Social Construction of Disability

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Abstract

This study examines the social reality of people with disabilities in Batang Kuis using Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, which includes the processes of externalization, objectification, and internalization. The method used is qualitative with a descriptive approach, which is to describe and understand social phenomena, behavior, or certain conditions in the research problem formulation. Data was obtained through observation, semi-structured interviews with people with disabilities, as well as relevant literature and documentation studies. The purpose of this research is to gain a deep understanding of how people with disabilities live their lives and how social structures shape their experiences and realities. This research was conducted between April and May 2025. People with disabilities in Batang Kuis Subdistrict are beginning to be socially accepted through empathetic interactions, reflecting a process of internalization in social construction. However, this acceptance has not been followed by objectification in the form of adequate policies, facilities, and public services. The lack of access to inclusive education, therapy, and vocational training highlights the weakness of structural support. Therefore, strengthening policies and community education is necessary to ensure that acceptance does not remain at a symbolic level but transforms into real and sustainable inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

The situation of helplessness among people with disabilities in Batang Kuis Subdistrict, Deli Serdang Regency, is deeply concerning. In the Disdukcapil In the 2023 Disdukcapil, there are 38 people with disabilities consisting of various types of disabilities, namely physical and psychological disabilities. People with impairments experience a negative stigma in society, making them feel constrained and unneeded. Actually, individuals have a right to social assistance and work depending on their ability by Laws Nos. 8/2016 and 13/2003. Discrimination and a lack of public understanding remain the most major hurdles to their social (Apriliana & Nafiah, 2021). This disorder has a negative impact on disabled people's self-esteem, emotions, and motivation.

In response to this, it is important for society and the government to understand and support people with disabilities so that they can participate in social life (Lestari & Sumarto, 2021). The government should pay special attention to all people with disabilities (Kuper et al., 2024). Because the government plays a crucial role in improving the well-being of people with disabilities and ensuring their rights are respected. Similarly, the attitudes and behaviors of society that do not fully understand what it means to be a person with disabilities, because without proper understanding of what it means to be a person with disabilities, they cannot shift their perspective from focusing on disabilities to focusing on the abilities and potential of people with disabilities themselves, and as a result, people

with disabilities feel increasingly powerless, unneeded by their social environment, and this also leads to a lack of self-confidence for people with disabilities to participate in their social environment. However, on the contrary, if the attitudes and behaviors of society can understand what it means to be a person with a disability without stigmatization, they will feel more confident to participate in society, work, and pursue their dreams without fear of discrimination or judgment (Espinet-Rius et al., 2024).

The social construction theory proposed by Berger and Luckmann in The Social Construction of Reality is rooted in the philosophy of constructivism, which views social reality as the result of individuals' creations through a continuous process of social interaction. This theory is influenced by the ideas of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who emphasized the role of reason, intellect, and human social nature in constructing verifiable knowledge (Paul, 2025). The constructivist paradigm views humans as free beings who actively shape and are influenced by the social world through a series of processes, namely externalization (adapting to social products), objectification (institutionalizing social reality), and internalization (absorbing social values and meanings by individuals). Thus, the social construction of reality is created through activities, behaviors, and interactions carried out both individually and collectively, which ultimately form knowledge and meaning that are recognized collectively within society (Dreher, 2016).

Earlier research studies, such as (Rizki, 2019), investigated the social construction of people with disabilities when using public transportation, but only in public settings. (Arianto & Apsari, 2023) investigates barriers to the use of public transportation in many countries, however the context is too broad and the role of local communities is less prominent. In (Dewi Pangestuti, 2022), the discrimination of people with disabilities in the public education system is addressed without regard for individual experiences. These studies highlight significant issues, but they do not fully address social experiences and social constructions in the larger community.

This research fills the gap by focusing on how the social construction of society in Batang Kuis Sub-district shapes the experiences and social lives of people with disabilities. Departing from Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization will be analyzed to understand how stigma is formed and affects the identity and social participation of persons with disabilities (Asmanidar, 2021). This study also wants to see how changes in community attitudes can support the empowerment and strengthening of self-confidence of persons with disabilities.

This research focuses on two main questions, namely how the social lives of people with disabilities in Batang Kuis Sub-district run on a daily basis, and how the views and perceptions of the community towards them are formed through social processes. The purpose of this research is to understand in depth how people with disabilities live their social lives and how the social construction of society shapes their experiences and realities. What distinguishes this research from previous ones is its broader and more comprehensive approach, not only looking at accessibility or policy aspects, but also exploring the social aspects that affect the lives of people with disabilities. Thus, this research is expected to make an important contribution in changing the negative stigma attached and encouraging the creation of a more inclusive social environment for people with disabilities.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to describe and understand the social construction of persons with disabilities in Batang Kuis Sub-district, Deli Serdang Regency. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring meaning and social reality from the perspective of informants who experience the situation firsthand.

The research location was purposively selected, namely Batang Kuis Sub-district, based on the discovery of social realities related to the lives of persons with disabilities that are relevant to the problem formulation. The subjects in this study consisted of 15 informants with various types of physical, mental and intellectual disabilities. The informants were classified into three groups, namely

key informants (persons with disabilities with unique experiences), main informants (persons with disabilities with physical limitations since childhood), and supporting informants (family members of persons with disabilities). A purposive sampling technique was used to select informants based on the relevance of their experiences to the research objectives (Candra Susanto et al., 2024).

Data collection was conducted through three main methods: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted in an unstructured manner to directly observe the activities and interactions of persons with disabilities in daily life, without using standardized instruments, thus allowing flexibility and depth of observation. Interviews were conducted in both structured and unstructured ways. In structured interviews, researchers use a list of questions to ensure consistency of answers from all informants. In contrast, unstructured interviews give informants the space to convey their experiences freely and openly (Mouwn Erland, 2020). The interview process involved identifying informants with disabilities. Before beginning the interviews, the researchers prepared several questions relevant to the research questions and objectives. Documentation techniques are used to collect supporting data, such as images, official documents, and statistical data from trusted sources, including consolidated data from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024).

The interview guidelines in this study were developed based on the theoretical framework proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann regarding the social construction of reality. This theory emphasizes that social reality is formed through three interrelated dialectical processes, namely externalization, objectification, and internalization. Each of these processes serves as the basis for the formulation of interview questions, which are developed thematically to explore the informants' meanings, experiences, and perceptions of disability in a social context.

In the externalization stage, the interview focuses on how individuals express and interpret disability in their daily lives. The questions asked include the informants' understanding of the terms "disability" or "person with a disability," their personal experiences or relationships with individuals with disabilities, as well as society's responses to the presence of persons with disabilities, whether in the form of attitudes, special treatment, or social interactions that occur.

The objectification stage is aimed at exploring the extent to which the meaning and treatment of persons with disabilities has been institutionalized in the social structure. In this section, informants are asked to describe the availability of disability-friendly public facilities, the role of the village or sub-district government in supporting the livelihoods of persons with disabilities, and the existence of concrete policies or assistance received. In addition, they are asked how the community views the work capacity and social participation of persons with disabilities, which reflects social views that have crystallized in norms and institutions.
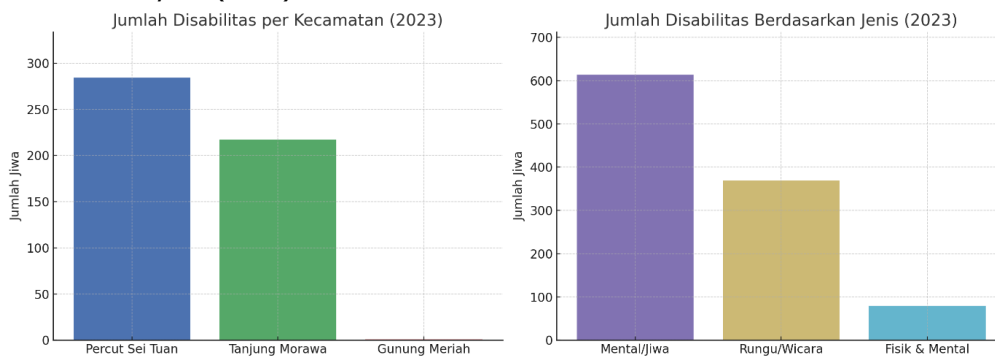
Furthermore, in the internalization stage, the interview guidelines target the process of identity formation and self-awareness of persons with disabilities, as well as how they interpret their social position in society. For informants with disabilities, questions were directed at their perceptions of how society treats them, their level of social acceptance, and their confidence in participating in social and economic activities. Meanwhile, for families or community members, questions were also asked about how families care for and treat family members with disabilities.

To conclude, the interview was supplemented with reflective questions regarding the informants' expectations of society and the government in creating a more inclusive life for people with disabilities. Informants were also asked to provide their views on aspects that still need to be improved in order to create more tangible equality for this group. All interview questions were semi-structured and flexible, allowing for adjustments based on the context of the situation and the informant's responses during the interview. The interview technique used was an in-depth interview, aimed at comprehensively gathering data based on the informants' direct experiences and subjective perspectives.
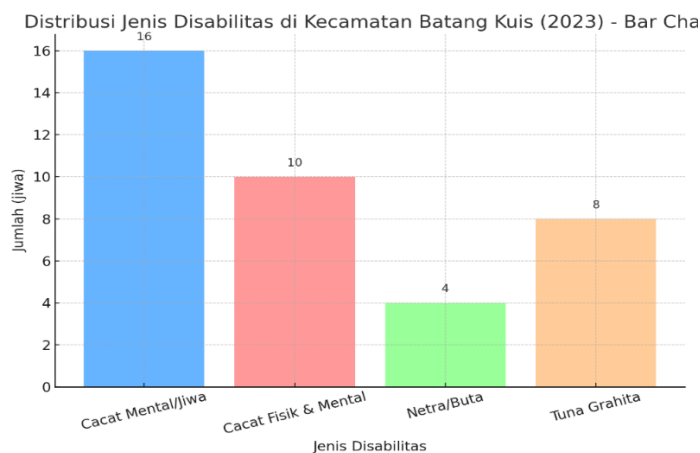
Fieldwork for this study was conducted over a period of six weeks, from April to May 2025. The process began with administrative preparations and the identification of informants using purposive

sampling techniques. The core activities, which included in-depth interviews, direct observation of the social activities of people with disabilities, and documentation, were carried out over three consecutive weeks. In the fifth week, the researcher validated the data through triangulation of sources and methods, as well as reconfirming the findings with the informants (member checking). The final week was focused on reflecting on the field results and compiling preliminary data for the analysis process. All activities were conducted with a strong emphasis on research ethics and a participatory approach to ensure the validity of the data and build trust between the researcher and the informants.

The following graph is based on the number of people with disabilities and by type of disability per sub-district in the year (2023).

In 2023, data on persons with disabilities in Deli Serdang Regency shows that Percut Sei Tuan Sub-district occupies the highest position with 284 persons with disabilities. The next position is Kecamatan Tanjung Morawa with 217 people, while the least number is recorded in Kecamatan Gunung Meriah which only has 1 person with a disability. Based on the type of disability, the group of people with mental disabilities is the largest, with 613 people. Followed by people with hearing/speech disabilities, totaling 369 people, while the smallest number was people with physical and mental disabilities, totaling 79 people (Efendi, 2023). Meanwhile, in the Batang Kuis sub-district, the graph of the number of people with disabilities shows the following:

The graph above shows that there are 38 people with disabilities in Batang Kuis subdistrict with various types of disabilities. There are 16 people with mental/psychological disabilities, 10 people with physical and mental disabilities, 4 people with visual impairments, and 8 people with intellectual disabilities. The main instrument in this research is the researcher himself as the key instrument, supported by interview guidelines, field notes, and documentation tools. No measuring instruments or statistical instruments were used given the exploratory and narrative nature of the research.

The main tool in this study was the researcher himself, supported by interview guidelines, field notes, and documentation tools. No measuring or statistical tools were used, given the exploratory

and narrative nature of the study. Data analysis was conducted through three main stages, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification (Alejandro & Zhao, 2024).

Data Reduction in this stage, all data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were carefully selected and simplified based on their relevance to the research objectives. Coding was performed to categorize the data into main themes such as stigma, acceptance, participation, accessibility, and policy. Data Presentation after processing, the data was organized and presented in narrative and visual form. Quotes from informants' statements were used to reinforce key findings. A matrix was also developed to compare responses among different groups of informants, such as between people with disabilities and their families. Conclusion Drawing and Verification at this stage, patterns and relationships are identified based on the categorized data. Conclusions are drawn using an inductive approach, while verification is carried out continuously throughout the research process to ensure consistency. Emerging findings are verified through triangulation of sources, methods, and time to enhance credibility.

Data validity is ensured through triangulation techniques. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing information from various types of informants and documents. Technique triangulation is used by combining interviews, observations, and documentation. Meanwhile, time triangulation is used by collecting data at different times to evaluate the consistency of information. These three forms of triangulation help ensure the credibility and reliability of research findings (Dehalwar et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Research Findings
1. The reality of social life for people with disabilities
a. Form Of Disability

People with disabilities are individuals who experience barriers to full and effective participation in society, whether physical, mental, intellectual or sensory. These forms of disability are very diverse, and each provides different challenges, both in personal life, education, the world of work, and social interaction. Based on Law No. 8/2016 in (Ari Atu Dewi, 2018) on Persons with Disabilities, as well as international references such as WHO, forms of disability can be classified into several main categories.

Pertama, Physical disability is experience partial or complete impairment in their bodily functions. Examples include people who have paralysis, amputation, cerebral palsy, or impaired mobility due to certain diseases such as polio. Kedua, Sensory Disability, Visual disabilities include individuals who are totally blind or have low vision. Meanwhile, hearing disabilities include those with total deafness or partial hearing loss. In some cases, people with sensory disabilities also have speech impairments, so they are categorized as deaf-speech disabled. Ketiga, Intellectual disability is have difficulty in abstract thinking, learning and understanding information. One of the most common forms is mental retardation, including Down syndrome. These barriers often impact a person's ability to lead an independent life without support. Ketiga, Psychosocial Disability, a condition of mental or emotional disturbance that affects one's ability to go about daily life. Individuals with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) fall into this category. Keempat, Multiple Disabilities, this is when a person experiences more than one type of disability at the same time. For example, a person may have a combination of physical and intellectual disabilities, or hearing and vision disabilities. Examples include autism spectrum disorders and other neurodevelopmental disorders affecting communication and social interaction skills.

Therefore, based on the above explanation, it can help the community to develop a more inclusive perspective and break down the stigma that has long been attached to people with disabilities. Equality and accessibility are not gifts, but rights that must be guaranteed by the state and supported by the collective consciousness of all elements of society. This research found several forms of

disability experienced by residents in Batang Kuis Sub-district, reflecting the diversity of disability conditions as classified in Law No. 8/2016.

Among them, several informants had physical disabilities. Suparman (47) is one of the people with physical disabilities who had his hand amputated due to a work accident. Currently, he does his daily activities with only one hand. Another case is Ardiansyah (30), who has experienced physical deformities since childhood due to medical complications, resulting in limited movement functions. Meanwhile, Hairani Siagian (64) has been physically disabled since birth. According to her, during her pregnancy, her mother did not receive adequate nutrition and vitamins, which then resulted in abnormal leg growth. Secondly, intellectual disabilities were also found in several cases. Popo (27) and Herman (32) are mentally retarded individuals. Bidin (23) and Yoga (12) are known to have Down syndrome, while Iyan (35) and Putra (24) are categorized as people with tunagrahita. All of these cases show limitations in cognitive and adaptive functions, which affect their ability to carry out daily activities independently. Third, sensory disabilities were also part of the research findings. Nur Asiah (57) was blinded as a result of a public transportation accident she had a few years ago. Meanwhile, Alvin (6) has been speech impaired since birth, characterized by limited speech.

The findings show that the forms of disability that exist in Batang Kuis Sub-district are quite diverse, both in terms of their causes and their impact on daily life. Each individual experiences disability from a different background, whether due to birth, accidents or certain medical conditions. Therefore, it is important for the community and local government to understand this diversity in order to design inclusive policies and programs, according to the needs of each person with a disability.

a. Public Perception of People with Disabilities

Public perception is a response or environmental knowledge from a collection of individuals who interact with each other because they have values, norms, ways and procedures that are common needs in the form of a system of customs that are continuous and bound by a common identity obtained through interpretation of sensory data (Attar et al., 2024). In the context of people with disabilities, people form perceptions based on what they know and experience about disability, whether through direct experience, the media, or stories developed in the social environment. This process is not only cognitive in recognizing that someone has a physical or mental difference but also involves emotional aspects, such as pity, fear, or even admiration.

Perceptions themselves are not formed suddenly, but emerge from ongoing social interactions between individuals within a community. In these interactions, people form values, norms, ways of life, and procedures that become part of an ongoing system of customs and become a shared identity. This shows that the way people perceive people with disabilities is strongly influenced by the social construction that surrounds them (Nursholichah et al., 2024).

When these perceptions are influenced by negative values, such as the notion that disability is a burden or a disgrace, then society tends to treat people with disabilities in a discriminatory and exclusive manner. Conversely, if the values developed are inclusive and view disability as part of human diversity, then the community will be more open in accepting and supporting the participation of people with disabilities in social life. Thus, community perceptions play an important role in shaping attitudes and treatment towards people with disabilities. Understanding how these perceptions are formed is the first step in changing society's perspective to be more inclusive and fair to all groups, including those living with disabilities.

In line with the previous understanding, this research found that community perceptions of people with disabilities in Batang Kuis Sub-district show quite complex dynamics. On the one hand, there is still a general assumption that people with disabilities are weak, helpless or pitiable. But on the other hand, the reality on the ground shows that not all people with disabilities experience discriminatory treatment or are excluded from their social environment.

One of the important findings in this research was obtained from an interview with Bayu Saputra (24), a university student who actively interacts with people with disabilities in his neighborhood. In

an interview conducted at his residence, Bayu expressed his views on the changing perceptions of people with disabilities. According to Bayu, although there are still some people who do not fully understand the conditions of disability, the tendency for people to view people with disabilities negatively has begun to decline. He considers that the collective awareness of the community is slowly increasing, marked by the increasingly open space for social interaction between people with disabilities and the general public. Bayu emphasized that people with disabilities are no longer seen as weak and alarming individuals, but as equal parts of the community.

"...In my opinion, about people like that they must be well cared for, because many people who do not understand often consider people with disabilities weak and concerning. In my opinion, there is no negative view of people with disabilities in the surrounding community, because they already understand such conditions..."

This statement shows that there is a shift in society's perspective, from a stigmatizing attitude to a more inclusive and appreciative attitude towards people with disabilities. Furthermore, Bayu emphasized the importance of the family's role in assisting persons with disabilities. According to him, emotional and social support from the family has a central role in shaping the self-confidence and independence of persons with disabilities. In this case, the family not only functions as a companion, but also as a social bridge between persons with disabilities and the surrounding environment. However, Bayu also highlighted the structural barriers faced by persons with disabilities, particularly regarding access to public facilities. He noted that special education facilities and disability-friendly public transportation are still very limited. This indicates that although social perceptions of people with disabilities are improving, real support from the infrastructure and public policy aspects is not yet fully adequate.

"...The role of the family is very important because people with disabilities must be given good treatment. To be honest, facilities are still lacking for people with disabilities like this, because there are also no schools available for children with special needs and other public transportation..."

This statement shows that changes in public perception must be accompanied by an increased commitment from the government and related institutions to provide inclusive facilities, so that people with disabilities can participate fully in social, educational and economic life.

Figure 1. Interview with the Informant

Other informants reported that they felt accepted and treated equally by their surroundings. Daily interactions, such as greetings or involvement in activities at places of worship, become social spaces that strengthen a sense of community. However, some individuals still feel hidden stigma, in the form of pitying looks or feelings of being differentiated, especially in the context of work or when socializing for the first time outside the usual environment. The role of family support has proven to be very significant in building self-confidence and providing emotional strength for people with disabilities in living their daily lives.

Although the general public still perceives people with disabilities as a weak or deplorable group, the reality on the ground shows that this is not always true. Many people with disabilities actually feel well accepted by their social environment. The surrounding community shows a friendly, empathetic attitude and appreciates their existence as part of the community. This can be seen from the experiences of informants who can still socialize smoothly, feel valued, and do not receive discriminatory treatment.

b. Social constraints experienced by people with disabilities

Reefani in (Nanda & Herawati, 2021) states that there are several types of people with special needs/disabilities. This means that each person with a disability has their own definition of constraints, all of which require assistance to grow and develop properly. Types of people with disabilities: Persons with Physical Disabilities, physical disabilities are impaired movement functions, including amputation, paralysis, paraplegia, celebral palsy (CP), stroke, leprosy and small person. Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, what is meant by intellectual disability is the disruption of the function of the mind due to the level of intelligence below the average, including slow learning, mental disability and down syndrome. Persons with Mental Disabilities, what is meant by Persons with Mental Disabilities is the disruption of the functions of thought, emotion, and behavior. Persons with Sensory Disabilities What is meant by "Persons with sensory disabilities" is the disruption of one of the functions of the five senses, including visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, and/or speech disabilities.

The obstacle faced by persons with disabilities in obtaining employment is the lack of information on the availability of vacancies that open formations for persons with disabilities. Access to information related to job training, entrepreneurship training is still uneven for all persons with disabilities. Only those who are active in organizations can get this access. There are many factors why a person with a disability is not active in organizing, one of which is the family factor that does not allow them to leave the house because they are embarrassed, etc. In addition, there is also the factor of access that is not available to people with disabilities. In addition, there are also access factors that cannot be held by people with disabilities (Leonardi et al., 2024).

The low participation of persons with disabilities, especially those with severe disabilities, in the development process reflects the limited application of the principle of inclusiveness in various sectors of life. This inequality is also evident in the suboptimal empowerment efforts in a number of strategic areas such as education, health and the economy. As a result, people with disabilities have not fully benefited from development on an equal basis with non-disabled groups. The Indonesian government has actually demonstrated its commitment to inclusive development through the issuance of Law No. 8/2016 on Persons with Disabilities. This change in conceptual approach is expected to be an important milestone in promoting equality and opening up space for improvement in the implementation of inclusive development in Indonesia. However, the transition process towards a more inclusive approach still faces various structural and cultural challenges that have the potential to lead to the exclusion of persons with disabilities (Hastuti et al., 2020).

Thus, the marginalization of persons with disabilities in development cannot be solely explained by limitations in body function or structure. On the contrary, their interaction with an environment that is not disability-friendly physically, socially, or institutionally is the main factor that causes marginalization. At the individual level, low empowerment is a crucial factor that has a direct impact on limited participation in development and access to public services.

This lack of empowerment is inseparable from the influence of interpersonal contexts, such as relationships with family, peers, educators, and employers, which are often still overshadowed by stigma, social norms, and discriminatory behavior. Patterns of interaction at the wider community level also tend to reinforce social exclusion through neglect of the rights of persons with disabilities and the lack of support that allows them to participate equally in community life.

While the social constraints of persons with disabilities in the findings of this study are structural barriers that remain a major problem, the lack of disability-friendly public facilities limits mobility and

social participation. In the world of work, negative perceptions from employers also narrow opportunities, so many people with disabilities turn to independent businesses or remain at home.

The difficulties faced by people with disabilities in accessing formal employment were revealed by several parties, including Suparman (47), a person with physical disabilities, who expressed various challenges faced at the beginning of the social interaction process, including feelings of inferiority, fear, and concerns related to safety and social acceptance. In the context of social interaction, Suparman feels quite accepted in his environment, although he still faces challenges in the world of work. He feels stigmatized by those outside the community who do not fully understand or accept his physical limitations.

"...It's hard to get along when it comes to work issues, if you just hang out chatting with friends or people around, it's normal, if the view is different I really feel that I am seen as different, especially in terms of the ability to work even though I am able to do it even though using one hand there are no obstacles for me, but sometimes people consider me incapable. Those who look at me that way are mostly my coworkers who are not from around here..."

Furthermore, Suparman emphasized that his living environment provided positive acceptance, which was an important factor in rebuilding his confidence. This positive experience not only impacted him personally, but also strengthened his perception that society can be inclusive.

"...I've never been commented on negatively let alone mocked like that, if it's a matter of being underestimated or ignored, that's a matter of work, the most unpleasant thing is being shunned by coworkers because they think I've done nothing when it's not so..."

As such, the narrative depicts Suparman's journey in overcoming social interaction challenges and building self-confidence, demonstrating the importance of environmental support in the process of self-acceptance and social inclusion.

Figure 2. Interview with the Informant

It can be concluded that the findings from interviews with people with disabilities and their families show that the social reality of disability in the Batang Kuis Sub-district community is the result of a dynamic social construction process. Berger and Luckmann (1966) The Social Construction of Reality in (Tinjan, 2025) explain that social reality is formed through the process of externalization, objectivation, and internalization that takes place in daily social interactions.

The research findings regarding the reality of the lives of persons with disabilities in Batang Kuis Sub-district can be explained through three main processes in Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. First, externalization can be seen in how people express the meaning of disability through daily interactions. The use of terms such as "handicap" and compassionate treatment reflect how people form initial meanings of disability based on cultural values and social experiences. Secondly, in the objectivation process, these views are institutionalized in social policies and practices. The findings show that people with disabilities face limited access to public facilities, education and employment. These barriers are not solely due to physical conditions, but because disability has been constructed as a social and structural inability. Third, through internalization, people with disabilities accept and process society's view of themselves.

Some informants show strong self-acceptance due to social support, while others experience self-confidence due to discriminatory treatment. Overall, community perceptions of people with disabilities are the result of social constructs that can change. The emergence of more inclusive attitudes in society shows that social construction is dynamic and can be directed towards a more equitable direction through positive interaction and education.

2. Social Construction of Persons with Disabilitiy

a. Community Response to Persons Disability

The results of the interviews in this study show that community responses to persons with disabilities in Batang Kuis Sub-district are diverse and reflect the dynamics between inclusive attitudes and the challenges that still arise. In general, the community shows concern for people with disabilities, but this concern is not always accompanied by a proper understanding of the needs and potential of individuals with disabilities. Some informants stated that the community tends to show concern or pity for their condition, although not directly giving negative comments. One of the informants, Ardiansyah (30), expressed this.

"...I think they always look at me with concern or pity, even though I'm fine..."

This statement shows that even if there is no explicit discrimination, a pity-based perspective can have implications for perceptions that reduce the capacity of people with disabilities as independent and empowered individuals. On the other hand, most informants also expressed positive social acceptance from the surrounding environment. They do not feel neglected and receive tangible forms of social support, both in the form of emotional attention and practical assistance from neighbors and the surrounding community. For example, some informants recounted that they were often given food, light assistance, or simply received a warm greeting that strengthened their sense of acceptance in society.

This was clarified by an interview with Mrs. Mariana (57), a mother of a child with intellectual disabilities. In a conversation conducted at her residence, Ibu Mariana described that her child is able to carry out daily activities quite well and establish positive social interactions with individuals around him. She emphasized that the community in her neighborhood showed a high level of acceptance towards her son's existence.

"...Never treated badly by others, the neighbors around here have been very understanding of my child with his condition like this. People around here in my opinion have been very friendly and kind as far as I can see, even they also really love my child with conditions like this. Sometimes the neighbors buy clothes for Eid..."

This statement illustrates a form of social support that is not only symbolic, but also tangible in the form of emotional attention and care. This reflects the process of internalizing inclusive values that have been embedded in the local community, where people with disabilities are not only recognized for their existence, but also valued as an equal part of the community.

This finding shows that in certain social contexts, collective norms have been formed that support acceptance of differences, including disability. This is in line with the view of (Dewi Pangestuti, 2022) who emphasizes the importance of integrating inclusive values in daily social practices as part of the social construction process towards people with disabilities. Thus, this experience shows that communities can play a significant role in creating supportive social spaces, which ultimately contribute to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their families.

Figure 3. Interview with the Informant

An interview with Ms. Hairani Siagian (63), a person with a physical disability, provides a clear picture of how communities can shape an inclusive and supportive social environment for individuals with disabilities. In an interview conducted at her residence, Mrs. Hairani said that she never felt treated differently by the surrounding community. Instead, the open and friendly attitude of the social environment made her feel recognized and valued as a full member of the community.

"...I have a good relationship with the surrounding community, about getting along I think it's normal because the neighbors here are good and accept me in this condition, never seen as different, all are seen as equal..."

This statement reflects a strong sense of social acceptance, where people with disabilities are no longer seen as a separate or fundamentally different group from non-disabled individuals in the context of social capacity. This inclusive acceptance not only impacts day-to-day social interactions, but also contributes to self-confidence and active participation in community activities.

Furthermore, Ms. Hairani emphasized that this acceptance made her feel safe, comfortable, and had space to express herself and engage in social activities, such as weekly recitation and perwiridan. She said,

"...With the friendly and kind response of the community so far, I feel like I am part of them, that's why until now I have never felt avoided by the people around me. And I think even with that situation, I feel more confident and always participate in community activities..."

Social support provided by the community not only strengthens the social identity of persons with disabilities as equal individuals, but also creates psychological conditions that support active involvement in social life. In this context, the community acts as an important agent in breaking down stigma, and building a social structure that is more just and friendly to diversity.

Figure 4. Interview with the Informant

The findings from the interviews above show that the community's response to people with disabilities in Batang Kuis Sub-district tends to be more inclusive and supportive. Although there are

still nuanced views of pity or pity, most communities have shown a positive attitude of acceptance. They no longer view people with disabilities as a completely different or incapable group, but rather as an equal part of social life.

b. Solutions for Persons with Disabilities in Daily Life

The problems experienced by persons with disabilities can seize the attention of the government. Therefore, the government has created a new policy for persons with disabilities with the aim of fulfilling the rights of persons with disabilities. Law No.8 2016 includes 22 rights of persons with disabilities, including: a. right to life; b. right to be free from negative stigma; c. right to privacy; d. right to justice and legal protection; e. right to proper education; f. right to entrepreneurship and cooperation; g. health; h. politics; i. religion; j. sports; k. culture and tourism; l. social welfare; m. accessibility; n. public services; e. accessibility; n. public services; l. social welfare; m. accessibility; n. public services; o. protection from disasters; p. disability and rehabilitation; q. concessions; r. data collection; s. live independently and be included in the community; t. communicate and interact and obtain information; u. change places and citizenship; and v. be free from discrimination, neglect, abuse, exploitation (Alika et al., 2025).

In addition, there are efforts to alleviate poverty, one of which is by empowering people with disabilities as a solution so that they are able to hone their potential so that they can produce a work that can prosper their lives both financially and non-financially. The village government has a great responsibility in trying to solve problems in the village. The village government is fully responsible for ensuring the continuity of the rights of persons with disabilities (Syah Roni Amanullah, 2022). The problems experienced by persons with disabilities are fairly continuous, from educational problems to employment. The village government plays an active role in dealing with these problems, by instilling the nature of independence in people with mental retardation, with the aim that other people do not underestimate people with disabilities (Blaise et al., 2025).

The findings of this study indicate a mismatch between the ideal conditions expected in the fulfillment of the rights of persons with disabilities and the reality that occurs in Batang Kuis Sub-district. Although some informants stated that social interactions and community acceptance of persons with disabilities showed increasingly positive and equitable developments, this has not been matched by adequate structural support. Support in the form of accessible public facilities, employment opportunities, social assistance such as basic necessities, and fulfillment of other basic needs is still very limited. In addition, there are no initiatives or policies from the local government that specifically provide job training programs or economic empowerment efforts for persons with disabilities. This condition is an obstacle in realizing the independence and welfare of persons with disabilities in their daily lives.

To strengthen the findings of this study, one of the informants, Rikayanti (34) and Nia Ramadhani (27), a mother of a child with Down syndrome, conveyed the difficulties she faces in meeting the daily needs of her child. She revealed that her child needs support from the government, especially in the form of providing healthy and nutritious food, access to special education that suits the child's needs, and ongoing therapy services.

However, according to Rikayanti, until now there has been no initiative or concrete solution from the village or sub-district to address these needs. This is unfortunate, as the absence of these basic facilities and services means that people with disabilities face significant obstacles in carrying out their daily activities and improving their quality of life.

However, informants also highlighted the challenges faced in meeting their children's needs. One of the main challenges is the absence of special facilities from the government, including therapy services, special education and ongoing social assistance. She noted that special schools for children with intellectual disabilities are not yet available in her sub-district, making access to appropriate education difficult. She also shared a traumatic experience when her child once got lost because he was difficult to control outside the home. In addition, assistance from the government has only been received once, whereas such assistance is needed to support the daily life of the child and his family.

"...the environment here is very friendly and good too, because the community here has understood the situation of my child like this. the challenges faced when he has left do not want to go home and even disappeared, besides that the school is far away because in this sub-district there is no special school for syndrome disabilities for my child, I have also only received assistance from the government once even though it is very helpful for my life and my child..."

Figure 5. Interview with the Informant

3. Theoretical Analysis Using Berger and Luckmann's Framework

The concept of social construction developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) in their work The Social Construction of Reality provides a relevant theoretical framework for understanding the social reality of people with disabilities in Batang Kuis District. From this perspective, social reality is not understood as something objective and fixed, but rather as the result of an ongoing social dialectical process that unfolds through three stages: externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Longhofer & Winchester, 2016).

a. Externalization (Society's Expression of the Meaning of Disability)

Externalization is the initial stage in which society expresses its perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge about persons with disabilities through actions, language, and daily social interactions. The results of this study indicate that the process of externalizing the meaning of disability in Batang Kuis is still dominated by ambiguous perspectives. On one hand, the use of terms such as "disabled" or "weak" is still commonly found, reflecting that some members of society view disability as a condition of deficiency or helplessness. Additionally, attitudes of pity without a full understanding of the potential of people with disabilities are also part of the social expressions commonly encountered. Ardiansyah's (30) statement expressing society's pity toward people with disabilities, even without explicit negative comments, serves as evidence that the externalization of the meaning of disability remains oriented toward a pity-based paradigm rather than the principle of equality. However, the research results also indicate the emergence of more positive social expressions. Some residents, such as Bayu Saputra, have begun to view people with disabilities as equal members of society. Other forms of positive externalization are seen in the practical assistance, warm greetings, and social acceptance provided by local residents, as expressed by Mrs. Mariana and Mrs. Hairani Siagian. This phenomenon shows that the social construction of people with disabilities in Batang Kuis is not entirely negative, but is shifting towards a more inclusive meaning.

b. Objectification (Institutionalization of Meaning in Social Structures)

Objectification is the stage when the meanings expressed by society become institutionalized as social realities that are considered normal, accepted by all, and detached from their individual creators. In the context of Batang Kuis, objectification of persons with disabilities is reflected in two main aspects, namely social and structural aspects. In the social aspect, some members of society have developed norms that encourage acceptance, support, and positive interaction with people with disabilities. This is evident in the social lives of families with disabilities, such as those experienced by the children of Mrs. Mariana and Mrs. Hairani Siagian, where social acceptance and support have begun to become

part of the local social structure. However, negative objectification remains strongly entrenched, particularly in the structural dimension. This study shows that limited accessibility to public facilities, insufficient special education services, and low employment opportunities for people with disabilities are concrete forms of negative objectification that have hardened into an exclusive social structure. Complaints from informants such as Rikayanti (34) and Nia Ramadhani (27) regarding the government's lack of attention in providing facilities and empowerment programs indicate that objectification at the structural level has not yet fully favored persons with disabilities. Although there are normative regulations governing the rights of persons with disabilities, such as Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, implementation at the local level still shows a significant gap between the idealism of the regulations and the reality on the ground.

c. Internalization (Identity Formation and Self-Awareness)

Internalization is the stage at which individuals, including persons with disabilities, adopt objectified social realities into their self-awareness and identity. This internalization process occurs in two opposing directions. On one hand, people with disabilities who receive social support and positive acceptance from their families and surrounding environment tend to internalize a positive self-image, as experienced by Suparman and Bayu Saputra. This support plays a significant role in building self-confidence, encouraging social participation, and strengthening their identity as equal members of society. On the other hand, structural limitations, lack of access to education and public facilities, and the persistence of social stigma trigger negative internalization. This is reflected in the experiences of some people with disabilities, as shared by Rikayanti and Nia Ramadhani, who feel inferior, isolated, and lack self-confidence due to the social realities they face. Thus, the internalization process in Batang Kuis reveals a duality influenced by the dynamics of externalization and objectification in their environment. The position of people with disabilities in society is not determined solely by biological conditions but is also significantly shaped by the evolving social constructs.

d. *Disability as a Dynamic Social Construction*

Based on analysis using Berger and Luckmann's framework, it can be concluded that the social construction of persons with disabilities in Batang Kuis is dynamic and constantly evolving. The meaning of disability is constructed through social expressions of the community, institutionalized in social norms and structures, and internalized into the consciousness of individuals with disabilities. Although there is a positive trend toward increased social acceptance, structural realities indicate that efforts toward an inclusive society still face various obstacles, particularly in terms of policy and the provision of adequate facilities. Transforming the social construction of disability in Batang Kuis requires synergy between changes in societal attitudes at the micro level and concrete structural interventions at the macro level. Inclusive education, public awareness campaigns, improving accessibility to public facilities, and economic empowerment for people with disabilities are crucial steps toward achieving an equitable and just society.

Results

The results of the study indicate that the community in Batang Kuis is beginning to show empathy and greater openness toward people with disabilities. They are accepted into social circles, receive emotional support, and are viewed humanely by most neighbors and the surrounding community. However, this acceptance tends to be interpersonal in nature and is not yet supported by social structures capable of guaranteeing the rights and needs of people with disabilities comprehensively. The attitudes that emerge represent symbolic concern rather than systemic support. In other words, the community accepts the presence of people with disabilities, but does not yet understand the importance of inclusion as a right, rather than merely an act of kindness.

The structural inequality experienced by people with disabilities is evident in the lack of inclusive public facilities, the absence of special schools at the sub-district level, limited access to therapy services, and the absence of sustainable job training or economic empowerment programs. The absence of affirmative policies from local governments reflects the weak social objectification of disability as part of human diversity. This indicates that state actors, as holders of structural power, have not been optimally present in distributing resources and rights that should be guaranteed by law,

particularly in the implementation of Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities. In the context of social relations, power also operates symbolically through the way society interprets disability. Terms such as "defective," "pitiful," or "incapable" are still frequently used in social interactions, indicating that the interpretation of disability is still dominated by a paternalistic paradigm. In this paradigm, people with disabilities are not positioned as independent and empowered social subjects, but rather as objects of pity and assistance. This symbolic form of power reveals epistemic domination where the majority determines the definitions and boundaries of the identity of minority groups such as people with disabilities (Cocks, 2024).

Furthermore, this domination does not only stop at the level of meaning, but also influences the formation of the self-awareness of people with disabilities themselves. Several informants in the study revealed feelings of inferiority, lack of self-confidence, and reluctance to socialize because they felt unequal. This is evidence of the internalization of inequalities that have been objectified in the social structure. When society and the social system continuously send the message that people with disabilities are weak, individuals in that group tend to absorb that meaning into their identity, which ultimately reinforces the cycle of subordination.

Thus, it can be concluded that the social construction of disability in Batang Kuis still takes place within unequal power relations, both structurally and symbolically. While the processes of externalization and internalization have shown a direction toward more inclusive acceptance, the objectification of disability through policies and support systems remains far from ideal. Within the framework of transformative social change, these power dynamics must be redirected to support the creation of an inclusive society that not only symbolically accepts but also structurally ensures the active participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of social, economic, and political life. Therefore, simultaneous strengthening is needed at two levels, (1) The micro level, namely educating the community to change their perspective from pity to respect for the rights and capacities of persons with disabilities; and (2) The macro level, namely policy reform at the local level through the provision of inclusive education facilities, adaptive health services, public accessibility, and sustainable economic empowerment programs. Only through the synergy between social awareness and structural power can an inclusive society truly be realized (Leahy & Ferri, 2022).

In recent decades, the discourse on disability rights has undergone a fundamental transformation from a medical and charitable approach to a rights-based approach. This perspective is emphasized in important documents such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2006 and ratified by Indonesia through Law No. 19 of 2011. The CRPD emphasizes that disability is a social construct resulting from the interaction between individual limitations and environmental barriers or societal attitudes. Therefore, the primary strategy in building an inclusive society is to eliminate these barriers, whether physical, social, or institutional (Smith et al., 2024).

This study shows that the community in Batang Kuis has begun to show signs of social acceptance of persons with disabilities. Warm social interactions, empathetic attitudes, and emotional support provided by families and the community are indicators that inclusive values are beginning to be internalized in the collective consciousness. This acceptance reflects the strong social potential to form an inclusive society from the bottom up. However, when viewed in the context of human rights, especially disability rights, this social acceptance is still superficial and has not been adequately institutionalized. Interpersonal acceptance does not necessarily guarantee the fulfillment of the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities, such as the right to education, employment, mobility, access to health services, and political and social participation. This raises a major contradiction that is an important finding in this study: society is beginning to accept persons with disabilities as part of social life, but the state and structural institutions have not yet provided fair and equal space and support for their livelihoods.

For example, some informants said they felt accepted by their neighbors and the surrounding community, and even often received help and attention. However, on the other hand, they still had

difficulty accessing special education, therapy, formal employment, and basic social services. Assistance from the government was minimal and tended to be incidental rather than systemic. In fact, a rights-based approach requires the state to be the main actor in ensuring equal access and fulfillment of the specific needs of persons with disabilities.

This contradiction highlights the gap between a social construction that is beginning to be inclusive and a social structure that remains exclusive. Within the framework of Berger and Luckmann, this means that the process of internalizing values of acceptance has begun to take shape, but it is not yet supported by the process of objectification that produces norms, institutions, and policies that favor the disability community. As a result, the inclusive social reality remains at the symbolic level, failing to develop into a just system.

From a global disability rights perspective, this condition reflects the fragility of social acceptance without structural support. When legal systems, public policies, and social services are not inclusive, social acceptance becomes vulnerable to being reduced to charity, which is unable to substantively change the social position of persons with disabilities. This contradicts the spirit of the CRPD, which demands equal recognition before the law, reasonable accommodation, and full and effective participation in all aspects of life (Fiala-Butora, 2024). Therefore, to bridge this gap, a shift is needed from a cultural approach that solely emphasizes attitude change toward a structural approach that demands state responsibility in providing policies, infrastructure, and service systems based on rights and equality. An increasingly inclusive society is an important foundation, but without strong structural support, such acceptance will stagnate and risk being reproduced in the form of dependency and non-empowering symbolism.

The findings of this study, which uses Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory, show that the social reality of people with disabilities in Batang Kuis is shaped through a dialectical process between society and social structures. The process of externalization in the form of expressions of empathy and acceptance, the process of internalization in the form of self-identity acceptance, and the weak objectification in the form of a lack of policies and facilities, create an incomplete picture of social construction. People with disabilities are beginning to be accepted on an interpersonal level, but their rights have not yet been fulfilled structurally. To enrich understanding, these findings can be compared with a number of similar studies that use different theoretical approaches, including Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory and critical disability studies.

In a study by Pangestuti (2022), which examined discrimination against persons with disabilities in the general education system in large cities using Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, it was found that dominant norms that exclude persons with disabilities have been internalized as something "normal." Public schools do not actively reject students with disabilities, but structurally create a system that makes access difficult for them in terms of curriculum, facilities, and teacher attitudes.

When compared to findings in Batang Kuis, there is a fundamental similarity in that social acceptance is not accompanied by structural change. However, Gramsci's approach emphasizes that this inequality is not merely the result of negligence but part of the cultural dominance of the majority that shapes "neutral" educational norms, which are actually exclusive. Within this framework, social class dominance also plays a role in maintaining inequality through society's "voluntary compliance" with an education system that is not inclusive. This approach highlights how power operates not only through formal institutions but also through ideological control and public consciousness. It expands the analysis of social construction theory, which tends to focus on the interaction and institutionalization of values, by incorporating elements of cultural domination and ideological power relations.

Research by Alizah et al. (2023) examined employment policies for people with disabilities in state-owned enterprises using a critical disability studies (CDS) approach. CDS views disability as the result of exclusionary social and economic structures and rejects medical or charitable views of people with disabilities. The study revealed that despite the existence of disability employment quotas, their

implementation is weak and often circumvented by companies. People with disabilities are still viewed as a burden rather than as potential workers.

In the context of Batang Kuis, similar conditions are evident in the labor market: people with disabilities face marginalization due to societal assumptions about their inability to work, despite their actual capable workforce potential. The findings also reveal that people with disabilities are often "forced" to work independently or remain at home because the workplace is not inclusive and does not provide opportunities. CDS rejects the notion that people with disabilities must "adapt" to the system and instead demands that the system change. This approach is more radical than Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory because CDS not only discusses how the meaning of disability is formed but also challenges the economic-political structures that perpetuate inequality.

Table 1. *Synthetic Comparison: Advantages and Limitations of the Approach*

Aspect	Berger & Luckman (this study)	Gramsci (Pangestuti, 2022)	Critical Disability Studies (Alizah et al., 2023)
Main focus	Social interaction, meaning formation	Cultural hegemony, ideological domination	Struktur penindasan, advokasi transformasi sistemik
Types of power	Local symbolism and structure	Cultural hegemony, ideological domination	Ekonomi-politik dan sistemik
Solutions offered	Community education, inclusive policies	Ideological resistance, curriculum change	Perombakan sistemik, intervensi berbasis hak
Contextual relevance	Suitable for small communities	Suitable for analysis of the national education system	Relevan untuk kebijakan negara dan korporasi besar

Through this comparative analysis, it can be concluded that the findings in Batang Kuis reinforce a general trend in disability studies, social inclusivity has not been followed by structural transformation. Berger & Luckmann's approach provides a strong framework for explaining how the meaning of disability is constructed and disseminated, but it does not address aspects of systemic and economic-political domination as offered by hegemony theory and CDS.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that the community in Batang Kuis Subdistrict is beginning to show an inclusive attitude toward persons with disabilities, as reflected in empathy, acceptance, and more open social interaction. These values of acceptance are beginning to be internalized in the social consciousness of the community, but they are still symbolic and not yet supported by adequate facilities, accessibility, or policies to improve the welfare of persons with disabilities. The social construction process is still in its early stages, where interpersonal acceptance has not yet been fully followed by objectification in the form of sustainable programs, institutions, and policies. The role of the local government is also not yet optimal, as seen in the lack of facilities such as inclusive education, therapy services, job training, and empowerment programs that are needed.

This study has limitations, including being conducted only in the Batang Kuis sub-district, so the results cannot be generalized to other areas. Additionally, the study primarily reflects the perspective of the general public, while the direct experiences of people with disabilities and their families have not been explored in depth. An in-depth analysis of local government policies has not been conducted, and the short research period poses a challenge in capturing broader social dynamics.

Therefore, further research is recommended to cover a broader area, involve more people with disabilities and their families as the main subjects, and examine the role and implementation of government policies in more detail. This is expected to lead to the formulation of more effective

strategies to accelerate the realization of an inclusive society, not only in attitude but also in the form of concrete policies and social systems.

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