 275 scenes, representing 11.5%, while housewives appear in 190 scenes, making up 8.0% of the total. This distribution suggests a strong emphasis on differently-abled individuals who are self-employed or entrepreneurial, reflecting narratives that highlight their agency and independence.

With relation to the socio-economic status of the characters shown in the dramas, it was observed that a substantial majority (74.5%) were depicted as belonging to the elite class, accounting for of the total scenes. Middle-class characters appear in 608 scenes, making up 25.5%. This distribution indicates a predominant focus on elite differently-abled individuals, suggesting that the narratives are more inclined to explore the lives and challenges of those in higher socioeconomic strata.

Findings of the study revealed that a significant majority of the depictions of the differently abled persons featured a young character. The distribution across genders was relatively equitable with a very marginal difference. A positive element in the representations was that more than 50% of the characters were shown to be married while around 40% were shown to be single. Majority of the depictions featured a literate character belonging to the elite class while there was no representation of the working class which is problematic.

RQ 2: **Which forms of disability are most frequently depicted among the characters?**
Table 2
The Distribution of the types of disabilities portrayed among characters in the sampled dramas

	Types of Disabilities	Frequency
Cognitive disability 78.8%	Developmental/Learning Deficiency	265
	Schizophrenia	893
	Clinical Depression	719
	Anxiety Disorders	0
	Bipolar Disorder	0
	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	0
	Eating Disorders	0
	Disruptive Behavior & Dissocial Disorder	0
	Down Syndrome	0
Physical Disability 21.2 %	Quadriplegia/Paralysis	504
	Blindness	0
	Deafness	0
	Cerebral Palsy	0
	Epilepsy	0
	Physical Deformation	0

The second research question pertained to the form of disability being portrayed and whether it was physical or cognitive/psychological. The data in table 2 categorizes the types of disabilities portrayed in the sampled dramas into cognitive and physical disabilities. Cognitive disabilities, encompassing conditions such as schizophrenia, clinical depression, and developmental or learning deficiencies, are overwhelmingly predominant, accounting for

78.8% (1877 scenes) of the total. Physical disabilities, including quadriplegia and paralysis, constitute 21.2% (504 scenes).

The data in Table 2 reveals the distribution of various disabilities portrayed among characters in the sampled dramas. Schizophrenia is the most commonly depicted disability, accounting for 37.5% (893 scenes) of the total. Clinical depression follows with 30.2% (719 scenes), and quadriplegia/paralysis represents 21.2% (504 scenes). Down syndrome, developmental, or learning deficiencies are the least depicted, at 11.1% (265 scenes). The crosstabulation by gender shows distinct patterns: all characters with down syndrome/developmental/learning deficiencies are male (265 scenes). Schizophrenia is portrayed more frequently in males (550) than females (343). Clinical depression is more commonly depicted in females (457) than males (262), and quadriplegia/paralysis shows a stark gender disparity with a significantly higher portrayal in females (474) compared to males (30).

RQ 3: Does the portrayal of specific types of disabilities vary according to the characters' demographic traits?

Table 31

Crosstabulation of disability type and demographic factors

Demographic Factors		Cognitive Disability	Physical Disability
Age	Child	66	0
	Young	1811	314
	Mature	0	190
Gender	Male	1077	30
	Female	800	474
Marital Status	Single	971	70
	Married	905	411
	Divorced/Separated	0	23
Literacy	Literate	1612	504
	Semi-Literate	265	0
Occupation	Student	275	0
	Housewife	0	190
	Own Business	746	314
	Unemployed	856	0
Social Class	Elite	1269	504
	Middle Class	608	0

The third research question explored the relationship between the type of disability the characters were shown to be having and the demographic characteristics of the characters. Findings showed that cognitive deficiencies were predominantly portrayed in young individuals (1811 scenes) and are absent in mature characters, while physical deficiencies are more evenly distributed among young (314 scenes) and mature (190 scenes) individuals but absent in children. Gender-wise, cognitive disabilities are more frequently depicted in males (1077 scenes), whereas physical disabilities are predominantly shown in females (474 scenes). Marital status reveals that single characters are more associated with cognitive deficiencies (971 scenes) and less with physical deficiencies (70 scenes), whereas married characters have a relatively balanced portrayal between cognitive (905 scenes) and physical (411 scenes) disabilities.

Literacy status shows that all semi-literate characters (265 scenes) are associated with cognitive disabilities, while literate characters are portrayed with both cognitive (1612 scenes) and physical (504 scenes) disabilities. Occupationally, students and unemployed individuals

are exclusively portrayed with cognitive disabilities (275 and 856 scenes, respectively), whereas housewives and those with their own businesses show a mix, with housewives entirely depicted with physical disabilities (190 scenes) and business owners with both (746 cognitive and 314 physical). Social class data indicates that elite characters are depicted with both cognitive (1269 scenes) and physical (504 scenes) disabilities, while middle-class characters are solely portrayed with cognitive deficiencies (608 scenes).

RQ 4(a): *Are differently-abled persons portrayed in predominantly positive or negative roles?*

Table 4

Roles assigned to differently abled persons

	Frequency	Percent
Positive role	2057	86.4
Negative role	324	13.6
Total	2381	100.0

The fourth research question focused on whether the differently abled persons were shown in a positive or negative light. The data examines whether differently-abled characters are portrayed in positive or negative roles within the sampled dramas. The majority of these characters are depicted in positive roles, with 2057 scenes accounting for 86.4% of the total. In contrast, negative roles are significantly less common, appearing in 324 scenes, which constitutes 13.6% of the total. This distribution indicates a strong tendency to portray differently-abled individuals in a positive light, emphasizing their strengths, resilience, and positive contributions.

RQ 4(b): Whether there is any association between the portrayal of type of disability and role of the characters having disability?

Table 5

Crosstabulation of Disability type and type of role

	Cognitive Deficiency	Physical Deficiency	Total
Positive role	1877	180	2057
Negative role	0	324	324
Total	1877	504	2381

The second part of the fourth research question focused on the association between the type of disability that the characters were shown to be having and the role assigned to them. The crosstabulation data in Table 5 examines the association between the type of disability (cognitive vs. physical) and the role (positive vs. negative) of differently-abled characters. All characters with cognitive deficiencies are depicted exclusively in positive roles, with 1877 scenes. Conversely, physical deficiencies are associated with both positive and negative roles; 180 scenes depict characters with physical disabilities in positive roles, while 324 scenes show them in negative roles. This stark contrast reveals that while cognitive disabilities were uniformly portrayed positively, physical disabilities are more likely to be depicted negatively.

RQ 5: How are differently-abled persons treated by those around them?

The fifth and last research question pertained to how the differently abled characters were treated by those around them. Table 6 examines how differently-abled persons are treated by those around them, categorized into immediate family, extended relatives, and outsiders. Instances of pity, both verbal and non-verbal, are relatively low, with immediate family showing verbal pity in 16 cases (0.6%) and non-verbal pity in 21 cases (0.9%). Extended

relatives and outsiders exhibit verbal pity in 15 (0.6%) and 9 (0.4%) cases respectively, while non-verbal pity by outsiders is absent. Abuse is more pronounced in verbal forms, with immediate family showing verbal abuse in 22 cases (0.9%) and physical abuse in 12 cases (0.5%). Extended relatives and outsiders also show physical abuse, with 15 (0.6%) and 12 (0.5%) cases respectively. Encouragement is the most common positive treatment, with immediate family providing it in 101 cases (4.2%) and extended relatives in 96 cases (4%). Outsiders show very minimal encouragement, with only 4 cases (0.2%) and a single instance (0.04%).

Table 6

Behavior showed towards the differently- abled characters

		Frequency	**Immediate family**	**Extended Relative**	**Outsider**
Pity	Verbal Pity	16 (0.6%)	15(0.6%)	13 (0.5%)	9(0.4%)
	Non-Verbal Pity	21 (0.9%)			
Abuse	Physical Abuse	12 (0.5%)	15 (0.6%)	5 (0.2%)	12 (0.5%)
	Verbal Abuse	22 (0.9%)			
Encouragement	Encouragement	101 (4.2%)	96 (4%)	4 (0.2%)	1(0.04%)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The aim of the research was to explore how persons with disability are portrayed on mainstream media. In this regard, the research focused only on those television drams which aired during the prime-time slot and featured a person with disability in a leading or major role. Significant previous research (Donaldson, 1981; Henderson & Heinz-Knowles, 2003; Saito & Ishiyama, 2005) had indicated that the most remarkable aspect of the portrayal of disability and disabled characters is their marked absence from mainstream media. However, this aspect has slightly improved as various characters in major or lead roles were found.

The first research question of the research pertained to the demographic characteristics that the characters are shown to be having. Findings of the study revealed that a significant majority of the depictions of the differently abled persons featured a young character. This is in line with previous research (Henderson & Heinz-Knowles, 2003; Saito & Ishiyama, 2005) who had found that the demographic which is the most underrepresented in prime-time TV were disabled persons who were 65 years old or older. The distribution across genders was relatively equitable with a very marginal difference. A positive element in the representations was that more than 50% of the characters were shown to be married while around 40% were shown to be single which is in contrast to previous research by Elliot and Byrd (1982) who had found that people with disabilities were generally shown to be single. Nelson (1996) had also observed that on TV persons with disabilities were often excluded from important roles as husbands and wives, as fathers or mothers. Majority of the depictions featured a literate character belonging to the elite class while there was no representation of the working class which is problematic. Interestingly, previous literature (Elliot & Byrd, 1982) had noted that people with disabilities were depicted, predominantly, as belonging to lower socio-economic groups, and also unemployed, which is very different from the findings of the present research.

The second research question pertained to the type of disability being portrayed and whether it was physical or cognitive/psychological. Findings showed that more than 70% of the scenes featured a character with a cognitive/psychological disability. The next research question queried about the most common types of disabilities the characters are shown to be having. Findings showed that the representation of psychological issues such as schizophrenia and clinical depression were most common while the third most commonly shown disability

was quadriplegia/paralysis. The findings of the present research are in stark contrast to previous literature (Gardner & Radel, 1978) who had found that that most dramas portrayed individuals with physical disabilities rather than cognitive or mental disabilities. Further, Gardner and Radel (1978) had found that there was greater representation of physical impairments such as paraplegia, quadriplegia, blindness, deafness, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, diabetes and physical deformation.

The third research question explored the relationship between the type of disability the characters were shown to be having and the demographic characteristics of the characters. Findings indicated that a majority of the characters shown to have cognitive disability were found to be younger while those with physical disability were found to be mature. Also, males more commonly were shown to have cognitive disability while females were shown to have physical disability. There wasn't any significant impact of marital status, literacy levels and occupation. With regard to social class, as a majority of the characters were shown to belong to elite class and there was no representation of the working class, the influence of the type of disability could not be judged.

The fourth research question focused on whether the differently abled persons were shown in a positive or negative light. Findings showed that a significant majority of the depictions were positive which is a healthy sign but in contrast to previous literature such as Haller (2023) who were of the opinion that media is often accused of neglecting the positive contributions of persons with disabilities to society. Longmore (1987) described five common portrayals of disabled persons in television and motion pictures: portrayals of disabled persons as evil criminals with no soul; portrayals of disabled persons as monsters; portrayals of disabled persons as maladjusted; portrayals of disabled persons as heroes; and portrayals of disabled persons as sexually deviant, asexual or sexually incapacitated either physically or emotionally. In a similar vein, Nelson (1996) pointed to six major stereotypes in film and television: the disabled person as victim (telethon); the disabled person as a hero (supercrip); the disabled person as a threat (evil and warped); the disabled person as unable to adjust ('just buck up!); the disabled person as one to be cared for (the burden); and the disabled person as one who should not have survived. All these portrayals are fairly negative and thankfully were not visible in the sample. The first part of the research question focused on the association between the type of disability that the characters were shown t*o* be having and the role assigned to them. Findings indicated that while cognitive disabilities are uniformly portrayed positively, physical disabilities were more likely to be depicted negatively.

The fifth research question pertained to how the differently abled characters were treated by those around them. Findings showed that the most commonly occurring behavior was encouragement which was most commonly showed by the immediate family members of the differently abled characters. There were very few cases of physical abuse but relatively more cases of verbal abuse which was also most often done by family members. Similarly, although verbal pity was less frequent, non-verbal show of pity through gestures and expressions was more commonly shown by the family members. The media has been accused of promoting negative stereotypes of persons with disabilities, such as portraying them as helpless, dependent, or objects of pity. (Haller, 2023). Media outlets can effectively create knowledge by emphasizing the challenges faced by individuals who are disabled through the medium of television episodes and plays (Amoako et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study it can be concluded that the portrayal of persons with disability often features young elite class individuals, however the distribution across genders and marital status is equitable. The study also found that the disability that was most commonly portrayed was the cognitive/psychological disability such as schizophrenia and clinical

depression. When the type of disability was studied in light of demographic characteristics, it was found that a majority of the characters shown to have cognitive disability were found to be younger while those with physical disability were found to be mature. Also, males more commonly were shown to have cognitive disability while females were shown to have physical disability. Further it was also observed that a significant majority of the depictions were positive which is a healthy sign but the problematic aspect is that although cognitive disabilities were uniformly portrayed positively, physical disabilities were more likely to be depicted negatively. Lastly, findings also showed that the most commonly occurring behavior was encouragement which was most commonly showed by the immediate family members of the differently abled characters. There were very few cased of physical abuse but relatively more cases of verbal abuse which was also most often done by family members. Similarly, although verbal pity was less frequent, non-verbal show of pity through gestures and expressions was more commonly shown by the family members.

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