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The Diversity of Disability

Key points:

- **The causes and types of disability are many and varied**
- **2005 Census identified 'arm or leg handicapped' as major type of disability in the Lao PDR**

Disability can affect people from all backgrounds irrespective of gender, age, socio-economic status, sexuality, ethnicity or cultural heritage. Further, disability may be visible or invisible, temporary or total or partial, lifelong or acquired.

There are many types of disability:

Physical disability: An impairment limiting the functioning of body parts and/or motor skills.

Sensory disability: An impairment of the senses. Vision and hearing are two senses most commonly affected. Visual impairments relate to loss of vision that cannot be corrected or reversed. Hearing impairments are conditions affecting a person's ability to detect sounds heard by most people. Other sensory disabilities may affect smell, taste, or feelings of heat, cold and pain.

Intellectual disability: A term used to describe a broad range of conditions in individuals who have impaired cognitive and intellectual functioning.

Mental disorders and emotional disability:

Psychological or behavioural patterns triggered by or associated with distress or disability at a particular time (for example, depression).

Developmental disability:

Any disability resulting in growth or developmental problems. Developmental disabilities differ from intellectual disabilities as they encompass many congenital conditions (conditions developing before, at or immediately after birth) that have no mental or intellectual components (for example, spina bifida and cerebral palsy).

Non-visible disability:

Chronic conditions including diabetes, asthma or epilepsy can be considered non-visible disabilities.

Types of disability in the Lao PDR as a proportion of the total population of Lao people with disabilities*:

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|----------------------------|-----|
| • 'arm or leg handicapped' | 39% |
| • 'deaf or dumb' | 27% |
| • 'visually impaired' | 17% |
| • 'multiple disabilities' | 7% |
| • 'other disabilities' | 10% |

*2005 Population and Housing Census (survey terminology)