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Access to employment in Kenya: the voices of persons with disabilities

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Abstract

Introduction: Unemployment is one of the major challenges facing persons with disabilities worldwide. Persons with disabilities experience significantly high rates of unemployment compared with the general population, and are often employed in low-paid jobs. This could indicate a missing link in identifying employment opportunities and impeding factors to the opportunities. This study examined access to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the Nairobi County in Kenya.

Method: An exploratory study design, using qualitative methods, was conducted with three categories of persons with disabilities: the physically disabled, the visually impaired, and the hearing impaired. A convenient sampling was used to recruit 30 participants from five constituencies in Embakasi in the Nairobi County.

Findings: The study found that access to employment for persons with disabilities in the study area was limited. Factors responsible for the high unemployment include inaccessible information on employment, negative attitudes, inaccessible physical environment, low educational attainment of persons with disabilities, and ineffective legislation on employment.

Conclusion: The lack of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Kenya suggests that poverty reduction among persons with disabilities will be difficult. Therefore, efforts should be made through implementation of effective policies to remove barriers hindering

access to employment for persons with disabilities in Kenya.

Keywords: attitude; employment; Kenya; legislation; persons with disabilities.

Introduction

Employment is not only a key concept in economics, but also an essential element in achieving a good standard of living in that it provides an opportunity for economic self-sufficiency, contributes to a sense of dignity and self-worth, and serves as a means of self-expression [1]. A decent and secured employment is an important exit from poverty; as such, the right to work is fundamental and every human being should have the opportunity to exercise this right [2]. Increasing the participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market will therefore significantly reduce poverty among them and increase their social inclusion. Employment for persons with disabilities is thus an important step towards their empowerment, independence, and overall well-being (Department for International Development, 2000). It is in this regard that Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) places emphasis on unhindered access to employment for persons with disabilities. Article 27 requires that the state parties undertake measures to prohibit all forms of discrimination and to create a working environment that ensures that persons with disabilities are able to work on an equal basis as others and to have a professional career [3].

Despite the importance of employment, and the right of every individual to have access to decent jobs without discrimination, many persons with disabilities are denied access [4–6]. Although reliable data on the employment of people with disabilities are generally sketchy and difficult to obtain, available data indicate that persons with disabilities have more limited access to employment than their counterparts without disabilities; the few who are employed, usually engaged in menial jobs with low wages [1, 7]. Consequently, unemployment is widespread among

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persons with disabilities globally, but the situation is worse in low-income countries such as those in Africa [4, 5]. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, it is estimated that over 80% of persons with disabilities were unemployed in 2014 [7]. In Kenya, the unemployment rate in 2011 was 64% among the working population, out of which more than 80% were persons with disabilities [8].

As persons with disabilities have limited access to employment, poverty among them is generally higher than persons without disabilities [9]. They are also unable to access services such as education and health care and therefore are worse off in terms of educational and health outcomes than persons without disabilities [10, 11].

Many factors account for the high rate of unemployment among persons with disabilities. These include low educational attainment, lack of the relevant skills, negative attitudes, lack of reasonable accommodation, inaccessible physical environment, and inadequate or ineffective laws and legislations on employment for persons with disabilities [7–11]. For example, persons with disabilities encounter barriers in relation to the nature of the physical environment, such as unfriendly buildings, inaccessible transport systems, and lack of information on job vacancies in accessible formats [2, 9]. Also, misperceptions about the causes of disabilities and the perception that persons with disabilities are unproductive have led to low investments in their development [6, 7, 11–14]. As a result, many persons with disabilities lack the skills and experience needed to compete with others in the labour market [10, 12, 15]. Furthermore, policies and legislations (for example, affirmative actions) needed to increase access to employment are non-existent in many countries [12, 15]. Where they exist, they are either poorly enforced or are not enforced, making policies and legislations on employment for persons with disabilities in many countries, especially in low-income countries, worthless [5, 7, 10, 12].

Models of disability

Models of disability provide insights into different ways in which disability is perceived, and consequently, the models adopted by employers greatly influence their perception of the capabilities of persons with disabilities and the employment outcomes of persons with disabilities [16–18]. There are several models of disability, but the two most frequently used are the medical and the social models [17–20].

The medical model has been the predominant model for providing services and designing disability policy for

many years [21–24]. The main tenet of the medical model is that disability is the result of physical or mental conditions of individuals; it underrates the importance of the physical and social environment in which people live. The medical model focus almost exclusively on impairment, and on care, leads to a tendency to exempt persons with disabilities from work and makes them dependent on society or segregated in institutions [18, 24, 25]. This way of thinking about disability has dire consequences for employment outcomes of persons with disabilities because it views persons with disabilities as objects of pity and limits their opportunity for choices, make them less economically self-sufficient and impedes their ability to reach their full vocational potential. The result is that existing preconceptions and misconceptions about the capabilities of persons with disabilities are reinforced among employers [17, 18, 20, 26].

The social model of disability emerged in response to criticisms of the medicalisation of disability and its negative consequences on the daily lives of persons with disabilities [16–20]. The social model considers disability as the results of barriers in the physical, economic, and social environments [17]. In handling issues affecting persons with disabilities (for example, employment), the social model would focus on the barriers that interact with the functional limitations or impairment such as those relating to the environment and attitudes, rather than on the individuals with impairment [16–19]. The social model thus shifts the analysis of the difficulties persons with disabilities encounter in their daily lives in society rather than perceived defects of the functional, physiological, and cognitive abilities of individuals who have impairments [24–26]. In other words, persons with disabilities are disadvantaged not because they have impairments; rather, the ways in which the physical, social, and economic environments have been organised unnecessarily exclude them from participating in their communities [14–17]. This implies that if barriers associated with attitudes, physical environment, and institutional arrangements are removed, persons with disabilities will have a greater opportunity to participate in the labour market. Creating a better understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities and eliminating economic, social, and environmental barriers are therefore important to open up the labour market to persons with disabilities [5, 18, 27].

Persons with disabilities in Kenya encounter numerous barriers that make it difficult for them to participate in socio-economic activities such as accessing health care, education, and employment [27]. For example, a survey conducted by the National Coordinating Agency for Population and Development (NCAPD) [28] found that negative

attitudes and inaccessible physical environment, including transport systems, are major barriers facing persons with disabilities in Kenya. Also, according to the Kenyan Commission on Human Rights [20], persons with disabilities in Kenya still encounter barriers arising from the inaccessible physical environment, ineffective laws and policies, and stereotypical and inimical cultural practices. Also, persons with disabilities received very little financial support in the form of old age pension, disability grant, private insurance/pension, and social security [28]. This means that there are very few or no social protection programmes to cushion the impact of poverty on persons with disabilities.

Legislative framework

Various attempts have been made at both local and international levels to increase the participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market. As has been explained in the previous section, the CRPD, which is one of the major efforts in this direction, has provisions urging governments to remove all forms of barriers hindering access to employment for persons with disabilities [3]. A typical example of this provision in the CRPD is Article 27 described in the previous section. Similarly, international labour organization (ILO) [5] advocates for non-discrimination, equal opportunities, accessible environment, and involvement of persons with disabilities in public decision making. Kenya is a member of the ILO and a signatory to the CRPD, as such, it is expected that it will respect decisions by the ILO and implement provisions in the CRPD.

At the local level, the Constitution of Kenya and the Persons with Disabilities Bill (2013) are examples of legislations that addresses the concerns of persons with disabilities. There are provisions in the Constitution of Kenya addressing negative societal attitudes and the removal of physical barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from participating in socioeconomic activities on an equal basis as their peers without disabilities. For example, Article 27 [4] of the Constitution prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities, while Article 54 [1] requires all public places, public transport, and information to be reasonably accessible to persons with disabilities. Article 54 also requires that employment should be made accessible to persons with disabilities and they should also be protected from unsafe cultural practices and exploitation [29].

The Persons with Disability Bill (2013) has sections on employment for persons with disabilities. Article 28–33 of

the Bill guarantees the rights of persons with disabilities to work without discrimination. It also states that 5% of contractual and casual jobs be reserved for persons with disabilities. Similarly, the Government of Kenya, under Regulation 31 of the amended procurement laws in 2013, has set aside 30% of government procurement opportunities for persons with disabilities who own small business enterprises. This is aimed at encouraging persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups to do business with government whiles facilitating income generation.

However, it appears that these efforts are not making the needed impact as a large number of persons with disabilities are still unemployed [11]. This is particularly so for persons with disabilities who are residing in deprived and rural areas such as the Western Province of Kenya [27]. While there is evidence that persons with disabilities in Kenya have limited access to employment, little is known about the challenges they encounter when seeking for jobs. Understanding their job search experiences will provide insights into factors that obstruct access to employment and serve as a guide for policy and programme interventions in Kenya. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the challenges that persons with disabilities in the Nairobi County encounter when searching for jobs. The following research questions were explored: how accessible are the sources of information on job vacancies to persons with disabilities, and what attitudes do employers exhibit towards persons with disabilities who are searching for jobs? Answering these questions provided insights into the barriers persons with disabilities encountered during their job search.

Methods

Study design and type

An exploratory study design, using the qualitative method, was employed to document participants' perception of barriers to employment for persons with disabilities in the study area. Qualitative method is ideal for this study because it allowed participants to relate their experiences, offering deeper insights, and understanding about employment challenges of persons with disabilities in the Nairobi.

Study area

The study was conducted in Nairobi, which is the capital and the largest city in Kenya. Nairobi is one of the most populous cities in the Great Lakes region and the industrial hub of East Africa, and it has many businesses and international organisations. According to the 2009 Population and Housing Census, Nairobi had a population

of over 3 million [26]. Out of the eight administrative divisions in Nairobi, the study purposively recruited participants from Embakasi, which is located in East of Nairobi. Embakasi is made up of five constituencies out of a total of 16 constituencies in Nairobi. Participants for the study were chosen from this area due to its strategic importance. It is a residential area near the main international airport – Jomo Kenyatta International Airport and home to lower-middle-income people. Because there are a lot of business setups and industries in this area, people living in this area have fairly modest jobs and decent living [30]. Therefore, it is expected that the area will attract people, including persons with disabilities, from other parts of the country. The area is, therefore, ideal for the study as it offered an opportunity to recruit persons with disabilities who had some experiences in competing for a job in a competitive labour market situation.

Study participants

The study population included the physically impaired, the hearing impaired, and the visually impaired persons who were registered members of Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) and were residing in the five Embakasi constituencies. Participants were drawn equally from these three disability groups.

Sampling and sampling technique

We used purposive sampling to select communities and convenient sampling to select prospective study participants. We purposively selected five sub-constituencies in the Embakasi area, which have a lot of business activities and also attract a lot of people. These are Embakasi West, Embakasi Central, Embakasi South, Embakasi North, and Embakasi East. Six participants (two from each disability group) were recruited from each of the five constituencies, making up a total of 30 participants.

The researchers liaised with the executives of the three DPOs whose members were targeted for the study to help identify their members. Through the executives, announcements were made on local radio stations and on posters in the constituencies inviting interested persons. The announcement included information about the study, eligibility requirements, and invitation to volunteers to meet at specific locations at preset dates and times. All volunteers who attended the meetings were screened, and those who qualified and were willing to participate in the study were recruited after going through the informed consent process.

The majority of the participants (63.3%) were males. The low representation of females in the study is a major shortcoming of the sampling technique that was used in recruiting participants. In terms of age, 23.3% of the participants were between 36 and 45 years while 10% were between 46 and 55 years with an average age of 33 years. Nearly half of the participants (46.7%) were single; 23.3% were married, and 30% were divorced. More than half (60%) of the participants had no children while the remaining had one or more children. In terms of education, 46.7% had no formal education and only 10% had a university education. About half of the participants (56.7%) were unemployed while <10% were civil servants, possibly those with formal education. Table 1 shows the background characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18–25	5	16.7
26–35	15	50
36–45	7	23.3
46–55	3	10
Mean	33.3	
Gender		
Male	19	63.3
Female	11	36.7
Total	30	100
Marital status		
Married	7	23.3
Single	14	46.7
Divorce	9	30
Total	30	100
Education		
None	14	46.7
Primary	5	16.7
Secondary	8	26.7
University	3	10
Total	30	100
Employment		
Unemployed	17	56.7
Artisan	7	23.3
Trading	4	13.3
Civil servant	2	6.7
Total	30	100
Number of children		
None	18	60
1–3	6	20
4–6	4	13.3
≤7	2	6.7
Total	30	100

Data collection

In-depth interviews were used to collect information from all participants. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide that explored a wide range of topics: background characteristics of participants, their living conditions, access to education, barriers to employment opportunities, and support from family members and government. The demographic characteristics of participants include information on where participants' lived, educational attainment, marital status, and how they acquired their disability. The major issues covered under living conditions are sources of income, support from family members and government, access to medical care, and attitude of society towards persons with disabilities. Issues discussed under access to employment are the availability of employment for persons with disabilities, the perception of capabilities of persons with disabilities, and the skills they possessed. With respect to education, participants were asked how accessible the schools were to persons with disabilities and whether the educational system provided persons with disabilities with the relevant skills. Although the interview guide was in English, participants spoke in Swahili, which is the language spoken by most people

in Kenya. Deaf participants communicated in sign language and an interpreter translated the sign language into English. The interviews were recorded with permission from participants.

Data management and analysis

The data were analysed using content analysis. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by two persons fluent in both English and the local language. Each interview was transcribed separately and saved on a portable laptop accessible only to the researchers. The scripts were then translated from the local languages to English. The researchers, with the two transcribers, read the transcription several times and the differences in the transcriptions were reconciled. Also, the sign language interpreter assisted in translating the interactions with the hearing impaired persons into English. The translation was audio-recorded before it was transcribed verbatim into a word format. The researchers read through the final transcripts in order to make sense of the data. During the readings, concepts, and statements that are related to the objectives of the study were marked out and assigned codes. Similar concepts and statements were given the same alphabetical code.

The coding system involves assigning each disability group an alphabetical code (B, D, and P corresponding to visually impaired, hearing impaired, and physically impaired, respectively) and research question a numeral code (01 and 02 for research questions 1 and 2, respectively) (Table 2). A statement related to research question 1 by a hearing-impaired participant, for example, was coded, D01, indicating both the research question and the disability type. This made it easy to differentiate concepts and statements related to each research question and also categorised these concepts and statements into groups. Based on the codes, we put together concepts and codes that are similar, to form the main themes. The main themes identified are inaccessible information on job vacancies, employers' perception, low educational attainment, neglect by the family members and society, and lack of legislations on employment.

Ethical consideration

The researchers sought approval from the Nairobi City County authorities prior to the data collection. The research instruments and protocols were scrutinised by the officials of the City County before being given approval. A written informed consent, translated from English to Swahili was used to seek consent from participants. With regard to deaf participants, the sign language interpreter translated the informed consent for them. Participants signed the informed consent form before they participated in the study.

Table 2: Coding system used in the data analysis.

Disability type	Code
Visually impaired	B
Hearing impaired	D
Physically impaired	P
Research questions	
Research question 1	01
Research question 2	02

Results

Participants discussed their experiences, including factors that limited their chances of securing jobs. The factors identified include inaccessible information on job vacancies, employers' perception, low educational attainment, neglect by the family members and society, and lack of legislations on employment.

Inaccessible information on jobs

Access to information on job vacancies was a major barrier because, according to the participants, information on job vacancies was not in accessible formats and so they were unable to access advertisements on jobs. For example, while the deaf participants said they had difficulty obtaining information from radio adverts and could not communicate with people around them, the visually impaired said they could not access information from newspapers because they (newspapers) were not in Braille.

I can't read neither do I have radio. No one tells me about any job vacancies. I depend on almighty God for survival because he touches people's heart to give me money for food in order for me to live [Interview 2]

I can't see so even if they are looking for people to work I wouldn't be able to know. There is something I can do when I'm trained but have not got such an opportunity. No newspaper is in Braille for me to be able to read. I'm just existing and sitting down idle [Interview 15]

Not many people can use sign language here in Kenya so communication becomes very difficult. I used to walk around town asking people if they have jobs for me to do. We can't communicate so that is the problem [Interview 25].

From the above comments, it is evident that the lack of information in accessible formats was affecting the ability of persons with disabilities in the study area to search for jobs.

Perception of capability to work

Almost all the participants claimed that they had painful experiences with employers when looking for jobs in the past. Instead of employing them, they claimed they were mocked, handed cash, and turned away by employers, because employers had low expectations of them. For instance, a physically impaired person and a visually impaired person shared their experiences, respectively.

Employers always had negative attitude towards our abilities, For example, when we are looking for employment, instead of getting a job, employers end up just pitying you instead of seeing what you can deliver or instead of giving you a chance to try on the job [Interview 5]

Anytime I send application to an organization for job, they will laugh at me and make fun about me. They end up giving me money for food and tell me that there is no job there that I can do. I usually feel bad so it has discouraged me from looking for jobs. I have to beg on the street to survive [Interview 21]

The responses from some of the participants suggest that having a disability made it difficult to compete for jobs with others without disabilities in Kenyan society. For instance, two visually impaired persons shared their experience when they commented that

In our communities, getting jobs among the disabled is not easy. Competition for jobs between the disabled and the abled has resulted in the plight of the disabled being neglected. This mostly happens with the formal sector where they feel we cannot be productive and expensive to provide support services [Interview 10]

It is not easy to survive as a disabled person in our community. No one wants to employ you so it becomes very difficult to survive in life. The jobs are only for those without disabilities. Sometimes they say we can't work and that they will pay more for employing persons with disabilities [Interview 17]

Some participants mentioned that they had given up looking for jobs due to the humiliation and insults from employers when looking for jobs. Three participants commented on their experiences.

I don't want to bother people again because anytime I move about looking for jobs; they tell me they want non-disabled people. It is as if I'm not a human being but the condition has made it impossible for me to work [Interview 12]

I don't look for job anywhere. I have suffered enough on the hands of people. They keep pushing you out and at times insult you. They don't want to have anything to do with disabled persons. I have given up on job search. I don't remember the last time I went looking for job. I know God will take care of me and my family [Interview 18]

Because they had no hope, the only option available for them was to stay in the street begging for alms to survive.

I have no hope in getting job in this country so I don't see why I should waste my time moving from place to place looking for any job. Even if there is job, they won't give it to me. They think I can't work so I stay in the streets [Interview 1]

I am tired of the insults so I have to stay on the street and pray that people passing by will give me something for food. I have

suffered enough while going about looking for jobs to do. I cannot bear it anymore so I have stopped looking for jobs here [Interview 1]

While people, especially employers, perceived persons with disabilities as incapable of working, views from participants contradicted this perception. According to some participants, their disability had no effect on their ability to work; they are capable of working.

People think having a disability makes you incapable of working, so they don't want to give us jobs but that is not true. I can work, only that I can't walk but people in the community have made it impossible for us to work [Interview 1]

You see, I can work and do many things but employers think we cannot work and so they are refusing to give us jobs. But the truth is that we can do everything if we are given the opportunity to work. So people should stop thinking negatively about our abilities (Interview 5).

As for me, I am able to do all works related to masonry and I can make artisan works such as making of beds. I learned these while I was in prison. I can use my experience to work since I don't have sight and I'm managing bit by bit so employers can try me and see [Interview 9]

I am the personal assistant to the Member of the County Assembly. I have been working with the Member of County of Assembly for over a year. People are able to see that even the disabled people are able to work and deliver just like any other person [Interview 13]

Some participants, however, seemed to have acknowledged that their capabilities could be lower than persons without disabilities. Some participants even blamed their inability to get jobs on their disability; they could not compete in the job market because their disability limited their ability to compete with others. Two participants commented:

Even though I'm disabled and able to work but my skills and ability to work are limited to some extent such that my output is not similar to the days before I lost my left hand. I can't compare my ability to work with non-disabled (Interview 23).

I can work and guide my apprentice but it is not like before I had the disability. I can only give instructions as they work. Although I have the knowledge but I am unable to apply it but I have to be here guiding the other who can see to do the work (Interview 9).

Yes, I know I cannot compete with other non-disabled persons when it comes to doing certain jobs because of my disability. However, I can do many other things. For example, I can do carpentry and work in shops but it will be difficult to work in certain areas in the big shops as a disabled (Interview 7).

Inaccessible physical environment

Some participants cited the physical environment as a major barrier. According to these participants, they were unable to move to places where there were job vacancies because the physical environment is inaccessible. One visually impaired female and a physically impaired female said that:

I usually hear of job advertisement on radio but I can't go there since I have no one to send me there. There are gutters everywhere which are not covered so it is better for me to stay home than risking my life to go there [Interview 26]

I can't take my wheelchairs there. There are staircase everywhere and I can't move with this wheelchair. Where most jobs and companies are located are not friendly which makes it difficult for me to move to there [Interview 8]

Low education

Almost all the participants cited their inability to attain higher education as a major factor that was limiting their access to employment. The nature of the physical environment, financial constraints, distance to school, and discrimination were major barriers to education for persons with disabilities, denying them the opportunity to develop their skills to make them competitive in the job market. The following quotes illustrate how low educational attainment limited access to employment for persons with disabilities.

I have only primary education. Advancement to other levels of education has been difficult due to financial constraints and discrimination from other members of society and unfriendly nature of our schools. Because I don't have good education, my ability to get a job is limited because without good education you can't get a job [Interview 22]

I have no relevant education qualification, so I can't get a job. I have not been to school so I don't have the qualification to get a job. My family thinks I'm disabled so I can't learn but that is not the case. I can learn as any other person. Even the schools are far and it would have been difficult for me to attend [Interview 7]

I never went to school and this is the same of others with disability. This makes competition for work difficult for persons with disabilities. It is very difficult for us to get any meaningful jobs because we lack the skills to work [Interview number 12]

As you can see, this building here is not properly constructed for access by the disabled. We are forced to use inaccessible routes to these buildings. This is the same in all schools around and

that is why we can't go school in order for us to get good jobs [Interview 9]

The above assertion is supported by participants who had jobs. These participants claimed that they had some education before the onset of their disability, and this has enabled them to secure jobs. One participant remarked:

My education at a young age helped me get a job. I was able to reach college level before getting the disability so I couldn't continue. I plead to other persons with disability to go to school and learn in order to increase their chances to obtain the opportunities that education brings. I always plead that the education system in Kenya will accommodate the needs of disables so that we can also go to than going to beg on the streets [Interview 6].

Understandably, without a good education, one cannot compete in the labour market as education provides the required knowledge and skills to compete for jobs.

Lack of working legislations

All the participants agreed that ineffective laws greatly contributed to unemployment among persons with disabilities in Kenya. For instance, some participants commented that although the government has passed a law making it mandatory for government institutions and the private sector to reserve 5% jobs for persons with disabilities, the law is not enforced at the moment. A visually impaired person remarked that

Being disabled has limited us to job opportunities. Even though the Kenyan government policy of 5% jobs for the disabled has been passed but it is yet to be fulfilled. It is not being implemented. The policy is only implemented in certain sections of government institutions but is yet to largely operate in many companies and organizations within the country [Interview 17]

Again, participants mentioned that the government of Kenya has passed a law reserving 30% of the government tenders for persons with disabilities who have companies, yet the bureaucratic processes in company registration and the nature of built environment were hampering the efforts to implement this policy.

We have opportunities in business through tenders from the government. Thirty percent of tenders from government contracts are reserved for persons with disabilities but the processes of company registrations and other bureaucracies act as a hindrance and barriers for us to explore such opportunities. The environment is not adjustable enough so it makes it difficult for us to take advantage of this opportunity [Interview 25].

Neglect from the family and society

The participants discussed the lack of support from family members and their communities and how it impacted on their employment opportunities. Some participants mentioned that their family members abandoned them when they acquired their disability. As a result, they could not acquire any skills that would make them employable. They, therefore, depended on well-wishers or cash transfers from the government. The following accounts from participants illustrate this point.

My family abandoned me when I had this disability, so I could not develop myself. I have no family. I rely only on well-wishers for my support. None of my family members check on me to give me money or food or nay support that will make me employable. I take care of myself [Interview 4]

There is need for education among family members on ways to handle the disabled persons. They don't seem to understand us. We only rely on cash transfer from the government because the family support is very low. We cannot rely on the family for constant support because they think we can't make any positive impact on the family. Without support from the family members, it will be hard for us to be self-employed or get jobs from other people [Interview 11]

Additionally, persons with disabilities were subjected to abuses and rejection from their communities. The participants alleged that even properties owned by persons with disabilities were sometimes destroyed with impunity. For instance, one of the participants mentioned that:

People in the community do not view disabled persons in a good light. Properties owned by disabled are disrespected and not treated equally. I owned a pig that was slaughtered by other people without my consent just because of who I am [Interview 7]

I am sometimes discriminated because of my disability. Society views that there is something I did of my family did that is why I have been cursed. When things happen this way, I wept at things but I do encourage myself. This attitude of society affect our ability to get employed [Interview 3]

It can be seen that failure of families to accept their members with disabilities impacted negatively on their lives. This is because support is needed in order to overcome some of the barriers they might face in life.

Consequences of unemployment: poverty

Participants acknowledged that due to their inability to access jobs, persons with disabilities are very poor.

Poverty has made it difficult for them to participate in social activities because they were unable to make financial contributions. For instance, a respondent said that:

I live here in the ghetto and I survive only by begging on the street. I was informed to join a group of the disabled persons but it required an entry cost of KES 400 (5 dollars) and a monthly amount of KES 100. I cannot be able to afford that is why I have not been able to join the group that advocates for disabled persons. This makes me feel that there is no support I receive from the community around me [Interview 16]

Although the government has instituted a cash transfer programme to cushion the effects of poverty on persons with disabilities, participants revealed that the support is inadequate and not everyone received the funds.

As members of the Embakasi Handicap Centre, we are supposed to receive the money monthly. We only receive KES 2.000 (22 dollars). The money is largely not enough to cater for our needs. This year delivery of the cash transfer has been irregular and unsustainable [Interview 2].

Sometimes organizations are led by persons without disabilities so when support is allocated, it ends up in their pockets and they do not share the money to the actual people who need it so many of us do not get the transfers [Interview 23].

In order to obtain support, I require an individual who is able to see to help me take the money. Therefore, when the money from government is provided it ends up in the hands of the people who support me. I am forced to share the money with such an individual [Interview 2].

From the above, it can be seen that the high rate of unemployment among persons with disabilities in the study area is the result of a complex web of factors that often started from the family. Factors, such as low educational attainment, lack of employment legislations, inaccessible physical environment, and lack of information in the accessible format were very important factors for limiting access, but their effects could have been ameliorated if the family members had given adequate support to their relatives with disabilities.

Discussion

This study explored barriers to employment for persons with disabilities in five constituencies in Embakasi Division in Nairobi, Kenya. The study, although limited in scope, provides useful insights into the job search experiences of persons with disabilities in Nairobi. As expected, participants encountered numerous barriers mainly with

employers' attitude, and also, with the nature of information on job vacancies, their low educational attainment as well as the physical environment during their job search.

The barriers encountered stemmed mainly from the religious, cultural, and medical perceptions of disability, leading to the discrimination and exclusion of persons with disabilities from mainstream activities. In Kenya, as in many parts of Africa, the interaction between culture, social status, and religion have influenced people's perception and attitude towards persons with disabilities [8]. For example, the belief that persons with disabilities are cursed by the gods or as punishment for sins committed by the person or a family member or as a result of witchcraft leads to stigma and social rejection [15]. The negative attitude exhibited by employers towards persons with disabilities during their job search, as indicated by the participants in the study, therefore, mirrors this general perception of society. The stigma associated with a disability may have caused employers to be hostile and verbally abused persons with disabilities who were searching for jobs. That is, their attitude may have been influenced by misconceptions about the causes of, fear of, and stigma associated with disability; employers would have nothing to do with the people perceived as "unclean" (cursed). According to Agbenyega [14] and Slikker [15] superstition and the cultural belief system have created deep-seated obstacles to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the society; the belief system makes it difficult for interaction to occur between the persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities.

Additionally, it is common knowledge that employers often look for employees who are highly productive and skilful on the job. Thus, the perception that persons with disabilities are "sick" and incapable of engaging in economic activities may have influenced employers' attitude towards them. As this perception associates disability with a medical condition and portrays persons with disabilities as "sick" and objects of pity that should depend on charity, their capability to work are often questioned by the employers [19, 21, 22, 24]. Employers probably thought persons considered as "sick" should not be searching for employment. This assertion is buttressed by the claim of participants that, instead of employers giving them jobs, they were rather given alms.

Moreover, the perception linking persons with disabilities with higher cost is a likely reason for employers' negative attitude towards the job-seekers. Although this perception has been challenged by disability activists on the grounds that it is not always simple to differentiate between the cost of employing persons with disabilities from the cost of employing others [6, 8, 12, 13], it is

an issue that cannot be ignored. Providing reasonable accommodation, such as sign language interpreters for deaf employees and retrofitting buildings to make them accessible to wheelchair users, for example, come with costs, which employers may not be willing to bear. This is especially important in low-income countries such as Kenya, where there is mass unemployment, no incentives for employers, and a large pool of labour force from which employers can easily employ. Also, while it may be argued that the cost of employing persons with disabilities is just a small fraction of the profit of large business entities [11], small scale businesses (such as those found in low-income countries) can be affected adversely. It should be mentioned that because of the negative perceptions about disability, any extra cost of employing them, no matter its magnitude can be a disincentive to employers. Therefore, efforts by the government to increase access to employment for persons with disabilities in Kenya through legislation would have to address employers' concern about the cost of accommodating persons with disabilities at the workplace; otherwise, attitude will remain a major barrier.

Furthermore, because of the traditional beliefs about the causes and capabilities of persons with disabilities, many parents and community members do not see the value in educating children with disabilities [14, 15, 18]. Thus, as some of the participants acknowledged, low educational attainment was a major barrier to their ability to compete with others on the labour market. Consequently, even if laws on employment are well enforced and employers are willing to employ persons with disabilities, there are still challenges to deal with. The lack of training and qualification, coupled with the lack of previous experience on the part of persons with disabilities would make it difficult for them to take advantage of legislations meant to promote access to employment. This is compounded by the inaccessible physical environment; buildings without elevators or ramps, open gutters and rough terrain are the barriers for wheelchair users, and persons with visual impairment would have to overcome to access employment opportunities.

Finally, although begging in the street can be stigmatising and devaluing, participants justified their choice to be on the street to beg for alms. For the participants, begging was a form of work, the only option available to them as no employer was ready to employ them. In other words, although living on the street is dehumanising, it was better than the treatment meted out to them by employers. In a study to investigate the motivation for begging on the street among persons with mobility impairment in Accra, Ghana, Kassah [13] found that begging was a form of work

to make a living, to acquire assistive devices, and to avoid harassment from employers.

Implications for policy making

Findings from the study have implications for policy making on employment and related issues concerning persons with disabilities in Kenya. Firstly, there is the need for an intensive national awareness campaign in Kenya to sensitise families and communities about the capabilities of persons with disabilities and the need to support them to participate in social and economic activities on an equal basis as others. Access to vocational training and formal education for persons with disabilities should be improved to make them competitive in the job market, as the findings from the study suggest. This could be achieved if the needs of persons with disabilities are factored into educational policies, which include teacher training, provision of disability-friendly teaching and learning resources, and infrastructural modification. Targeting persons with disabilities, reviewing recruitment procedures, and adapting application and interview processes to match the needs of all job-seekers may help break barriers at the recruitment stage.

The findings that existing laws on employment seemed ineffective in addressing the employment challenges of persons with disabilities suggest that poverty among persons with disabilities cannot be eradicated easily and street begging is unlikely to cease in Nairobi. This will defeat governments' drive to reduce poverty in the populace. The government should, therefore, endeavour to create an enabling environment (for example, enforcing existing laws, providing incentives to employers who employ persons with disabilities, and providing skills for persons with disabilities) to increase the participation of persons with disabilities in economic activities. Additionally, the government should involve persons with disabilities in the management of the disability fund and increase the quota allocated to them in order to make the funds serve the purpose for which it has been established. Disability activists and disabled people organisations could advocate for the implementation and enforcement of disability laws – provisions in the Persons with Disabilities Bill (2013), which prohibit discrimination, and require that 5% of the contractual and casual jobs be reserved for persons with disabilities, should be enforced.

Moreover, persons with disabilities could be provided with job search skills and information on job vacancies made available in accessible formats for them.

Employment centres could be set up at various locations to counsel persons with disabilities on career opportunities and assist them in accessing jobs that are disability-friendly. It should be remembered that some persons with disabilities may have also internalised misconceptions about the capabilities and so efforts should be made to increase confidence and self-esteem among them.

Conclusion

This study investigated barriers encountered by persons with disabilities when accessing jobs in five constituencies in Embakasi Division in Nairobi, Kenya. Although the study is limited in scope, it provided an understanding of experiences that persons with disabilities go through when searching for jobs in Nairobi. Although the barriers identified in the current study are generally similar to barriers encountered by persons with disabilities worldwide, solutions to these barriers may differ. This is because the employment issues affecting persons with disabilities are complex and requiring context-specific approaches. Thus, it is important for persons with disabilities and their advocates to be proactive and engage all stakeholders in the labour market to enforce existing policies on employment for persons with disabilities. The limitation of this study lies in its scope. Although the qualitative nature provided in-depth information on the barriers to employment for persons with disabilities, extending the study to other areas in the country will provide a better picture on the topic.

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