**Name**: Description of Multiple Disabilities

**Description**:

To begin with we shall see how multiple disabilities are described in India.

***Multiple disabilities*** in simple terms can be said to be presence of more than one disability in individuals.

In ***India*** –

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) deals with all disabilities.

The National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act (1999) specifically deals with multiple disabilities.

They define multiple disabilities as combination of two or more disabilities among –

Blindness and low vision

Deaf and hard of hearing

Locomotor disability including cerebral palsy, leprosy cured, dwarfism, acid attack victims and muscular dystrophy

Autism, intellectual disability, specific learning disability and mental illness

However, for ***educational rehabilitation***, multiple disabilities may be described in a different way.

* + - In developed countries such as the USA, multiple disabilities are defined more specifically for the purpose of educational rehabilitation and training.
    - According to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), multiple disabilities is –
  + Concomitant presence of –
* Intellectual, sensory, orthopaedic and other impairments;
  + The combination of which causes severe educational needs –
* That cannot be accommodated in special educational programme solely for one of the impairment; and
  + Does not include deaf-blindness.

**Name**: Causes of Multiple Disabilities

**Description**:

Multiple disabilities may be caused by some common problems that lead to most other disabilities such as the ones illustrated in the figure 1.

*Figure 1:* Causes of multiple disabilities.

In India one another common cause is old age where co-existence of presbyacusis (hearing loss due ageing), presbyopia (visual problems in old age), physical ill-health like arthritis and/or psychological deterioration like dementia may lead to multiply-disabling condition. Apart from these there are some special causes leading to multiply disabling conditions. They could be –

* + - ***Disabilities*** like – autism, cerebral palsy and severe intellectual disability which apart from their primary impairment are frequently associated with a complex of sensory, motor, cognitive and/or social-emotional aberrations;
    - **Diseiases** like leprosy, multiple sclerosis and tuberous sclerosis are also found to have multi-faceted adverse impact on the affected individuals, which we shall discuss in detail later; or
    - ***Syndromes*** like CHARGE, Down’s or Usher syndromes may have multiply disabling effect on the individuals affected.

**Name**: Classification of Multiple Disabilities

**Description**:

Multiple disabilities are complex conditions that can be classified in diverse ways according to need of the situation. Some of the common bases of classification are highlighted in figure 2.

*Figure 2:* Bases for classification of multiple disabilities.

However, when more than one disability co-exist, it is difficult to measure each disability’s precise severity or effect. Sometimes it is even difficult even to identify some milder disabilities among the more profound ones. Therefore, for practical purposes as in educational rehabilitation –

* a functional classification will be helpful,
* which will be based on the collective severity of the condition, and
* its combined impact on the individual’s ability and skills for living and learning.

One such simple classification based on effect of outcomes describes three levels of functioning. Accordingly, the mild level of multiple disabilities shall include only one predominantly severe disability, and the rehabilitation intervention shall be focusing on that disability. The severe version of multiple disabilities shall be comprised of more than one severe disability so that it affects the overall development of an individual. If an individual is challenged by presence of severe congenital multiple disabilities from birth, s/he can be expected to have not more than 40% typical development, or in other words development of around 7 or 8 years of age. More profound degree of multiple disabilities may have two or more acute disabilities resulting in residual abilities of around 10% or overall development of less than 2 years if the condition is congenital. The highlights of this classification have been illustrated in figure 3.

*Figure 3:* Functional classification of multiple disabilities.

Further the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in consultation with the Director General of Health Services has provided a simple guideline formula for computation of severity of multiple disabilities, which is a + b (90-a)/90. Where ‘a’ is the percentage of the more severe disability in the combination and ‘b’ is the percentage of less severe disability in the combination.

**Name**: Summary of description, causes and classification of multiple disabilities.

**Description**:

To conclude, the nature of multiple disabilities, the common as well distinctive causes and classification of multiple disabilities have been encapsulates in the following figure 4.

*Figure 4:* Summary of description, causes and description of multiple disabilities.