

# Disability Justice in Global Health: Let's Not Forget to Dismantle Ableism

**Ananya Tina Banerjee, PhD (she/her)**

অনন্যা টিনা ব্যানার্জী

Assistant Professor | Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (EDIAR) Lead

School of Population and Global Health | Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

McGill University



# Land Acknowledgement

In traditional teachings, individuals with disabilities are often viewed as those with special gifts, with a special connection to spirituality, or with a special purpose.

Indigenous culture has often embraced people with disability, rather than segregating them.

Some cultures have referred to developmental disabilities as “beautiful difference” or “Naadjwinoon kina ebkaana”.

# My Story



"That You come to save me- that is not my prayer, I ask for strength to overcome. You need not comfort me - by lightening my load; I ask for strength to carry my burden."

-Rabindranath Tagore



**Disability is not just a medical condition,  
but also a historical, social, cultural, and  
political construct...**

# THE LANCET

[This journal](#) [Journals](#) [Publish](#) [Clinical](#) [Global health](#) [Multimedia](#) [Events](#) [About](#)

**PERSPECTIVES | The art of medicine** · [Volume 405, Issue 10480](#), P690-691, March 01, 2025

[Download Full Issue](#)

## Legacies of ableism and the pursuit of disability justice in medicine

[Ananya Tina Banerjee](#) 

# Defining Ableism



## **ABLEISM**

a·ble·ism \ äbə-ˌli-zəm \  
*noun*

A system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence and excellence. These constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence and excellence are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics and capitalism.

This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on people's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily produce, excel and "behave."

You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

*a working definition by Talila "TL" Lewis*

Persons with disabilities constitute the world's largest marginalized group in all regions of the world and often left behind...

**ABLEISM IS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON**

# The Eugenics Movement and Forced Sterilization of People with Disabilities

- In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the eugenics movement from Europe and North America spread globally, influencing legal policies worldwide to structurally discriminate communities with disabilities.
- Aligned with capitalism by excluding disabled people from the labor market, valuing productivity over inclusion, and reinforcing economic marginalization.



A Eugenic Society Poster



**Global development**

This article is more than 9 years old

## People affected by leprosy in India face stigma reinforced by cruel colonial law

A draft bill aims to repeal laws that enshrine prejudice and discrimination against people with leprosy, including one that makes the disease grounds for divorce

Supported by



About this content

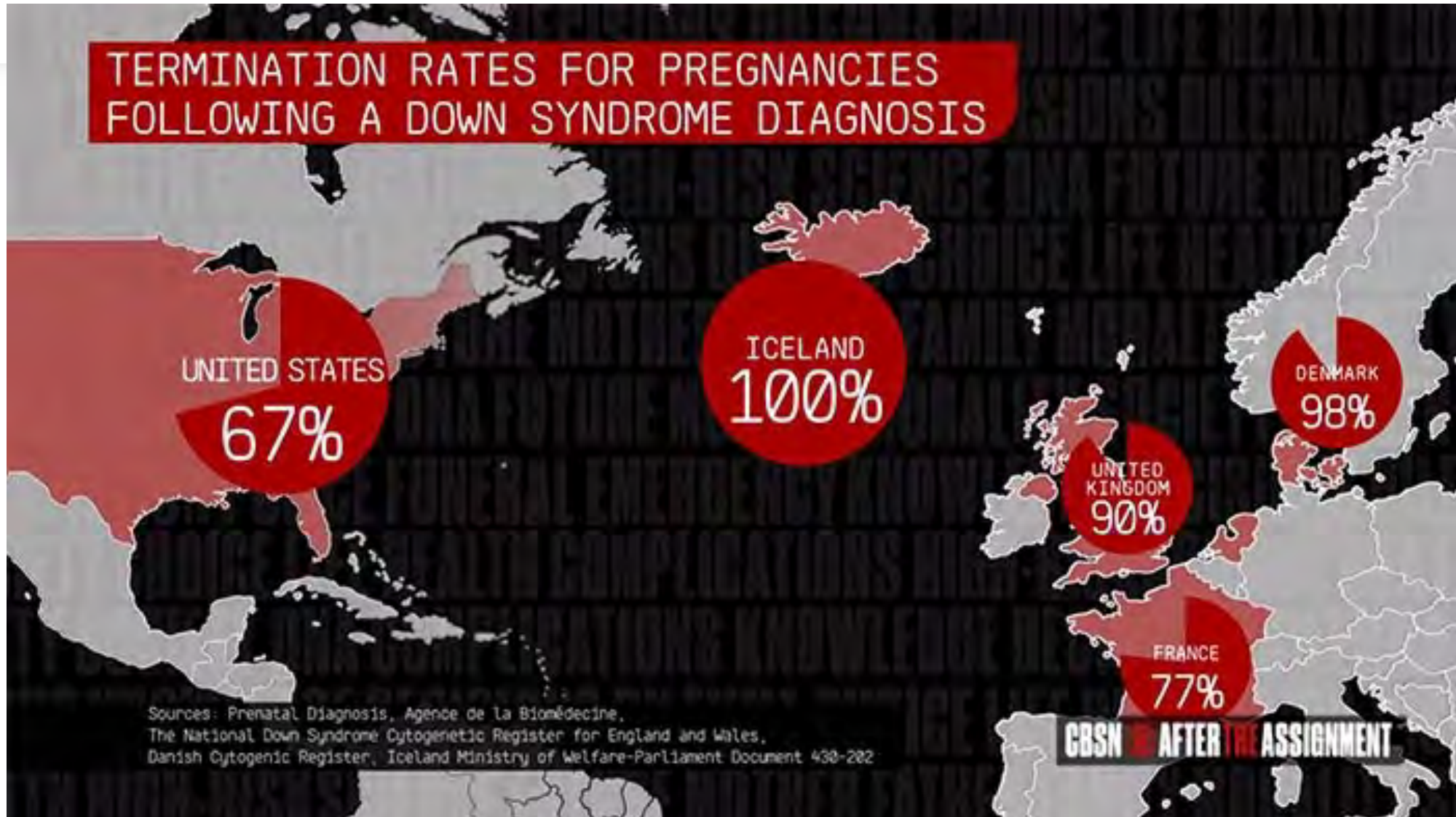
**Amrit Dhillon** in New Delhi

Tue 10 Nov 2015 10:00 GMT

Share



# The Concept of “Perfect Ability”



## Medical Model of Disability

Locates the problem in the disabled person

Understands disability as a medical condition

Focuses on what a person can't do

Sees disability as a tragedy to be prevented, cured, contained, & pitied

Language differences:  
special needs,  
wheelchair bound,  
crippled,  
suffering from x

## Social Model of Disability

Locates the problem in the disabling world

Understand disability as socially constructed

Focuses on removing & reducing barriers to inclusion

Sees disability as socially constructed (the social consequence of having an impairment)

Language differences:  
access needs,  
wheelchair user,  
disabled person,  
person with impairment

Talks about disability

# Disability Justice

## 10 PRINCIPLES OF DISABILITY JUSTICE

- 1 INTERSECTIONALITY** *"We do not live single issue lives"* --Audre Lorde  
Ableism, coupled with white supremacy, supported by capitalism, underscored by heteropatriarchy, has rendered the vast majority of the world "invalid."
- 2 LEADERSHIP OF THOSE MOST IMPACTED**  
*"We are led by those who most know these systems."* --Aurora Levins Morales
- 3 ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITIC**  
In an economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming body/minds.
- 4 COMMITMENT TO CROSS-MOVEMENT ORGANIZING**  
Shifting how social justice movements understand disability and contextualize ableism, disability justice lends itself to politics of alliance.
- 5 RECOGNIZING WHOLENESS**  
People have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity. Each person is full of history and life experience.
- 6 SUSTAINABILITY**  
We pace ourselves, individually and collectively, to be sustained long term. Our embodied experiences guide us toward ongoing justice and liberation.
- 7 COMMITMENT TO CROSS-DISABILITY SOLIDARITY**  
We honor the insights and participation of all of our community members, knowing that isolation undermines collective liberation.
- 8 INTERDEPENDENCE** We meet each others' needs as we build toward liberation, knowing that state solutions inevitably extend into further control over our lives.
- 9 COLLECTIVE ACCESS** As brown, black and queer-bodied disabled people we bring flexibility and creative nuance that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity, to be in community with each other.
- 10 COLLECTIVE LIBERATION** No body or mind can be left behind  
-- only moving together can we accomplish the revolution we require.

[www.sinsinvalid.org](http://www.sinsinvalid.org)

SINS INVALID 2015

[Home](#) » [International Disability Alliance welcomes finalized draft of WHO Pandemic Agreement as a major step forward for disability-inclusive global health](#)

# International Disability Alliance welcomes finalized draft of WHO Pandemic Agreement as a major step forward for disability-inclusive global health

By IDA - April 16, 2025



The International Disability Alliance (IDA) welcomes the finalized draft of the WHO Pandemic Agreement and encourages all States to support its adoption at the upcoming 78th World Health Assembly, taking place from 19 to 27 May 2025. This historic draft agreement marks a significant advancement in strengthening global collaboration for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response—and represents a major step toward more equitable, inclusive health systems for all, including

persons with disabilities.

# THE LANCET

[This journal](#) [Journals](#) [Publish](#) [Clinical](#) [Global health](#) [Multimedia](#) [Events](#) [About](#)

**COMMENT** · [Online first](#), April 11, 2025

## Why and how academic medicine must champion diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

[Arghavan Salles](#)<sup>a,b</sup>  · [Ananya Tina Banerjee](#)<sup>c</sup> · [Wendy Caceres](#)<sup>a</sup> · [Mamas Mamas](#)<sup>d</sup> · [Oni Blackstock](#)<sup>e</sup>



Dakshineswar Kali Temple built in 1855, West Bengal India

# Thank you

[ananya.banerjee@mcgill.ca](mailto:ananya.banerjee@mcgill.ca)