



# The portrayal of persons with disabilities in Arabic drama: A literature review

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Persons with disabilities  
Portrayals  
Stereotypes  
Arabic drama

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The media plays a vital role in addressing the issues of society through audiovisual means that contribute to the transmission of media messages. Drama contributes to implement positive values or negative attitudes in people's minds towards various societal issues. The negative stereotypes shaped by drama about persons with disabilities (PWDs) have attracted the attention of the researchers. Therefore, Arabic drama is required to present a true portrait of PWDs that reflects their reality without exaggeration or discrimination. It is also required to re-correct the stereotyped image that has been formed in society towards PWDs.

**Aims:** This literature research was conducted to review and analyze research and theses that presented PWDs in Arabic drama. The research sought to reveal the stereotypical behavior of PWDs in Arabic drama, categories of disability, and drama genres that presented PWDs.

**Methods and procedures:** This research included 17 peer-reviewed research and thesis obtained from Arab and international databases from 2002 to 2022. The content analysis card was used to achieve the aims of this research.

**Outcomes and results:** The findings of the literature review indicated that the majority of Arab dramas presented negative stereotypes of PWDs. The results also showed that intellectual disability, visual impairment, and physical disabilities were the most dominant in Arabic movies and television series.

**Conclusions and implications:** Arabic drama and media were unable to present accurate representations of PWDs. They appeared in a distorted and satirical way in movies and television series. Perhaps, these negative stereotypes emerged from the prevailing popular cultures in the Arab countries that produce these movies and series. It is thus necessary to remove these stereotypes expressed in drama to enhance awareness and societal inclusion in the Arab culture and countries.

## 1. Introduction

Societies have viewed PWDs in various ways according to history and society. Inferiority, disrespect and social exclusion were the most dominant features of the most ancient societies toward PWDs. Consequently, these immoral practices, abuse and ignorance disrupted their role as active persons in society. It contributed to putting them in residential institutions, which also increased their isolation and supported the lack of acceptance and inclusion into society sectors (Al-Zoubi & Bani Abdel Rahman, 2017). These

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negative practices have formed attitudes and beliefs toward PWDs and have even become a social heritage that passed down through generations.

Therefore, the monotheistic religions came to modify these attitudes and beliefs toward PWDs (Al-Hattab, 2015). From historical perspective, it is well documented within the research studies that in Islamic teachings, many verses of the Holy Qur'an mentioned PWDs, and urged Muslims not to stigmatise individuals as disabled (Bazna & Hatab, 2005). The Qur'anic verses also call upon Muslims to be kind, benevolent, and supportive to PWDs (Benzahra, 2002). In this regard, Jegatheesan and Witz (2014) emphasized that the Islamic teachings contributes to the mother's acceptance of the presence of a disabled or an autistic child in family, and how belief in God's judgment reduces the emotional reactions of parents and siblings towards this child.

Recently, PWDs have received attention through international conventions and legislations related to human rights and the rights of PWDs. These conventions have contributed to modifying stereotypes and removing the negative image that prevailed in societies towards them (Al-Hadabi et al., 2021). It was manifested in the recognition of their social, educational, health and professional rights. Therefore, it may be the beliefs, attitudes, and practice of discrimination toward PWDs are still present in many societies (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016). However, it has become necessary to implement all methods, including the media, to correct the negative societal views and form positive attitudes toward them.

Societies rely on the media to provide their audience with correct information that enables them to have a realistic understanding of life. Currently, society needs transparent media based on knowledge to form a public societal opinion on issues of PWDs (Russell et al., 2016). On the other hand, visual media contribute to the formation of attitudes as a result of positive and negative media programs and messages. Television is one of the most influential mainstream media (MMS) for the audience's attitudes and behaviors. It simulates hearing and sight, combines sound, image and movement to draw one's attention for a prolonged period of time to watch movies and series.

Drama is one of the media that can shape human behavior and societal public opinion (Kubrak, 2020). It has been viewed as playing an active role in promoting positive values and raising awareness about societal issues. Drama can present realistic images and change stereotypes and negative images towards PWDs. Therefore, to achieve this, movies and series shown on television, satellite channels and cinemas are subjected to censorship and legislation (Al-Shboul, 2010). Drama has a real power of conveying information about societies and people in addition to create accumulated images in the minds of the audience who link these imaginary images to the reality that revolves around them. However, the constant repetition of certain information may contribute to the formation of stereotyped mental images of audiences.

Accordingly, theorists in social sciences and media specialists studied the impact of audio-visual media on the formation of stereotypes and mental images of audiences. For instance, Cultivation Theory assumes that cultivation is a learned behavior as a result of viewers watching movies and series for long periods (Musharraf, 2015). This develops beliefs and attitudes that what they see on television is a real image of their social environment (Russell, Russell, Boland, & Grube, 2014). According to this theory, the mental image that people form as a result of watching movies are the final products of the subjective impressions that form towards a person, a society, a race, a gender, or others. This theory concluded that heavy viewers of visual media have beliefs that what they watch in movies and TV series it is practitioner in reality in the life. According to this theory, it can be said that Arabic drama has created negative stereotypes for PWDs. The mental image and social reality that Arabic movies and TV series show about PWDs cultivated in the minds of Arab viewers that these stereotypes exist in reality and normal life for PWDs. In other words, if the image presented according to negative stereotypes represents of PWDs as pathetic, isolated and dependent on others. Thus, Arabic drama viewers, when they see a disabled person in life, will evoke the negative mental images that the drama has formed about them. On the contrary, the positive portrayal of PWDs in Arabic drama contributes to modifying viewers' attitudes and beliefs towards them.

Moreover, visual media play a pivotal role in constructing a mental image as a result of the cognitive, emotional and behavioral components that contribute to forming human attitudes and behaviors. In the negative aspects, the visual media contribute to shaping the learned helplessness behavior of PWDs their families, and audiences. Accordingly, some TV programs form stereotypes about them as dependent rather than as independent, and they need special services (Gardner & Radel, 1978). While, Draaisma (2009) argued that series and movies use stereotypes and often lead to inaccurate representation of certain conditions such as autism. This is further explored by Conn and Bhugra (2012) who analyzed 23 movies and found that autistic characters were often used for entertainment, and most likely harming the autistic community, and scientific errors related to diagnosis and recovery from autism. Most recently, Goldstein and Ressa (2021) examined autistic characters in three TV shows. They concluded that modern television programs presented stereotyped images about autism, which represented incorrect beliefs of audience and negatively reflect on the autism community.

However, positive outcomes were reported by several other studies. Bond (2013) highlighted the role of television media programs in representing individuals with physical disabilities as attractive, productive, moral and satisfied with life. Also, Ejaz (2020) emphasized the religion and Indian societal culture in dealing with autistic children in American movies in Hindi. Interestingly, these movies showed more social interactions between children with and without autism than in the original American movies. Giagazoglou and Papadaniil (2018) showed the effectiveness of school drama based on storytelling in modifying social impressions and attitudes toward children with intellectual disabilities. Meanwhile, Garner, Jones, and Harwood (2015) mentioned that visual media may contribute to improving societal awareness about autism more than research published in peer-reviewed journals. Dean and Nordahl-Hansen (2021) reviewed 26 studies and concluded that there was lack of research on the impact of TV and movies within which autistic children were represented and the impact on the audience.

### 1.1. Representation of PWDs in Arabic drama

Disability and societal neurodiversity exist in all countries and all individuals have their rights and need to be given opportunities for their optimal development, learning and integration within the society. The prevalence of disability was 10% in the seventies of the last century (Alkhateeb, 2013), and increased to 15% (Bindawas & Vennu, 2018). Nearly 80% live in developing countries or low and middle-income countries (Vanderschuren & Nnene, 2021) including Arab countries.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the movies and series industry moved from the United States to the Arab world, which produced many dramas concentrating on PWDs. But their representation was limited to a few TV movie dramas. Arabic drama has a substantial number of viewers. The portrayal of PWDs has raised questions for researchers about the reality of Arab drama dealing with their issues and the congruence between their reality and the way they are represented. However, Arabic drama effectively contributes to the formation of viewers' positive or negative images of societal issues. The followers of the drama found that PWDs were represented in a non-objective and deliberate manner. Consequently, it appears that this stereotyping contributed to creating a negative image among Arab viewers toward individuals with disabilities and neurodiverse, thus leading to segregation and lack of successful integration within the society.

AbuSalha (2012) analyzed a number of Arab movies that represented PWDs in negative stereotypes. The first appearance of PWDs in Arab drama was in 1944 in the Egyptian movie (*Laila in the Dark*), which represented the visually impaired woman in the form of compassion and charity, and that disability prevents a realization of ambitions. Meanwhile, in 1961, the Egyptian cinema produced a movie (*The Mute*), which represented the tragedy of an Arab woman with a hearing disability who was raped (AbuSalha, 2012).

In 1978, Egyptian cinema changed the negative stereotype of PWDs in the minds of Arab viewers as a result of previous movies. The movie *Conqueror of Darkness* tells the story of the life of Taha Hussein (Dean of Arabic literature), who is considered the most prominent symbol of human determination in the twentieth century (Iraq, 2017). While, in 1983 Egyptian cinema returned to present in the movie *The Beggar*, a negative image of the visually impaired man who invested his disability to make money and gave a negative stereotype to the Arab viewers by associating begging with visual impairment (AbuSalha, 2012).

In 1991, the Egyptian movie (*The Scream*) presented an example of discrimination, exclusion, sexual exploitation and injustice towards the society of persons with hearing disabilities. Meanwhile, Benzahra (2002) analyzed the negative stereotypes prevailing in the 1991 Egyptian movie (*The Kit Kat*) and one of the Tunisian TV shows. These dramas provided examples of social exclusion and isolation for persons with visual impairments, which did not comply with the teachings of the Islamic religion. While, Alkayed and Kitishat (2021) analyzed the worst images of sexual exploitation and taboos for females with intellectual disabilities in the Egyptian film (*Toot-Toot*), which was produced in 1993.

In 1993, the Jordanian drama presented the series (*A bite for Living*), which portrayed a positive image of persons with mild intellectual disabilities. This series reflects the culture of Jordanian society in accepting PWDs (AbuSalha, 2012). Meanwhile, the Syrian drama in 1993 presented the series (*End of a Brave Man*), which presented a positive image of person with physical disabilities who is exposed to chronic diseases that did not prevent them from continuing their normal lives (AbuSalha, 2012). In 2007, persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Asperger Syndrome) appeared negatively in an Egyptian movie (*Al-Torbiny*), exploiting their intelligence to collect money in gambling halls (AbuSalha, 2012). In 2007, the Kuwaiti drama presented a series (*Eyes Light*), which represented visually impaired female after losing her vision due to traffic accidents (AbuSalha, 2012). This series highlighted the psychological and emotional aspects of persons with visual impairment as they have feelings of love, hate, hope and ambition. However, Alenaizi (2018b) believes that the Kuwaiti TV series presented the viewer with a negative image of PWDs. The TV series "*Hebr Alyon*" presented negative stereotypes about Kuwaiti persons with multiple disabilities (Alenaizi, 2018). On the other hand, Kuwaiti theater presented negative stereotypes of PWDs as 'tragic', 'pitiable', 'pathetic', 'evil', 'ridiculed', 'a burden', and 'God's punishment' (Alenaizi & Alshammari, 2021).

O'Dell (2022) analyzed the stereotyped images of PWDs in four Egyptian, Syrian and Lebanese movies and series. In 1958, Egyptian cinema presented a movie (*Cairo Station*), which represented persons with physical disabilities with negative images related to taboos, sexual frustrations and the role of the villain. While, in 2018, the Egyptian cinema presented a movie (*Yomeddine*), which presented a negative image of persons with leprosy (Hansen's Disease), in addition to the mistreatment of them by society.

In 2010, the Syrian drama presented the series (*Behind the Sun*), which focused on persons with Down Syndrome and Autism (O'Dell, 2022). Despite some negative images that were presented about PWDs and society's mistreatment of them (O'Dell, 2022), it provided the Arab viewers with a positive image about the faith in destiny by accepting the presence of a disabled child in the family, in addition to providing them with all forms of support and altruism for PWDs. In 2017, the Lebanese drama presented the series (*The Tale of Amal*). This series focused on the physical and visual disabilities, highlighting the poverty and poor health conditions of these people in Lebanon (O'Dell, 2022). The Lebanese drama also presented in 2021 the series (*Ashti Ya Beirut*), which embodied the character of a child with Down syndrome who was subjected to various forms of extortion and kidnapping, but the series showed the care and support of parents for this child.

Based on the foregoing, we conclude that Egyptian movies and TV series dominate satellite channels and attract Arab viewers. In this regard, Asaeed, Abdulraman, and Ismail (2021) confirmed that Arab viewers are affected by Egyptian drama. On the other hand, Harb and Alhumaid (2019) confirmed that Egypt leads the Arab countries in the production of movies and TV series. This can be attributed to the early cultural relations between Europe and Egypt and it is possession of the ingredients for the production of movies and series.

The current study:

Specifically, the present literature review focused on the following questions:

- (1) What are the portrayals of PWDs in Arabic drama?
- (2) What are the categories of disability in Arabic drama?
- (3) What are Arabic drama genres represented by PWDs?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design

The qualitative descriptive research method was used in this research. A review and analysis were conducted for research and theses that dealt with the portrayals of PWDs in Arabic drama.

### 2.2. Study selection

The inclusion criteria: The selection process identified the following eligibility criteria. Inclusion criteria: The studies were published in Arabic and English from 2002 to 2022.

Keywords in Arabic and English included: “media”, “drama”, “cinema”, “television series”, theater, radio, films, movies, television advertisements, newspapers, social media, portrayals, image, stereotypes, portrait, people / PWDs, individuals with disabilities, children with disabilities Autism spectrum disorder, mental/intellectual disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical and health disabilities, learning disabilities, communication/speech and language disorders, emotional and behavioral disorders, and twice exceptional. The search also included keywords related to the name of each of Arab countries, the Arab world, and the Arab countries.

The next step included the screening of the full-texts of the chosen studies, in order to select those where the quality of life was a specified outcome. The following unit were used to analyze the content of research and theses: A word, a sentence, a subject, a characters. Content analysis units are classified into words, themes, characters, paragraphs, and semantics (Lune & Berg, 2017). In other words, content analysis is a method that may be used with either qualitative or quantitative data and in an inductive or deductive way (Elo & Kyngas, 2008, p. 107). Studies which were in line with the inclusion criteria were included in the final screening.

### 2.3. Quality assessment

The qualitative content analysis is one of the research methods that is no less significant than interview and observation (Rashidi, 2021). In the media context, it is defined as a method of analyzing written, verbal or visual means of communication (Mohajan, 2018). The qualitative content analysis came as a result of the development of mass communication means that focused on visual content related to images, graphics and videos (Gavara, 2015).

To achieve the objectives of this research, a content analysis card was developed after reviewing the literature. The card included a set of elements related to portrayals of PWDs in Arabic drama. These elements included categories of disabilities, their stereotyped behavior, and the drama genres that represented them in Arabic drama. To verify the face validity of card, two experts in media reviewed the card and provided their comments on it. Also, Holsti formula (Almahallawi & Zannuddin, 2018) was used to verify the reliability of the card. For this, two researchers from the Department of Mass Communication at Sultan Qaboos University watched the Egyptian movie (*The Kit Kat*) and provided their comments. This film represents visually impaired person. Therefore, the reliability coefficient was 0.75 after applying Holsti formula.

**Table 1**  
Bibliographic data of research sample.

Author (s)	Year	Language
O'Dell	2022	English
Alkayed & Kitishat	2021	English
Alenaizi & Alshammari	2021	English
AlMeqdad et al.	2021	English
Al-Ansi	2020	Arabic
Ahmad	2019	Arabic
Nasr et al.	2018	Arabic
Alenaizi	2018a	English
AbuSunah	2015	Arabic
Hashem	2013	Arabic
Albaradei et al.	2013	Arabic
AbuSalha	2012	Arabic
Aldesouky	2011	Arabic
Yousuf et al.	2011	Arabic
Nasr et al.	2009	Arabic
Al-Karni	2008	Arabic
Benzahra	2002	English

### 3. Results

The current research included 17 research and thesis, 15 research published in peer-reviewed journals, and 2 master and doctoral theses. Table 1 shows the bibliographic data for these research.

Table 1 included 17 published research and thesis from 2002 to 2022. 11 research and thesis were published in Arabic, while there were 6 research and thesis published in English. These research and theses were involved in the Arab and international scientific databases.

The research questions were included according to the elements of the content analysis card, which are as follows: (1) portrayals of PWDs in Arabic drama, (2) categories of disability in Arabic drama, (3) and Arabic drama genres that represented PWDs. Therefore, the results of first question shown in Table 2.

#### 3.1. Study characteristics and main findings

A summary of the information extracted from each study is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 showed that 70.59% of the portrayals of PWDs in Arabic drama were presented as negative behavioral stereotypes, while 17.65% were positive and negative stereotypes, and 11.76 were positive stereotypes, respectively. Therefore, Table 3 shown the results of the second question.

Table 3 showed that intellectual disabilities (20%), visual disabilities (20%), and physical disabilities (17%) were the most presented categories presented in Arabic drama. While, twice exceptional (2.5%), was the least categories presented in Arabic drama. Consequently, Table 4 shown the results of the third question.

Table 4 showed that 44% of PWDs were presented in movies, 40% were presented in television series, 12% were presented and 4% were presented in promotional advertisements.

### 4. Discussion

The main aim of this research is to explore the image of PWDs in Arabic drama. The current literature review indicated that the vast majority of Arabic drama showed a negative image of PWDs, consequently leading to form a mental image of the contents of the media messages that they are exposed to daily through films and series. The impact of these mental images may increase the absence of personal experiences in the life of the viewers. Accordingly, the viewers try to understand the societal and natural phenomena that surround them depending on the contents of the media messages conveyed by the visual or audio drama. Basically, drama seeks to amplify some societal issues to form stereotypes in the viewers' minds towards marginalized PWDs. In other words, drama plays a major role in the formation of stereotypes that are largely reflected in the shaping of viewers' opinions and attitudes towards PWDs. The repetition of what viewers watch in the drama, whether real or fictional characters, may reflect positively or negatively on their behavior patterns. The elements of suspense and sound effects that accompany dramas may contribute to increasing the creation of this mental image. Nasr, Ahmad, and Mohsin (2009) believe that the positive and negative image of PWDs is affected by the actor who plays the role of the disabled in Egyptian movies.

The focus of drama and other media on certain issues or obscuring others may facilitate viewers to interact with these issues and ignore others that are not raised by the media. This is consistent with the content of the Agenda Setting Theory, which believes that there is a positive correlation between the content of the raised media messages and the attitudes and beliefs of the viewers (Luo, Burley, Moe, & Sui, 2019). As a result, media messages that are evoked by visual and audio drama contribute to setting the agenda for viewers.

The Agenda Setting Theory is concerned with studying the interrelationship between the contents of the media message and determining the priorities of the viewers that make them think about the content of these messages. If the Agenda Setting Theory is employed in the common stereotypes in Arabic drama about PWDs, it will form a distorted and negative image about them for the Arab viewer. Therefore, most Arabic dramas provide the minds of viewers with a negative and distorted stereotype about PWDs. This stereotype also formed a negative mental image among Arab viewers that these persons are helpless and dependent on their families and communities. Apart from that, the Arabic drama has contributed to drawing another picture for the Arab viewers by making PWDs a means of mockery and laughter. In this regard, Alenaizi (2018a) indicated that the Kuwaiti drama represented PWDs as the subject of pity, ridicule, laughter and violence. This negative representation contributed to the formation of a negative stereotype among the Arab viewers that PWDs are different from other people and are in dire need of help because they are powerless. These accumulations of negative images in the representation of PWDs in this way formed a wrong belief for the viewers as a result of what was portrayed in Arab films and series about them. So, it can be said that the reality indicates that there are great similarities between PWDs and persons

**Table 2**  
Portrayal of PWDs in Arabic drama.

Portrayal types	Frequency	Percentage	Stereotypical behaviors
Positive	2	11.76	Straight characters, super intelligence, & musical intelligence, ambition, creative & hope.
Negative	12	70.59	Pitiable, tool of ridicule, sinister, marginalized, violent, helpless, and evil.
Positive & negative	3	17.65	Trustworthy, responsibility, patience, willing, happiness, contentment introverted, lazy, careless, and shy.
Total	17	100	

**Table 3**  
Categories of disability in Arabic drama.

Category	Frequency	Parentage
Intellectual disability	8	20
Visual impairment	8	20
Physical disabilities	7	17.5
Autism spectrum disorder	4	10
Health disabilities	4	10
Learning disabilities	3	7.5
Hearing impairment	3	7.5
Behavioral & emotional disorders	2	5
Twice exceptional	1	2.5
Total	40	100

**Table 4**  
Genres of Arabic drama that presented PWDs.

Genre drama	Frequency	Parentage
Movies	11	44
Television series	10	40
Theater	3	12
Promotional advertisements	1	4
Total	25	100

without disabilities as they are represented in Arabic drama. But the difference between the two groups is that PWDs need special services and adapt to the environmental, educational and social conditions to match their intellectual and physical abilities and capabilities. In this regard, [Almakani and Alodat \(2018\)](#) demonstrated the positive role of the Jordanian media in covering issues of persons with physical and health disabilities and communication disorders. Thus, the media coverage of their issues may contribute to changing the stereotyped image in Arabic drama.

From the psychological aspects, the Arab viewers watching the roles of PWDs in the drama do not come for the entertainment side only, but it also affects their intellectual system, which reflects the emotional impressions and may form negative attitudes towards PWDs. This research has referred to Cultivation Theory, which creates convictions in viewers' minds that what is being shown and represented by PWDs in drama is real. Therefore, the psychological effects of the drama are negatively reflected in the behavior and attitudes of the Arab viewers, which contributes to the practice of various types of discrimination towards PWDs. Perhaps the Arabic drama is not far from the foreign drama in showing the negative image of PWDs. For example, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is a film that represents forms of discrimination, social stigmas, and negative stereotypes toward PWDs ([B & Nair, 2019](#)). To be fair in the discussion, some filmmakers are currently making efforts to change these stereotypes portrayed in viewers' minds by highlighting the PWDs feelings, desires and their human qualities as being similar to those of persons without disabilities ([Black & Pretes, 2007](#)).

Accordingly, drama is considered a cultural force influencing the behavior and attitudes of viewers. Currently, drama has become a cognitive, cultural resource and a strategic partner in the social development of children. It contributes greatly to the formation of mental images and Cultural Cultivation in addition to its impact on the values and attitudes of members of society. However, Arab films and series have contributed to the formation of negative attitudes towards PWDs. The false information that was published about these people formed a mental image for the viewers. Thus, the whole information contributed to the formation of a distorted and false knowledge about PWDs for the Arab viewers.

It should be emphasized that the cognitive component of attitudes is the basis on which the negative mental image of the Arab viewers was formed as a result of the misleading information presented by the Arabic drama about PWDs. It is not surprising that the misleading information formed by the cognitive component affects the affective component of attitudes so that this knowledge leads to feelings of aversion and negative emotional attitudes towards PWDs. Therefore, with the passage of time, the information that is formed in the cognitive component fades away, leaving negative feelings and emotions present in the emotional component, which appear in the form of stereotypes and negative feelings towards PWDs. Negative feelings may turn into behaviors practiced on the ground through the behavioral component of attitudes, which will inevitably reflect the mental image formed by the Arab viewers towards PWDs. Thus, it can be said that the negative behaviors that are practiced in Arab societies are true of viewers' attitudes towards PWDs.

The stereotyped image formed by the Arabic drama in the minds of the viewers has been represented cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally in negative attitudes towards PWDs. Perhaps this is not only limited to films that represent PWDs, but also some Egyptian films have contributed to the spread of harassment and violent behaviors against women in Arab societies ([Aldeeb, 2021](#)). In this regard, [Abu Saoud \(2015\)](#) stressed that Egyptian drama should bear its social responsibility by not presenting immoral issues, drugs and prostitution that do not reflect the values and traditions of the Egyptian Muslim community.

In summary, the results of this research showed that Arabic drama contributed to the formation of negative attitudes and stereotypes towards PWDs for Arab viewers. Consequently, the majority of Arabic drama fail to raise issues of PWDs through their real social and cultural contexts in Arab societies. This may be due to the lack of moral, social and national responsibility of the producers of

Arab films and series that have negatively represented PWDs. In this regard, Younis, Al-Masadeh, Homidi, AlMeqdad, and Almakani (2020) recommended media representatives to benefit from experts in special education in preparing media programs in order to improve the negative stereotype of PWDs among viewers.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

Arabic drama, to some extent, is similar to other international drama in representing PWDs in movies and television series. Perhaps their representation in Arabic drama comes to show the values of sympathy and charity more than highlighting their human rights or to achieve financial incomes through filmmakers. The literature review showed that Arabic drama presented different stereotypes of PWDs in Arab movies and series. The results showed that the majority of dramas formed negative stereotypes of PWDs among Arab viewers. These stereotypes contributed to their social exclusion and integration into sectors of society. Consequently, most Arabic drama is still unable to present positive ideas that address the issues of PWDs, as well as fail to present successful models and stories that highlight their giftedness and creativity. The current research recommends for the Arab filmmakers to show positive portrayals of PWDs. This can be achieved by having some of the foreign movies and series which successfully achieved positive representation of PWDs. In terms of research studies, future work using comparative correlational examining different cultures and countries could add to the current discussion. In addition, to conduct cross-cultural research to identify the attitudes of PWDs towards their representation in Arabic drama. Finally, the results of the current research cannot be generalized to non-Arabic countries. However, it highlights the need for urgent move towards inclusion and empowering of neurodiverse individuals as well as their families to have equal voice and engagement within their societies.

## Compliance with ethical standards

This study followed institutional ethical procedure and gained full approval.

## Funding

Open access funding provided by Library of Sultan Qaboos University and Ajloun National University.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

All authors: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## Conflict of interest

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial incentives to disclose.

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