



SHORT COMMUNICATION

EXAMINING THE BARRIERS TO SOCIAL AND EMPLOYMENT INCLUSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MAKURDI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at examining the barriers to social and employment inclusion for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey method using structured questionnaire to collect data from 150 participants that included 120 employers of labour and 30 Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) within the study area. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage and mean distribution). Results showed that barriers to social inclusion in employment include; lack of Education (54%), physical structure or infrastructure (73%), Physical appearance/neatness (58%), Transportation (82%) and nature of job that could include heavy lifting and standing for long hours (86%). Further results revealed that perception of employers of PWDs in employment was negatives with a high number of employers having no desire to employ disabled persons (56%). They also perceived that disabled persons will be affected in terms of punctuality (72%), strenuous task (93%), and that their educational level is usually below employment standards (71). Results on awareness of policies and regulations on employment inclusion show that, there is very low level of awareness (72%) on the existing policies and lower level of awareness campaigns and strategies to help push awareness of this regulation (62%). The study concludes that there are existing barriers to social and employment inclusion that ranges from access to education, unfavourable employment structures/infrastructures, transportation barriers, and employers' negative perception. Therefore, stakeholders should leverage on different approaches such as social media platforms, community engagement print media, public campaigns, collaborative initiative such as Civil Society organization as tool for awareness creation, sensitization, and information dissemination on issues of disability.

KEYWORDS: Barriers, Employment, Inclusion, People with Disabilities, Social

INTRODUCTION

Over time, persons with disabilities (PWD) have been neglected, segregated and treated with disdain especially in social gatherings with their fundamental human rights denied. Until the 19th century, persons with disabilities were confined to poorhouses or jails if their families could not care for them. This institutionalization was largely driven by societal attempts to segregate people with disabilities rather than integrate them into communities (Winzer, 1993; Longmore and Umansky, 2001). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2023), PWD include all individuals who face long-term challenges with their physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental functioning, which may limit their ability to fully and actively engage with others in the society at the same level because of their disabilities. It is estimated that approximately 1.3 billion people, making up about 16% of the global population, experience significant disabilities.

Disability is defined as a physical or mental condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities (WHO, 2011). These disabilities often affect their movements, senses, or cognitive functioning. For example, children with severe physical disabilities may exhibit impairments such as intellectual disabilities, learning difficulties, or physical inability particularly keeping up with peers in sports or related physical activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In Nigeria, the number of people with disabilities is estimated to be over 25 million, constituting a substantial percentage of the country's population, with prevalent disabilities including visual, hearing, physical, intellectual and communication impairments (WHO, 2011; JONAPWDs, 2017). Persons with disabilities are at heightened risk of developing depression due to pervasive societal discrimination (WHO, 2023). They encounter attitudinal biases, lack of accessibility, inadequate accommodations, insufficient or lack of support systems, and discriminatory practices that negatively impact their well-being.

In Nigeria, these challenges are especially evident in the education and employment sectors, which are deeply interconnected. In developing countries like Nigeria, 80–90% of working-age PWDs remain unemployed (Washington Times, 2005). Employment opportunities are often dependent on educational qualifications; however, many PWDs lack access to quality education which serves as a hindrance for them to acquire gainful employment. Stereotypes, poverty, incomplete schooling, and limited specialized social support restrict the full participation of PWDs in society and hinder personal advancement (Alnaggar and Abdulkader, 2023). These obstacles are even more severe for PWDs from underprivileged backgrounds, making it difficult to secure stable employment. Without inclusive education, PWDs are disadvantaged in the labour market, struggling to compete and achieve meaningful social inclusion.

Employment outcomes for PWDs are significantly shaped by employer behaviours and perceptions. Recruitment processes tend to be subjective, often influenced by employers' assertiveness and biases (Bonaci *et al.*, 2020; Manasseh *et al.*, 2023; Nagtegaal *et al.*, 2023; Goodman *et al.*, 2024). Prevailing negative stereotypes—such as the perception that PWDs are less productive, require special care, or are costly to employ—further deter employers (Nagtegaal *et al.*, 2023; Pausic *et al.*, 2021). Employer willingness to hire often varies depending on the type of disability, further limiting access to employment and essential needs like healthcare (Manasseh *et al.*, 2023). Inclusive disability practices entail creating environments and implementing policies, programs, and services that enable the full and meaningful participation of PWDs in societal functions including education, employment, healthcare, transportation, and social life (WHO, 2011; UN DESA, 2018). These practices promote equal access and eliminate barriers, ensuring PWDs enjoy the same rights and opportunities as others. Additionally, poor enforcement of the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities Prohibition Act, 2018, lack of awareness, and limited investment in inclusive programs continue to undermine their rights (Adebisi *et al.*, 2014; Ewang, 2019). This study taking into consideration the challenges faced by PWDs is set to understand the root causes of these problems and proffer sustainable solutions to them. Hence, the following research questions were pertinent in the study:

What are the barriers to social and employment inclusion of PWDs in Benue State, Nigeria?

What are the perceptions of employers that limit employment inclusion for PWDs in Benue State, Nigeria?

What are the level of awareness on policies and regulation for social and employment inclusion of PWDs in Benue State, Nigeria?

The broad objective of this study is to examine the barriers to social and employment inclusion for persons with disabilities in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria while the specific objectives were to examine the barriers to social and employment inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Benue State, Nigeria. Assess the perceptions of employers that limits employment inclusion for PWDs in Benue State, Nigeria. Determine the level of awareness on policies and regulation for social and employment inclusion of PWDs in Benue State, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research adopted a descriptive research design using structured questionnaire to collect data from two groups of respondents (employers and PWDs). Descriptive research design is a design that allows the researcher to collect primary data from sampled participants selected from the research population. The population of the study involves employers of labour and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) within Makurdi local government of Benue State, Nigeria. One hundred and twenty (120) employers and thirty (30) PWDs were sampled systematically. Systematic sampling technique was used within these locations: (Market areas, Private and public Schools, Human Resource Departments of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) within Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was used in collecting data from the respondents. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics on SPSS version 25 with the baseline mean set at 3.00.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results on the barriers to social and employment inclusion of PWDs in Benue State, Nigeria is presented in Table 1. From the employers’ opinion, the results revealed that barriers to social and employment inclusion of PWDs include lack of education (54%), physical structure or Structure (72.5%), Physical appearance/neatness (58%), transportation (82%) and nature of job that could include heavy lifting and standing for long hours (86%).

This outcome implied that, people with disabilities face challenges of access to education, they are in most cases denied access to education, school discrimination and mostly faced with cases of dropouts. They are in most cases confined to begging for arms when they should be in schools. The also face challenges of transportation, architectural structure of company buildings and nature of the job that PWDs find it difficult to cope with. The educational systems in Nigeria are frequently not made to accommodate students with disabilities. Adaptive learning resources (such as Braille books and assistive technology), ramps, lifts and qualified special education teachers are all lacking in many schools. It is very challenging for children and youth with disabilities to obtain mainstream or special education services because of these systemic obstacles, claims Ajuwon (2012).

Table 1: Barriers to social and employment inclusion of PWDs in educational attainment and other social functions.

Barrier to social and employment inclusion	Yes	No	Not Sure	Mean
Disabled persons are usually uneducated	81 (54)	40(33)	20 (13)	3.91
They comprehend too slow to be carried along	56 (38)	34 (23)	60 (40)	4.02
Some physical structures are difficult for them	109 (73)	12 (8)	29(19)	4.21
They are hardly neat and so you avoid them	86 (58)	64 (43)		4.12
Our culture does not allow associating with PWDs	41 (27)	56 (37)	53 (35)	4.40
Transportation means can be barrier for them	123 (82)	25 (17)	2 (1)	4.06
They are not punctual for appointments	41 (27)	14 (9)	96 (63)	4.31
Nature of job especially lifting and standing for hours	126 (86)		21 (14)	4.14

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In both rural and even urban areas, very few schools provide inclusive classrooms where students with disabilities can study with their classmates. Long-term educational gaps are produced by this early exclusion. Students with disabilities are marginalized in the classroom because many teachers lack

special needs education training. A review of data on perception of employers of PWDs in employment on the Table 2 shows that a high number of employers in the study have no desire to employ PWDs (56%), The respondents also perceived that PWDs will be affected in terms of punctuality (73%), strenuous task (93%), job performance (51%), logical or smart solution (61%) and that their educational level is usually below employment level/standards (71%). This implied that, the general perception of employers about PWDs on employment inclusion is very low and these perceptions play a major role in the discrimination faced by PWDs on employment inclusion within the study area. This call for implementation of the 5% quota for employment of PWDs as stated in the regulation (Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018). There is also need for retraining of these employers and human resource persons that can help them have better view of PWDs during recruitment.

Employers often harbour biases about the productivity and reliability of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Bonaci et al. (2020) emphasized that employers are more likely to believe that PWDs cannot perform at the same level as their non-disabled counterparts, which limits employment opportunities. Some employers fear that hiring Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) may expose them to legal risks or additional bureaucratic burden. This perception discourages inclusion, despite existing legal frameworks (e.g., Nigeria’s Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities Act, 2019). Many employers, community members, and even government officials have limited knowledge of disability policies. Oye-Lithur (2007) and Oni et al. (2020) note that awareness of Nigeria’s disability laws is very low, particularly in rural areas like parts of Benue State.

Table 2: Perceptions of employers that limits employment inclusion for PWDs in Benue State, Nigeria (N=120).

Employers Perceptions of PWDs	Yes	No	Not Sure	Mean
Generally, do you feel the desire to employ any PWDs	33 (28)	67 (56)	20 (17)	4.02
Employing PWDs is a waste of vital slots	69 (58)	30 (25)	21 (18)	4.16
PWDs cannot perform any job whatsoever	28 (23)	61 (51)	31 (26)	4.08
Do you feel they cannot be punctual?	87 (73)	30 (25)	3 (3)	4.20
Cannot meet up with strenuous task?	112 (93)	8 (7)		4.69
PWDs are educationally below employment standard?	85 (71)	35 (29)		4.36
They can be smart in work solutions as others	73 (61)	11 (9)	36 (30)	4.01

Source: Field Survey, 2025. Values in parenthesis are percentage values

The results in Table 3 presents the level of awareness on policies and regulation for social and employment inclusion of PWDs in Benue State. The results reveal that; there is very low level of awareness (72%) on the existing policies and lower level of awareness campaigns and strategies to help push awareness of this regulation (62%). Employers and PWDs demonstrate low level of awareness of a policy that has been in existence since 2018.

There is need to provide awareness of the bill, not only to PWDs and employers but also to the general public who may be face with defending PWDs in the future from stereotype and discrimination especially with employment inclusion.

Although Nigeria enacted the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act in 2019, its implementation remains poor. A study by Human Rights Watch (2020) revealed that several public and private sector actors are unaware of the legal obligations under this law.

Table 3: Level of awareness on policies and regulation for social and employment inclusion of PWDs in Benue State, Nigeria (n=150).

Level of Awareness on policies on PWDs	High	Moderate	Low
Rate your awareness on any existing policy	32 (21)	10 (7)	108 (72.0)
Rate level of campaigns and awareness programs available on policies for PWDs	23 (15)	34 (23)	93 (62.0)
Awareness of regulation on employing PWDs	31 (21)	15 (10)	104 (69)

Source: Field Survey, 2025. Values in parenthesis are percentage values

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it was concluded that there are existing barriers to social and employment inclusion of PWDs that ranges from access to education, unfavourable employment structures/infrastructures, transportation barriers, and employers’ negative perception. These barriers are however addressed with the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018 which has been neglected by employers. This neglect can be traced to lack of awareness and implementation of these policies and regulation. Despite the efforts invested towards the inclusion of PWDs in Nigeria, there are still existing barriers to the appropriate practice of inclusion in Nigeria. Therefore, the following recommendations are highlights to promote the economic, social, political, and environmental inclusion of PWDs in Nigeria. Based on the finding of the study, it was therefore recommended that:

Stakeholders should leverage on different approaches such as through social media platforms, Community engagement print media, public campaigns, collaborative initiative such as CSO organization as tool for awareness creation, sensitization, and information dissemination on issues of disability and inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).

Special needs experts, health professionals, celebrities, influences, and other stakeholders can create interesting videos, audio, and written contents on issues surrounding disability inclusion that will rouse the interest of individuals across all age levels and influence their perception of these concepts.

There is a need for continuous research by experts and stakeholders on the state of inclusion of PWDs as well as implementation of existing policies for inclusion of PWDs.

Special needs education courses should be included in pre-service training for every teacher-trainee at all tertiary institutions.

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