

## **The Attitudes of Employers and Co-Workers towards the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Zimbabwe**

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**Abstract:** *This study was a systemic enquiry into attitudes of employers and co-workers towards employees with disabilities in the community of Chitungwiza in Zimbabwe. A qualitative case study method was used to carry out this study. The purposive sampling method was used to select thirty (30) participants into the study. A sample of ten (10) employers, ten (10) co-workers and ten (10) employees with disabilities were chosen as the subjects. The interview and observation were used to generate data. Among other findings, the major findings in this study were that employees with disabilities were discriminated in the workplace. Co-workers perceived PWDs as generally incompetent as they would need the assistance of fellow workers to accomplish tasks while employers were of the view that some of these PWDs scare away customers while some are dependent on fellow workers for the accomplishment of tasks. The same employers perceived most PWDs as lacking knowledge and having poor qualifications rendering them unemployable. Co-workers felt that employees with disabilities need maximum supervision and needed to be assigned special tasks suitable to their conditions. From these findings, it was recommended that co-workers needed to change their attitude towards employees with disabilities. The Ministry of Labour needs to establish incentive packages for companies that employ persons with disabilities to encourage employment of more persons with disabilities. Such incentive packages can be in the form of exemption of tax payment by such companies. The Ministry can implement such programmes like the quota system and the levy and grants system like what happens in the developed countries. The Ministry can also strengthen and activate laws that will act against discrimination and marginalisation of person with disabilities. Advocacy through disability movements be encouraged by all sectors of the economy. This will encourage implementation of reforms instituted by the responsible ministry or ministries.*

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### **1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The International Labour Organization's Disability Programmes promote equity of opportunity and treatment for persons with disabilities in vocational rehabilitation training and employment as reflected in Convention Number 159. The Convention reflects on the Vocational Rehabilitation of Employment of Persons with Disabilities (1983) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Labour Organization Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace adopted in 2001. The Convention works to increase knowledge on the training and the employment of persons with disabilities, by carrying out research relating to policy and practice, compiling and disseminating information, publishing guidelines and manuals and sponsoring research and reports.

In many countries, until recently persons with disabilities (PWDs) would not work, for example in the United States of America, prior to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, employment policies rarely aimed to place PWDs in competitive employment positions. Benefit programs for PWDs largely remained tied to income and it was only persons below a certain threshold income that received assistance. With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (1975) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (as amended in 2008), employment discrimination was reduced and employment opportunities for PWDs improved in the United States. This trend is not exclusive to the United States. Employment outcomes for PWDs continue to lag behind those of persons without disabilities in the United States and worldwide (Black, 2007; Blanck 2008).

Owing to attitudes held by employers and co-workers, PWDs face restricted access to employment. They are often disregarded and considered as “second class citizens” or objects of charity giving them a feeling of inadequacy, dependence and insecurity. Such prevailing social attitudes not only determine the social expectation and treatment accorded to PWDs in the society but also their self-image and function. Over the years perceptions towards PWDs varied and have changed from community to community. Hunks and Hunks (1948) observed that PWDs were completely rejected by some cultures and in others they were outcasts, while in some they were treated as liabilities. In other community settings, they were given respected status and allowed to participate to the fullest extent of their capacity (Amoake, 1977; Chakuchichi and Mutamiswa, 2004; Wright, 1960).

Philosophically, since the Greco-Roman Era (100BC-300AD), PWDs were given alms, such as money at certain designated dates. Besides this benevolence, disability was associated with idiocy and the evils of mankind. With changing philosophy in Europe people with disabilities were killed with the obsession of creating a perfect human race (Fatalicism) the same applied in Africa, assuming that such an occurrence was a bad omen linked to witchcraft. Fatalicism was soon replaced by Religious–philanthropic philosophy which was characterised by acts of patronage, sympathy, compassion, humanity, benevolence and charity. This soon led to the philosophy of Humanism, whose premise was based on social welfare. The emergence of Social Philosophy brought about morality and humanistic ideas centred on the concepts of “Social Justice”, “Affirmative Action” and “Positive Discrimination”. This accorded rights to PWDs such as right to education, right to employment and the right to movement (Chakukuchi and Kaputa, 2000).

In terms of the Zimbabwean Labour Law of (1992), a person with disabilities is defined under Section 2 of the Disabled Person Act: Chapter 17.9, as a person with physical, mental and sensory disability including visual hearing and speech, disabilities. These conditions lead to physical cultural or social barriers inhibiting him or her from participating at an equal level with other members of the society in activities undertaken or fields of employment that are open to other members of the society. Section A of the Act prohibits discrimination of persons with disabilities in employment.

According to the assertion by Khupe (2010), at least 10% of the total population of Zimbabwe consists of persons with various forms of disabilities and the general unemployment rate is at least 80%, it is estimated that the unemployment rate of PWDs is 99.9%. PWDs face restricted accesses to employment in the community, and they may be described as a forgotten tribe when it comes to issues of employment. The community holds a variety of attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Employment is considered a critical element of membership in the society; PWDs wish to be effectively employed one day because they have the same rights and aspirations as everyone else. PWDs suffer a lot of deliberate and sometimes inadvertent discrimination from the governments and the various units of their society, such as employers, schools and even hospitals. Their plight therefore, needs to be addressed. The study sought to establish the attitudes of employees and co-workers towards the employment of persons with disabilities.

## **3. RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS**

The following questions stood as sub problems:

- What legislations are available for the workers with disabilities?
- How are employees with disabilities viewed and treated in the work places?
- What is the attitude of employers and co-workers towards employees with disabilities?
- What are the challenges faced by PWDs in employment?
- How best can the PWDs be treated as equal parties in employment sector?

#### **4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

##### **Legislations available for the workers with disabilities**

Zimbabwe has to be congratulated for adopting a new Constitution which embraces a human rights approach to disability and for assuming obligations under the CRPD by becoming a ratifying party thereto on 23 September 2013.

Zimbabwe acknowledged the international recognition of persons with disabilities. It redefined its Labour Law of 1992 on disability by stating under Section 2 of the Disabled Persons Act: Chapter 17:9 that, "PWDs are persons with physical, mental and sensory disability including visual hearing and speech, functional disabilities which leads to physical cultural or social barriers inhibiting the individuals from participating at an equal level with other members of the society in activities undertaken or fields of employment that are open to other members of the society."

The Disabled Persons Act (Chapter 17:01) is not a human rights document in that it does not confer any rights to PWDs or confer any obligations on the state. The bulk of the laws still use pejorative terms that disempower rather empower PWDs. Terms like 'imbecile,' 'mentally disordered,' 'intellectually handicapped' and 'mental patients' demean, degrade, belittle, stigmatise and devalue PWDs (Mandipa, 2014).

In the United Kingdom the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 1995) makes it illegal to discriminate against persons with disabilities in any aspect of employment. Under DDA employers are required to "make reasonable adjustments" for workers with disabilities. Such adjustments included allocating employees with disabilities to work with someone else, transferring employees with disabilities to another post or another place of work, making adjustments to the working environment, providing modified equipment, making instructions and manuals more accessible and providing a reader or interpreter. That this type of approach to employment of persons with disabilities does not only end on paper, it mandates employers to make ecological adjustments to enhance the functionality of employees with disability. PWDs are therefore recruited in employment by virtue of their abilities and on equal opportunity criteria with persons without disabilities.

In Japan, the law for the employment promotion of PWDs was established in 1960 and amended in 1987, to encourage the workers with physical disabilities feature the employment quota system, the levy and grant system and vocational rehabilitation programs. Under the levy and the grant system companies that fail to comply with the employment quota system would be fined and the monies used to cover complying employers costs associated with installing or improving facilities and equipment. This is a positive attitude by the policy makers that will ultimately raise the employment rate of PWDs. The quota system requires that the persons with disabilities get equal employment opportunities with people without disabilities.

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) of Australia makes it against the law for an employer to discriminate against someone on the grounds of disability. Employers must offer equal opportunities to everyone. This means that if a person with disability can do the essential activities or "inherent requirements" of a job they should have just as much chance to do that job just like anyone else. If a person with a disability is the best person to do the job, the employer must make workplace changes or workplace adjustments if that person needs them to perform the essential activities of the job.

South Africa is the only country that has been found to have enacted an Employment Equity Act in the Southern Africa. It also has a National Disability Strategy. The Act provides for equal rights, prohibits discriminatory practices on grounds of race national or ethical origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability and allows for special programs to improve conditions of disadvantaged groups such as black people, women and people with disabilities. The purpose of the Act is also to achieve equity in the workplace by promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination and implementation of affirmative action. It takes measures to redress the discrimination in employment experienced by designated groups to ensure equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce. Owing to such developments and reforms

towards the employment of PWDs, it is felt that this could be the best way forward in employment of people with disabilities.

Employment of PWDs in Zimbabwe largely entails the transition from school to adulthood. In 1992, in Zimbabwe there was an important paradigm shift affecting the development of legislation and policies concerning persons with disabilities from segregation to integration and from the Medical Model to Social Model. Legislations towards the employment of persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe are enshrined in the Disabled Persons Act of, 1992. Under the Act issues pertaining to Disabilities are dealt with by the National Disability Board which is headed by a Minister. Among other functions, the functions of the Board are to formulate and develop measures and policies designed to achieve equal opportunities for PWDs by ensuring that they obtain education and employment, lead independent lives, prevent discrimination against persons with disabilities arising out of their disability and improve the social and economic status and conditions of persons with disabilities to achieve their interest. Section 7: subsection (2), of the Disabled Persons Act (1992) states that: Where the Board considers that any premises, services or amenities are inaccessible to persons with disabilities by reason of any structural, physical, administrative and other impediment to such access, the Board may subject to this section, serve the owner of the premise or service provider of the service concerned an adjustment order. Failure to comply with the order calls for a penalty not exceeding four thousand dollars or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or both such fine and imprisonment. According to section 9; subsection (2) of the Act, no employer shall discriminate against any person with disability in relation to the advertisement of employment, the recruitment for employment, the determination or allocation of wages ,salaries ,pensions, accommodation, leave or such benefits and any matter related to employment ,among other things.

Researches have shown that throughout the world, paid work is a crucial aspect of culture and identity, with many individuals organising their lives around employment. Employment helps define an individual's place in the community. The unemployed are often excluded from important activities and roles within the social group. The expectation for people with disabilities was, they usually would not work. Several studies cited United States of America, where, prior to the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, employment policies rarely aimed to place PWDs in competitive employment positions (Blanck, 2001; Obermann, 1980; Gott et al, 2001).

With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of (1975) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of (1990), as amended (2008), employment discrimination has been reduced and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities have improved in the United States. Despite this improvement, elsewhere, employment outcomes for persons with disabilities continue to lag behind those without disabilities worldwide as asserted by the International Disability Rights Monitor (2004). Since its adoption by the United Nations (UN), Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been signed by 114 nations, with the promise in part, of greater employment opportunities for all persons with disabilities (Blanck 2007; Blanck; 2008; United Nations, 2006).

## **5. HOW PWDs ARE VIEWED AND TREATED IN THE WORK PLACE?**

The unemployment outcomes for PWDs are greatly influenced by conceptual models of disability adopted by service providers. These models are tools for defining impairment and are important because they play a significant role in determining the strategies that help meet the needs of PWDs (Shapiro, 1994). The most important models in this regard are; the medical model, the social model and the bio- psychosocial model.

## **6. THE MEDICAL MODEL**

This has been the dominant model in the formulation of disability policy for more than a century. The primary principle of the model is that disability results from the physical and social environment in which people live. As a result the medical model focuses on the individuals impairment when forming disability policy and developing treatment and services for those living with disability. The model regards disability as a health or rehabilitation issue, so the first thing is to heal or find a cure for the disability. If this fails the model aims to provide the care and services to support the individual with disability. Because this model emphasises on care, PWDs may be

excused from the normal obligations of society such as work and institutionalization and segregation and given justification. This, however, has negative consequences for employment outcomes for PWDs. This model limits opportunities for PWDs to make choices, become economically self-sufficient and reach their full vocational potential. Furthermore, it reinforces existing prejudices among employers about the inability of people with disabilities to do a job. In countries that employ this model of disability PWDs are rarely employed, and when they are employed it is typically in segregated settings. PWDs could be viewed from a medical welfare framework as different from their non-disabled peers and in need of care. As a result of the emphasis on medical care, there is neglect of their social and economic need. They then face discrimination in accessing employment (Lunt and Thornton, 2008; Blanck, 2009; Shapiro, 1994; Myhill and Blanck, 2009).

## **7. THE SOCIAL MODEL**

This considers disability as a consequence of environmental and attitudinal social barriers that prevent PWDs from maximum participation in society. It implies that if attitudinal physical and institutional barrier are removed many PWDs will be viewed as having different abilities and greater opportunity to participate in society, rather than having the disability and the inability to participate. The social model has had positive consequences for employment outcomes in the United States, Canada, and Australia with many individuals with disabilities obtaining customised and competitive employment in the community. The social model of disability is more accommodative of PWDs for it focuses on the society attitudes rather than individual. Societal attitudes pose as the greatest barrier to employment of PWDs. Most importantly it focuses on the unique needs and abilities of each individual. This focus helps change the negative attitudes employers may have towards PWDs (Blanck et al, 2009; Gott et al, 2001).

## **8. THE BIO-PSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL**

This was adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1980) and is a framework that integrates the medical and social models of disability. In this model, the disability is believed to stem from the interaction between biological psychological and social factors.

The International Classification of Impairment of the Disabled and the Handicapped differentiated between the impairments, disabilities and handicaps. This was revised and renamed the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). This "ICF" uses the Bio-psychosocial approach to disability and acknowledges socio-environmental factors, socio-demographic factors and behavioural factors that dictate the subjective experience of living with a disability (Jette, 2006; Wright, 2004).

The reporting by business representatives of actual experiences with employing workers with mental retardation has also assisted in dispelling other longstanding myths and misconceptions about employing PWDs. For instance, employing persons with mental retardation does not result in an increase in health insurance rates or workers' compensation claims (Blanck, 1998; Olson et al., 2000; Shafer et al., 1987) or pose a safety risk in the workplace (Blanck, 1998; Olson et al., 2000). Findings regarding the social skills of workers with disabilities and their ability to interact or get along with co-workers were also inconsistent in studies investigating different disability types. In some instances, employers expressed little concern with co-worker acceptance or the ability of workers with disabilities to interact with co-workers (Fuqua et al., 1984; McFarlin et al., 1991). In more recent studies, employers have not only expressed more favourable attitudes toward employing persons with severe disabilities in the workplace but also viewed workers with severe disabilities as dependable, productive workers who can interact socially and foster positive attitudes on the part of their co-workers (Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy, 1993).

## **9. ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYERS AND CO-WORKERS TOWARDS PWDs**

Several studies have explored employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workforce according to the type or severity of the disability (e.g., Fuqua, Rathburn, & Gade, 1984; Johnson, Greenwood, & Schriener, 1988; McFarlin, Song, & Sonntag, 1991; Thakker, 1997). The results indicate that employers expressed greater concerns over employing persons with mental or emotional disabilities than employing persons with physical disabilities. For

example, they examined eight areas of disability in a mail survey sent to randomly selected urban employers. The disability areas included blindness, cerebral palsy, paraplegia, emotional problems, epilepsy, amputation, deafness, and mental disabilities.

Employers expressed the greatest concern toward employing individuals with mental disabilities and blindness and were least concerned about hiring individuals with epilepsy. Similarly, employers from a variety of businesses and industries located in Arkansas and Oklahoma believed that workers with mental disabilities and emotional disabilities were of greater concern than workers with physical or communication disabilities (Johnson et al., 1988). Although McFarlin and colleagues (1991) found that attitudes toward workers with disabilities tended to be more positive with respect to turnover, absenteeism and work performance, their results contrast with other reported findings (e.g., Fuqua et al., 1984; Johnson et al., 1988).

Employers with experience in supervising PWDs also indicated they were pleased with the individuals' work quality (Nietupski et al., 1996) or work performance (Marcouiller, Smith, & Bordieri, 1987). Previous Experience with Individuals with Disabilities Employers' previous experiences with individuals with specific disabilities such as deafness (Phillips, 1975), mental retardation (Gibson & Groeneweg, 1986; Gruenhagen, 1982), epilepsy (Gade & Toutges, 1983), psychiatric disability (Diksa & Rogers, 1996) also reported more favourable attitudes toward hiring applicants with the same disability. For example, in a study of employers' attitudes toward hiring individuals who are deaf, the results indicated that employers with previous experience employing individuals who are deaf have more positive attitudes toward hiring such a person again.

Negative attitudes towards employees with disabilities result in discrimination. Companies, agencies and organizations are composed of individuals with their own attitudes and beliefs about people with disabilities. Some able bodied co-workers may think that disability can be contagious. Some women may also fear that they would give birth to a child with a similar disability (Shapiro, 1994).

Employers do not hire workers with disabilities and discriminate them on the basis that they cannot perform essential functions. Most employers prefer employees that are flexible and able to do more than one task. They fear that employees with disabilities can not perform to full capacity. The employers associated disability with poor health; they viewed them as people who would most often report for duty sick needing time off for doctor's appointment. The 1999 United States President's Committee of Employment of People with Disabilities pointed out that the most difficult barrier to overcome was attitudes other people carry regarding people with disabilities. These attitudes could generate from ignorance, misunderstanding and stereotyping, backlash, and fear (Peck, Kirkbride and Smart, 2001).

Often the individual with a disability is seen as owing the problem rather than having limitations caused by environmental restrictions such as discrimination (Kaplan 2000). Smart (2001) discussed societal practices towards people with disabilities that stem from prejudicial sources such as charity, preferential treatment and financial compensation stereotypes of any kind lead to behaviours and action that limit and reduce the opportunities of people in that category.

Pertaining to employment, discriminatory stereotyping is a pervasive negative attitude that focuses on a person's disability rather than on a person's ability. The United States Department of Labour (2003) discusses the need for a concerted effort to dispel the attitudinal barriers that prevent full integration of people with disabilities in the world of work as this can affect the employment outcomes of people with disabilities. Many disability advocates believe negative social attitudes have led to the unemployment and underemployment of people with disabilities in the United States (Kennedy and Olney 2001; Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2000).

Misconceptions harboured by the employers, the employee and the public creates attitude that regards PWDs as second-class citizens. This may signify that they are not taken as part of the productive community despite having gone through tertiary education and acquired the appropriate qualifications and the necessary skills for the job, as asserted by Khupe (2010). Owing to this, potential employers often regard them as incapable of accomplishing tasks. In some situations, employers may even fear persons with disabilities as employees, not knowing

what to say when they meet them in the work environment or they may also fear that their customers or clients are not comfortable with employees with disabilities. The employers may also have vague concerns about image of the company or may worry that their customers or members of the public that deals with the employee may have some reluctance or uneasiness to deal with the employee (Steven, 2011).

## **10. CHALLENGES FACED BY PWDS IN EMPLOYMENT**

Employers' willingness to make special accommodations for workers with disabilities is also illustrated by employers who have hired persons with mental retardation. Employer representatives in several studies have indicated that PWDS may require extra time and effort to be integrated into the workforce (Nietupski et al., 1996; Shafer, Hill, Seyfarth, & Wehman, 1987). A recent study indicated that the employers perceived the amount of training and supervision for PWDS to be greater than that for nondisabled co-workers. Yet, employers in that same study reported that employing PWDS brings other benefits to their business, such as enhancing their organization's public image and promoting diversity in the workplace (Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2000).

Employers may be willing to devote additional time to training and supervision or to sacrifice productivity in exchange for a reliable, dedicated employee or for other unintended benefits, such as increased workforce diversity and promoting positive corporate social responsibility. Several researches indicated that lack of good health weighted heavily on both employees with disabilities and co-workers. The respondents indicated that person with disabilities due to lack of good health often reported unfit for the work needing to be seen by the doctor. Ill health often warrants periods off duty to allow recovery. Absence from duty was viewed negatively by the able "bodied" co-workers who voiced unfair pressure of work (Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2000).

Other studies have shown that PWDS lack flexibility in the work environment owing to both physical and mental disabilities. Lack of qualifications for the job was a challenge for working with persons with disabilities. This meant that employees with disabilities were viewed as lacking understanding of tasks to be executed. Negative attitudes about employees with disabilities by employers and co-workers seemed to emerge from lack of appreciation of workers with disabilities in the work environment. Employers and co-workers tend to overlook the fact that employees with disabilities also need to financially support themselves and their families. In a community where unemployment is generally high for the able bodied, employees with disabilities stand a high chance of facing negative attitudes in the work place (Blanck, 1998; Zorocosters, 2005; Perry, 2002).

Basic accommodation is a challenge for PWDS face in the workplace. There are almost always very basic and inexpensive ones, yet some employers continue to believe the accommodations a person with disabilities needs are expensive. Basic things such as an accessible desk or chair, a clear path to the place where a person will work, or other minor workplace environment changes that are inexpensive accommodations can find an employer with a dedicated employee with a disability (Radut, 2014).

## **11. HOW PWDS ARE TREATED AS EQUAL PARTIES IN EMPLOYMENT SECTOR.**

Employment is a human rights issue so PWDS have to be treated as equal parties with those without disabilities. There are three main models of employment of persons with disabilities implemented throughout the world. These include the sheltered employment, supported employment and customised employment. A useful distinction is where people with disabilities work in segregated environments of only workers with disabilities compared with an integrated environment of workers largely without disabilities. Notably Article 27 of the UN Conventions on the Rights of persons with disabilities emphasises "the right to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities" (United Nations 2006, Article 27(1)). Another distinction is between models that can pay and do not pay a competitive wage (Kregel and Dean, 2001).

In sheltered employment model, persons with disabilities work together in a segregated setting and are trained and supervised by persons without disabilities. The work places are usually set up as assembly-line workshop in which individuals work on assigned contracts. They get paid on jobs completed. Chimedza and Sithole (2000) suggested that this model of employment encourage segregation of people with disabilities from other employees in the community, work is brought to them and contracts are not always available. This model assumes that persons with disabilities are less productive than workers without disabilities and are often paid a wage that is a fraction of wages given to other workers, sometimes called “subminimum wage. Theoretically, PWDs are supposed to advance their productivity until they move out of segregated environment that pays a competitive wage. Thus the earlier the PWD moves out of this setting the better for his or her economic empowerment. Since a lower wage is paid in the setting, it encourages dependence on cash benefits and programs and it isolates the PWDs from the community. It also lowers employment expectancy and enhances negative public attitudes making it more difficult for persons with to obtain meaningful employment (Blanck et al 2003; Kregel and Dean, 2002; Chimedza and Sithole, 2000; Hunt and Marshal, 1994).

Supported Employment is an integrated model of employment in which workers with disabilities are assisted throughout the employment process. A job coach may assist the individual to find a job, train for the job and maintain the employment through individual supports and accommodation. This type of employment upholds the principles of rehabilitation and rehabilitation of PWDs. The model aims to place persons with disabilities in jobs that earn competitive wages. The model is grounded on the concept of self –determination. It is based on core values which emphasize the right to work, capacity to perform a job; individual strengths, personal goals and choices and the role of the community in the persons growth and development. This type of employment of PWDs requires the intervention of donors and or individual sponsors. These people are not readily available especially in Zimbabwe (Parent, 2004, Wehman et al, 2003).

Customised Employment refers to the employment relationship between the employees with disabilities and employers. It is based on an individualised determination of the strengths, needs, and interest of the person with disability. It may include employment developed through job craving, self-employment or interpersonal initiations or other job development or restructuring strategies to fit the needs of individuals with disabilities .Customised employment assumes the provision of the reasonable accommodation and support necessary for the individual to perform functions of the job (Office of the Disability Employment, 2000; Gott et al, 2001).

Customized employment is a ‘person centred’ approach to employment; it begins with the person’s needs, aspirations, talents and skills which serve as a basis for contacting potential employers. In the United States this model is employed in One-Stop-Delivery System in which workforce investment education and other human services programs collaborate to enhance access to services and long term employment outcomes (United States Department of Labour 1999). In this model of employment, jobs are negotiated so that they best fit the individual, while individuals are placed in individual settings and receive supports that match their individual disabilities. The researcher feels that customized employment helps individuals to make friends with individuals without disabilities. The model also promotes integration and normalization of persons with disabilities and establishes a culture of acceptance among all employees (Inge, 2008; Blanck et al, 2008).

## **12. HABILITATION/REHABILITATION**

PWDs can be treated as equal parties through the processes of habilitation or rehabilitation .The process involved skills training and acquisition when the natural means of acquiring these skills were not present from birth or were lost along the way in life. It is, therefore, essential for PWDs as it promotes self- reliance, economic dependence and access to equal opportunities in life. Both habilitation and rehabilitation serve the purpose of impacting and restoration of relevant vocational skills required by PWDs to participate fully in the community. Vocational rehabilitation is a preparation for work and placing PWDs in suitable jobs. The Government and private institutions may recruit PWDs and impart vocational skills to them, but they will also need to be placed into jobs for vocational rehabilitation to be complete. The training can be conducted



within the community or at external institutions. CBR programmes would however, be looking at them being employed like other people, within their local community. Very often, prospective employers are suspicious or uninformed about the capability of a person with disability, to perform productively on a job, hence, they opt to play it safe and exclude such a person without even trying him or her. This is discriminatory and can call for legal intervention (Mapande, 1986; Chakuchichi and Mutamiswa, 2004).

Introducing PWDs into the workplace and allowing them to both meet and work with experienced employees can not only help them feel welcome; it presents them with the potential to learn from experienced employees. Employers need to find ways to permit workers with disabilities to transition comfortably into working environments. Part-time or casual positions at a company or organization can assist workers with disabilities to find the accommodations they need and adapt to their working environments. These types of positions also help employers to learn about workers with disabilities and the challenges they face as individuals. Temporary and short-term job positions give employers the chance to learn about the extent to which disabilities affect a worker's productivity on a daily basis. The positions present ways for workers with disabilities to build experience in the workplace while demonstrating their skills and abilities to employers at the same time.

Hiring PWDs can help employers to overcome the challenges related to finding skilled workers. Through hiring them, employers have the ability to access a population of employees who many times remain unrecognized. There are a large number of highly-talented workers with disabilities in all sectors who have very strong skills and abilities. Workers with disabilities are often undiscovered due to an imbalanced focus on the barriers they face instead of work capabilities. Some employers still do not recognize workers with disabilities for their skills and abilities; instead they view their challenges as a huge mistake (Radunt, 2014).

Managers, supervisors and co-workers need to be sensitised to disability issues to facilitate change in attitudes towards employees with disabilities. This may be the first step in improving the employment rate and working conclusions of persons with disabilities in the community.

### **13. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Sub Problem 1: What legislations are available for the workers with disabilities?**

Participants were asked if there were any laws on the employment of PWDs. Most participants were of the view that these laws did not exist. However, a few participants were aware of the existence of the Disabled Persons Act which emphasised the need to avoid discrimination in employment and at the work place on grounds of one's disability. However, according to literature at hand, the Disabled Persons Act (Chapter 17:01) is not a human rights document in that it does not confer any rights to PWDs or confer any obligations on the state. This is because the law still uses pejorative terms that disempower rather empower PWDs. Terms like 'imbecile,' 'mentally disordered,' 'intellectually handicapped' and 'mental patients' demean, degrade, belittle, stigmatise and devalue PWDs (Mandipa, 2014).

The participants indicated lack of clarity in the existing labour laws in Zimbabwe as regards the employment of PWDs. Non specific aspects of the labour act relate to the employment of PWDs. This therefore, made the participants to perceive the existing labour act as not being effective on the employment of PWDs. Most of these findings seem to concur with those in other studies, for example, that employment policies rarely aimed to place PWDs in competitive employment positions (Blanck 2001, Obermann, 1980; Gott et al, 2001).

#### **Sub Problem 2: How are employees with disabilities treated in the work places?**

When asked whether there were PDWs employed in their company, there were mixed responses from the participants. Only a few participants acknowledged the existence of the PWDs in their workplaces. The reason attributed to this could have been that some of the disabilities went unnoticed as these were not mostly physical. Those that could be identified were those with mild disabilities such as those hard of hearing and those with low vision. However, this is contrary to some findings that have established that employing PWDs brings some benefits to the business,

such as enhancing their organization's public image and promoting diversity in the workplace (Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2000).

On what positions were held by PWDs, the participants indicated that most PWDs do not hold positions of power especially those that have physical or visible disabilities. Those with low vision, however, have been seen to be holding leadership positions. Most of those in leadership positions were seen to be putting on spectacles, an indication that they had low vision. On the other hand, the majority of those with severe disabilities were mostly seen occupying jobs in the lower ranks which include cleaners, grounds men and general hands.

Asked what special services were there to cater for PWDs, it appears most workplaces did not have these. Where there were wheelchair users, there were no ramps. Some workers with low vision were not afforded the opportunity of being given written material with large print. Similarly studies have shown that there is neglect of social and economic needs for PWDs causing them to face discrimination in accessing employment (Lunt and Thornton, 2008; Blanck, 2009; Blanck, 2009; Shapiro, 1994; Myhill and Blanck, 2009). Employees with disabilities do not get promoted to a higher grade.

### **Sub Problem 3: What is the attitude of employers and co-workers towards PWDs?**

Participants were asked if they would want to work with PWDs. Some participants did not want to have co-workers with disabilities. Asked the reasons, some female participants perceived disabilities as being contagious. This being the case, the worker with disabilities would be isolated and be excluded from some duties. In some instances, they were patronised to the extent of being over protected because they were regarded as fragile. Some employers were of the opinion that PWDs were not as competent as those without disabilities; hence they felt not obliged to employ them. This finding concurs with Peck and Kirkbride and Smart (2001) who noted that employers fear that employees with disabilities would not perform to full capacity.

On how competent PWDs were at their work place, most participants held different views. According to some, competence depended on the severity of the disability. A few participants indicated that PWDs were generally incompetent and would need the assistance of fellow workers to accomplish tasks. This concurs with Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, (2000) who noted that PWDs suffer a lot of deliberate and sometimes inadvertent discrimination from the governments and the various units of their society, such as employers, schools and even hospitals. Their plight therefore, needs to be addressed.

Employers were asked how they viewed workers with disabilities. Prevalent among the responses were the view that some of these PWDS scared away customers while some were dependent on fellow workers for the accomplishment of tasks. Some viewed the PWDS as being ignorant and having poor time management. All these then resulted in the PWDS being less productive. This was considered as negative attitudes by Shapiro (1994).

### **Sub Problem 4: What are the challenges faced in the employment of PWDs?**

There was a general belief among the employers that most PWDS lacked knowledge and poor qualifications rendering them unemployable. Participants indicated that co-workers had negative attitudes towards PWDs. Employer participants indicated that owing to the severity of disabilities, some PWDs could not be employed in their organisations. On the other hand, PWDs indicated that lack of policies and laws hindered their employment. They also indicated that there was lack of assistive devices in most places of work. Some participants indicated that there were unfriendly environments in the majority of the work places. Participating employers indicated that the provision of assistive devices came with an extra cost; hence they could do without the PWDs. Employees with disabilities on the other hand expressed their opinions by stating that co-workers and employers did not recognise them in the work environment. They stated that they were left out in many activities in the work place, such as workshops and seminars that has to do with employee or staff development. They responded that they were looked down upon and made to perform tasks beyond their abilities. They wished employers and co-workers could understand their plea and establish the spirit of co-operation and acceptance. Co-workers responded to this question by stating that employees with disabilities failed to perform like the other employees, they were often excused from work for check ups by the doctors and given many days off duty.

## **The Attitudes of Employers and Co-Workers Towards the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Zimbabwe**

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Co-workers expressed discomfort that they experienced burnout as employees with disabilities are excused at their expense. Some co-workers expressed that employees with disabilities needed maximum supervision or be assigned special tasks suitable to their conditions.

Notable among other challenges, as provided by other participants, were the following:

- Lack of good health;
- Lack of qualification;
- Unfriendly environments;
- Negative attitudes; and
- Unreliable attendance.

The findings concur with those in other studies where employers indicated that ill-health often warrants periods off duty to allow recovery. Absence from duty was viewed negatively by the able “bodied” co-workers who voiced unfair pressure of work (Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2000).

### **Sub Problem 4: How PWDs can be treated as equal parties in employment sector**

There was general consensus among the participants that there was need to have laws and policies in place which could guide in the employment of PWDs. This is besides the fact that there is the Disabled Persons Act which emphasises the need to avoid discrimination in employment and at the work place on grounds of one’s disability but it has been criticised for its use of pejorative terms that disempower rather empower PWDs (Mandipa, 2014). PWDs also advocated for attitudinal change among the co-workers and employers. The participants were also in agreement that there was need for resource mobilisation so that all the necessary infrastructure and equipment could be made available to assist the PWDs. The employers were also of the opinion that there was need for PWDs to improve their educational qualifications so that they could compete with their counterparts at the workplace. Some participants also felt that there was need to have workshops for all at the workplace so that they could manage to communicate with PWDs. Some suggested that where there were people with hearing impairments in the workplace, there was need for workshops on sign language. Where there were people with visual impairment, there was need for other facilities to be availed. These facilities could include large print and Braille.

Participants were also of the view that managers, supervisors and co-workers be sensitised to disability issues to facilitate change in attitudes towards employees with disabilities. This may be the first step in improving the employment rate and working conditions of persons with disabilities in the community. Furthermore, some suggestions seemed to indicate that architectures in the community need to be encouraged by the Ministry of Construction to design infrastructure that is user friendly to employees with disabilities, for instance, designing buildings with ramps instead of steps to allow easy access.

## **14. CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the above findings, the present study concluded that:

- No laws exist on the employment of PWDs despite there being the Disabled Persons Act which emphasised the need to avoid discrimination in employment and at the work place on grounds of one’s disability.
- There is lack of clarity in the existing labour laws in Zimbabwe as regards the employment of PWDs.
- Only a few PWDs are being employed in workplaces and this is attributed to the fact that some of the disabilities go unnoticed as these were not mostly physical.
- Most PWDs do not hold positions of power especially those that have physical or visible disabilities.

- Most workplaces do not have special services to cater for PWDs
- Female co-workers do not want to have co-workers with disabilities as they perceive disabilities as being contagious.
- Co-workers perceived PWDs as generally incompetent as they would need the assistance of fellow workers to accomplish tasks.
- Employers are of the view that some of these PWDS scare away customers while some are dependent on fellow workers for the accomplishment of tasks.
- Employers perceive most PWDS as lacking knowledge and having poor qualifications rendering them unemployable.
- Employers view the provision of assistive devices as coming with an extra cost; hence they can do without the PWDs.
- Co-workers feel that employees with disabilities need maximum supervision and need to be assigned special tasks suitable to their conditions.

## **15. RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the above conclusions, the study made the following recommendations:

- There should be laws on the employment of PWDs despite there being the Disabled Persons Act
- There is need for clarity in the existing labour laws in Zimbabwe as regards the employment of PWDs.
- More PWDs should be employed in workplaces
- More PWDs should be made to hold positions of power
- All the workplaces should have special services to cater for PWDs
- There is need for change in attitude among female co-workers who should be made to want to have co-workers with disabilities.
- There is need for change in attitudes among employers who are of the view that some of these PWDS scare away customers while some are dependent on fellow workers for the accomplishment of tasks.
- PWDS should receive staff development and in-service courses to upgrade their current educational levels so that they become employable.
- Employers make provision for assistive devices despite these coming with an extra cost; hence they can do without the PWDs.
- Co-workers need to change their attitude towards employees with disabilities despite feeling that they need maximum supervision and be assigned special tasks suitable to their conditions.
- The Ministry of labour need to establish incentive packages for companies that employ persons with disabilities to encourage employment of more persons with disabilities. Such incentive packages can be in the form of exemption of tax payment by such companies.
- The Ministry can implement such programmes like the quota system and the levy and grants system like what happens in the developed countries. The same Ministry can also strengthen and activate laws that will act against discrimination and marginalisation of person with disabilities.
- Advocacy through disability movements be encouraged by all sectors of the economy. This will encourage implementation of reforms instituted by the responsible ministry or ministries.

- Architectures in the community need to be encourage by the Ministry of Construction to design infrastructures that is user friendly to employees with disabilities. For instance, designing buildings with rumps instead of steps to allow easy access.

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