



## **Making Mosques Physically & Socially Accessible: Lack of Facilities for People with Disabilities**

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*Malaysia is a country which is known for the heavy Islamic moral values presented in its culture and traditions. Mosques in Malaysia are well known for their beauty and captivating architecture. There are 5,300 mosques built in Malaysia as of November 2017 and the number is increasing as the years pass, but the accessibility of amenities for the PWDs is still a major problem. The mosque is not just for those without disabilities, therefore it is important to provide accessibility as to give the PwDs an equal opportunity for them to perform congregational prayers together with other devoted Muslims in respect of helping them perform their responsibilities and their social roles. Throughout history, community attitudes and physical obstructions in the built environment have barred PwDs from fully participating in the society. Access to education, employment, housing, recreation, cultural events, and transportation were denied to many people. These days, along with the emergence in the PWDs population, the mission for impartiality and equal rights is carried out aggressively. Currently, major changes in design requirements, both market-driven and legally mandated, are creating a new life system for PWDs and a new path for designers. This paper will present some of the major dilemmas faced by PwD's when they perform prayers at mosque. Most of the mosque lack of accessibility and amenities for PwDs. Besides, PwDs are part of a community that needs to be assisted so that they can worship in comfort with the others. They also have equal rights and opportunities to live like other community members.*

**Keywords:** *people with disabilities, mosque, disabled person,*

### **1. Introduction**

In the general point of view, a mosque is considered a place where activities related to the society and religion should be planned and performed. It is one of

the places that play very important and essential role in shaping the character of Islamic communities and helps its followers to act according to the rules of Islam. These places act as centers of activity for their political, social, religious, and institutional activities. But, until today the majority of the mosques still lack of facilities that creates physical barriers that burden the PWDs the temporarily ambulant disabled and the elderly. These barriers eventually discouraged them to visit a mosque for prayers and other activities related to the mosque and the mosque compound as they lack the accessibility to continuity, especially from the parking area, the entrance, the ablution area, toilets and finally to reach the prayer hall.

The mosque is not just for those without a disability. Therefore, it is important to provide accessibility as to give the PWDs an equal opportunity for them to perform congregational prayers together with other devoted Muslims in respect to helping them perform their responsibilities and their social roles. According to the Persons with Disabilities Act (2008), persons with disabilities shall have the right to access and use public facilities, amenities, services and buildings open or provided to the public on equal basis with persons without disabilities, but subject to the existence or emergence of such situations that may endanger the safety of persons with disabilities [1].

The classification of disabled people is divided into four categories: visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, physical disabilities, and mental disabilities, but in this case, the study focused on three major problems which were visual, hearing and physical disabilities. According to statistics from the Department of Social Welfare (JKM) in November 2017, there are 443,541 people with disabilities throughout Malaysia. Malays have the highest number amounting to 294,997 people compared to other ethnic groups and 4.2 million people with disabilities were found to have yet to register with JKM based on the population statistics total 30.1 million. Besides, on the number of PWDs in Penang who were registered under JKM is 75,342 and there are 89,867 people with disabilities who have yet to register with JKM [2].

## **2. People with Disabilities (PwDs)**

PWDs are people with a physical, hearing or sight impairment or any combination of thereof, which affects their mobility to their use in the buildings. PWDs also require special facilitates due to limited physical or mental capabilities since birth, or the outcome of accident or disease [9]. PWDs can be classified into four categories which are visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, physical disabilities, and mental disabilities. Typically, people with hearing problems face problems in communication with the public, since most of the population lack understanding of sign language. They also run into difficulties when using public facilities in institutions such as mosques [10].

The study on public facilities provided by the authorities responsible must be studied to ensure that social welfares are provided to the disabled community [3].

PWDs Muslims have expressed their frustration and dilemma in visiting the main mosque throughout Malaysia and in Kuala Lumpur. From a local newspaper, they reported that PWDs also have the intention and desire of wanting to go to mosques to perform their congregational prayer together with other Muslims, but when the mosque or the destination facility does not provide good infrastructure or more or less an accessible environment for PWDs it made their trip to the mosque difficult and depressing [4].

### **3. Dilemmas of PwD's**

Mosque is the important asset in the development of Islam. They are not meant for normal people only, but it is also meant to be used by the disabled people. Mosques provide a wide array of facilities such as toilets, parking, place of ablution and others to the public. Most of the mosque lack of accessibility and amenities for PwDs. Besides, PwDs are part of a community that needs to be assisted so that they can worship in comfort with the others. They also have equal rights and opportunities to live like other community members. However, these facilities that are observed and found in this at Penang island area is lack of amenities to the PwDs. This raises the question of the level of public concern to this group including vehicle parking, pathways & ramps, main entrance, step ramps, door and doorways, stairs, lifts, escalator, handrails, grab rails, circulation spaces, guiding blocks, toilets, water closets, urinals, shower facilities, washbasin, bath, shelving and wall units, work surface, projection, guard rail, opening and drops, finishes, controls uses by PwD also sign and symbol [5]. Figure 1 shows major problem for People with Disabilities (PwDs) in mosque.

A major lacking of accessibility continuity especially from the parking area, the entrance, the ablution area, toilets and finally how the PwDs can reach to the prayer hall. The entrance of mosque usually has many designs and most of the designs are with split level, steps and having a series of staircase and some designed with wrong specifications. These are barriers and difficulties faced by the PwDs and elderly every single day to go to Mosque and even to perform the obligatory Friday prayer. They usually refuse physical help as they would like to be independent [6]. Next, the another problem is mosque passageway are usually wide, making legibility and way findings a problem as visual signage are not properly located at the right place so that the PwDs become hard to read and understand it.

Moreover, the prayer hall is always carpeted and this is an issue for wheelchair users as mosque caretakers claim that wheelchair brought in from outside are dirty and filthy as it would have dirt and probably animal stool. It is still an issue that has not been resolve and the PwDs are depressed as they are constantly being ask to leave the Mosque and could not perform their prayers [7].



**Figure 1.** Major problem for People with Disabilities (PwDs) in mosque [8]

Besides, people with disabilities are part of a community that needs to be assisted so that they can live in comfort with the others. They also have equal rights and opportunities to live like other community members. Rights-based approach or a rights-based and is also used to ensure proper protection of the interests and welfare of the disabled. Thus, the responsible authorities must ensure provision of facilities to the disabled in public premises known as "disabled-friendly". Basic disabled-friendly facilities should be established for them and are easily accessible and safe.

### **3. Mosque as Asset in the development of Islam**

Mosque is the most important asset in the development of Islam. They are not meant for normal people only, but it is also meant to be used by disabled peo-

ple. Mosques provide a wide array of facilities such as toilets, parking, place of ablution and others to the public. Most mosques lack accessibility and amenities for PwDs [9].

Mosque and Surau has been among popular building typology and facility that are often visited by the Muslim PwDs and the elderly other than the general public, as Mosque and Surau remained as a place of worship for devoted Muslims to perform the five daily prayers. In an article reported by Bernama, the Raja Muda of Perlis, Tuanku Syed Faizuddin Putra Jamalullail, insisted that all new buildings to be equipped with a surau and also said that some building owners provide prayer room merely to meet the criteria for building approval. Furthermore, Tuanku Syed Faizuddin added that the prayer room should have a place for ablution, adequate lighting, fans or air-conditioning, facilities for the disabled and segregation area for both men and women [10].

The mosque and prayer room are among the popular building typology and facility that are often visited by the Muslim PwDs and the elderly other than the general public, as a mosque and a prayer room remain a place of worship for devoted Muslims to perform their five daily prayers [11]. It is essential that all new buildings should be equipped with a prayer room and not just merely to meet the criteria for building approval. The prayer room should have a place for ablution, adequate lighting, fans or air-conditioning, facilities for the disabled and the segregation area for both men and women [12].

In the general point of view, a mosque is considered a place where activities related to the society and religion should be planned and performed [13]. It is one of the places that plays very important and essential role in shaping the character of Islamic communities and helps its followers to act according to the rules of Islam. These places act as centers of activity for their political, social, religious, and institutional activities [14]. The following are the main socio-religious roles of mosques as a religious place in the community: a religious foundation, a political center, a legal institution, and the foundation of peace and secure location, an administrative institution, a unit to obtain information, a social organization, and an educational institute [15].

## **6. Conclusion**

It should be pointed out that mosque is the important asset in the development of Islam. They are not meant for normal people only, but it is also meant to be used by the disabled people. Mosques provide a wide array of facilities such as toilets, parking, place of ablution and others to the public. Most of the mosque lack of accessibility and amenities for PwDs. Besides, PwDs are part of a community that needs to be assisted so that they can worship in comfort with the others. They also have equal rights and opportunities to live like other community members.

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