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## Employment Experiences of Persons with Disability in Calbayog City, Samar, Philippines

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### Abstract

**Aim:** This study was conducted to determine the employment experiences of persons with disability relative to their working conditions. Moreover, it also intended to acquire a deep understanding of the aspirations of persons with disability towards their work.

**Methodology:** In understanding the employment experiences of persons with disability in Calbayog City, Samar, this study used a transcendental phenomenological approach. Analysis was made on the employment experiences of fifteen (15) individuals who met the description of the participants being a person with disability, currently employed, a resident of Calbayog City, Samar, and willing to participate in the study. The gathering of data was conducted through an interview including the recording of the conversations on participants who are related to the phenomenon. The data generated from the interviews conducted were subjected to a thematic analysis method of analyzing qualitative data applied to a set of texts, such as an interview or transcripts wherein the researcher closely examined the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. In addition, the researcher also adapted the following process in inductive thematic analysis, namely: Familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining themes, and finalizing the analysis. Finally, the researcher synthesized all of the statements regarding each participant's experience into one consistent statement that describes and captures the essence of the experience being studied.

**Results:** Three themes resulted in exploring the employment experiences of PWDs: flexible work schedule, permanent status of employment, and increase in salary.

**Conclusion:** The unending problems encountered by PWDs concerning their employment is a serious matter that requires important thought. Despite the universal declaration of human rights protecting PWDs, supplemented by the various laws enacted by the Philippine government, still PWD employment problems continue to persist. This study gives us a clear picture of the conditions and problems encountered by PWDs in Calbayog City, Samar, in their employment, with their rights of employment not properly recognized by employers depriving them of what is lawfully due to them, constituting serious disregard of the existing laws.

**Keywords:** *Magna Carta, Disability, Experiences, Rights, Employment*

### INTRODUCTION

The right to existence includes a person's civil and political rights, right to life, liberty, free speech, privacy, economic, social, and cultural rights, and right to social security, health, and education. Among these different human rights, the economic right has considerable proximity to the right of existence. Securing the right of persons with disabilities to social protection, such must be a priority for States and the international community. Inclusive social protection systems, including social protection floors, can contribute significantly to supporting the social participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities by ensuring income security and access to social services. They can also play an important role in fostering the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals for persons with disabilities (ILO & IDA, 2019).

Accordingly, majority of countries with available data, persons with disabilities earn less per month than those without, which has direct implications for their purchasing power and living standards. Although the earning

140



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gap may be because many persons with disabilities work part-time, their lower monthly earnings limit their ability to consume and put them at a higher risk of falling into poverty (Stoevska, 2022).

On the other hand, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that Labor markets across OECD countries do not give the same opportunities to everyone, and people with disability in particular face considerable barriers to labor market participation. This is reflected in low employment rates of people with disability despite considerable shares of them receiving social benefits, and a high risk of living in a low-income household. Considerable policy efforts in the past 15 years have not succeeded in closing the disability employment and poverty gaps (OECD iLibrary, 2023).

Considering the theoretical framework on disability, among the best known is the social model of disability which posits that disability is constructed by society and is caused by the way society is organized. The society is made by and for non-disabled people and anyone who cannot fit into that model is disabled. The social model emphasizes the fact that full societal participation has little to do with the abilities of a person who is disabled, but the societal constructs that prohibit them from inclusion (Illinois Library 2020). The social model of disability fits the current study since both identify the existence of inequities abled and disabled individuals experience due to social constructs prohibiting PWDs from social inclusion. Another is the medical model which locates the problem of disability with an individual's abnormality and functional limitations. However, the social model switches attention to the social organization asserting that disability arises because society is not shaped to include people with impairments and provide them with the opportunity to choose their futures (Clifton, 2020). This model also supports the claim of herein study wherein disability is also identified as an individual's functional limitations. Moreover, the social model of disability provides a significant nexus to the current study's objectives which are intended to explore and understand the employment experiences of PWDs. Further, the use of qualitative phenomenological research design will lead to an in-depth understanding of their employment experiences, while the findings of this study could help enhance strict observance of PWDs' employment rights and benefits to achieve full social participation and eliminate PWDs' prohibition from social inclusion.

In addition, the independent living model of disability provides that people with disabilities work for self-determination, equal opportunities, and self-respect. Independent Living does not mean that the disabled do everything and do not need anybody or want to live in isolation. Independent living means the demand for the same choices and control in the everyday lives that non-disabled brothers and sisters, neighbors, and friends take for granted (Mladenov, 2022). Like the independent living model of disability, the current study also promotes self-determination, wherein PWDs can acquire a better future free from any deprivation of their right to employment.

In the Philippines, unemployment is a problem for the general population and the community of persons with disabilities is not exempted from this. In fact, according to the International Labor Organization, the unemployment rate for persons with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region is usually double that of the general population and often exceeds 80 percent. We have laws in place, the Republic Act 7277 (Magna Carta for Disabled Persons) and Republic Act 10524, that require that at least one percent of all positions throughout all government agencies, offices, or corporations shall be reserved for persons with disabilities. Private corporations with more than 100 employees are also encouraged to reserve at least one percent of all positions for persons with disabilities. Many local governments and private corporations still do not comply with these laws (Ambiong, 2021).

The rights of PWD are, in fact, fundamental and inalienable human rights. But because of prevailing cultural viewpoints on disability, especially where the indisposition relates to behavior and/or learning ability, PWDs have been largely kept at home, their exact numbers unclear, unmindful of their rights and of the fact that they can be active members of the community (Pimentel, 2020). Further, there is a very limited relationship between the type of disabilities and the categories of white-collar, blue-collar, and pink-collar. The barriers to this include the lack of awareness of the managers, the inclusivity policy of the institutions, the incompetency amongst PWDs, the relatively high employment cost, and the loss of productivity. Potential solutions are financial support and subsidies, capability building, enhancement of the partnership between the industry and government sectors, and improvement of the existing non-discrimination laws (Sampana & Dela Cruz, 2020).

On the contrary, a study revealed that Human Resource Management practices in the employment of Persons with Disabilities among selected Non-Government Organizations in the Philippines offered wide employment opportunities for PWDs. They were compensated equally based on the nature and accomplishments of their work. Hence, they were selected and recruited based on their potential and skills while emphasizing the prevailing policies on inclusivity and equal work opportunities (Cruz, 2023).

Moreover, it was also provided that in the BPO industry, Differently Abled Persons (DAPs) are treated no differently from other applicants. They undergo the same process as any other applicants. The Recruitment Manager



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of Company B shared that "as long as the employee is capable of taking in calls, use the keyboard and are able, then we give them the opportunity." Once these DAPs are hired, the BPOs want them to feel that they are like regular employees. They do not receive any special treatment like the schedule of work or even special workstations. The BPOs do not label them as DAPs, which could also be why when the HR Managers were asked about the number of DAPs in their company, they gave the researcher the number they could best recall. The BPO industry does not discriminate, and hiring DAPs is more of a Corporate Social Responsibility (Molina, 2022).

However, PWDs continue to belong to the most vulnerable populations. Despite increasing calls for inclusivity, they still face several health and financial challenges. To make matters worse, most of them are poor, finished lower levels of education, and face discrimination and difficulty finding employment. The global health crisis has placed them in an even more precarious situation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they were left unprotected from COVID-19-related health issues on top of trying to provide for their needs. This demonstrated that implementation of policies remains a problem and the impact has yet to be seen. There is a tendency for these policies and advisories to overgeneralize PWDs. It is important to recognize the heterogeneity of PWDs to better account for their specific needs. Moreover, there is not enough focus on adequate implementation and evaluation of existing policies and programs. It is important to identify existing gaps and barriers to address these shortcomings and to be able to cover as many PWDs as possible (Velasco et al., 2021).

The seemingly overlooked and limited research conducted on the rights of PWDs, especially among local government units despite the existence of laws intended for their protection became an important area of study because of their unique experiences considering their different situation and preferences. By examining their employment experiences and applying phenomenological study, this paper aims to explore and deepen our understanding of the employment experiences of PWDs relative to their working conditions and work aspirations.

This study was conducted to determine the employment experiences of persons with disability relative to their working conditions. Moreover, this study was also intended to acquire a deep understanding of the aspirations of persons with disability towards their work.

## Objectives

The main objective of this qualitative study is to understand and explore the experiences of persons with disability in terms of their employment. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How work preferences were described by PWDs in their work?
2. How challenges in workplaces were faced by PWDs?
3. What are the goals of PWDs relative to their employment?

## METHODS

### Research Design

To understand and explore the employment experiences of PWDs, the transcendental phenomenological approach was used in this study. Transcendental phenomenology, largely developed by Husserl, is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology seeking to understand human experience. For Husserl, the phenomenological method is necessarily connected to the fundamental idea of transcendental philosophy that all objects are in principle accessible to consciousness (Moustakas, 1990; Marinay, n.d.). This study focused on exploring the employment experiences of PWDs, in Calbayog City, Samar. Thorough interviews were conducted with the participants to gather in-depth insights into their employment experiences. The different experiences identified from interviews were transcribed and clusters of meaning were analyzed to properly identify the central themes of participants' experiences.

### Population and Sampling

The participants of this study were selected by applying purposive sampling. In this sampling method, the researcher selects sampling units based on his or her judgment of what units will facilitate an investigation (Adler & Clark, 2008; Frost, 2023). Said participants chosen were PWD residents of Calbayog City, Samar. The invitation to participate was done through an initial meeting. The individual participants meet the description necessary for the study, being a person with disability, currently employed, a resident of Calbayog City, Samar, and willing to participate in the study.

The PWDs who met the criteria to participate were asked to read and understand the contents of the consent form and asked to attach their signature signifying the voluntariness of their participation. Further, face-to-



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face interviews were conducted in their preferred convenient and comfortable private venue, with fifteen (15) PWDs who voluntarily participated in this study.

### Instrumentation

The researcher made use of triangulation to test the validity of the information. The Interview guide utilized in this study is composed of three central questions that probe PWD's employment experiences as stated in the objectives of the study. Moreover, Interview questions were developed from the researcher's early meeting and interview with the participants, including the existing laws that were intended to protect the rights of PWDs. The interview was semi-structured allowing for more flexibility in the conversation and ensuring that key topics were being covered and with open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses of the participant's experiences.

### Data Collection

In the gathering of data, this study conducted interviews to gain a deep understanding of the employment experiences of PWDs in Calbayog City, Samar. Interviews were made, including the recording of the conversations with participants who are related to the phenomenon. The interview content was validated by experts. Further, the researcher provided an agreement with informed consent, confidentiality, time and place, commitments, and permit to record, and explained the research ethical principles. For the data storing methods, the researcher used note-taking and dialogic form interviews.

### Data Analysis

The data generated from the interviews conducted were subjected to a thematic analysis method of analyzing qualitative data applied to a set of texts, such as an interview or transcripts wherein the researcher closely examined the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly. To properly identify and analyze themes, the researcher applied Inductive Thematic Analysis. Inductive thematic analysis, also known as bottom-up or data-driven thematic analysis, is rooted in the principles of grounded theory and explores patterns and themes that emerge directly from the data. The following are the steps in inductive thematic analysis; Familiarization with the data, researchers immerse themselves in the data through repeated readings, noting initial impressions, and identifying potential patterns or themes; Generating initial codes, researchers assign labels or codes to meaningful segments of data, capturing different aspects of the content. Codes are often descriptive and derived directly from the data; Searching for themes, researchers review the codes and group them into potential themes based on shared meanings, patterns, or relationships. Themes are developed iteratively through constant comparison and refinement; Reviewing and defining themes, researchers critically examine the identified themes, refining and defining their boundaries and characteristics. They consider the coherence and relevance of each theme to the research question or objectives; Finalizing the analysis, researchers document the themes and their definitions, provide illustrative examples, and write a comprehensive narrative that captures the essence of the data (Rashid 2023). Finally, the researcher synthesizes all of the statements into one consistent statement that describes and captures the essence of the employment experiences of PWDs in Calbayog City, Samar.

### Ethical Consideration

For the entire research process, ethical norms were appropriately observed to protect the rights, privacy, and security of the participants. To strictly adhere to ethical considerations, the researcher observed the following; Voluntary participation, individuals should at no point feel any coercion to participate in a study which includes any type of persuasion or deception in attempting to gain an individual's trust; Informed consent, individuals must give their explicit consent to participate in the study; Confidentiality, the information supplied by research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected; Potential for harm, doing everything to protect the participants in the study, including the risk-to-benefit ratio, and if the risks outweigh the benefits, the study should be abandoned or redesigned; results communication, the obligation of investigators to clearly and fully communicate the results and their meaning to participants, particularly those with uncertain findings (Enago Academy, 2023). Moreover, to manage potential ethical dilemmas, the researcher strictly adhered to the ethical standards in the conduct of the research. Lastly, to provide transparency and credibility, the researcher included the necessary audit trail identifying the progress of the study which started from identifying the topic, including the research gap, how to conduct the research and the needed steps, formulation of interview guides, as well as establishing a research plan, goal, scope, timeline, and dependencies. This research was conducted during the year 2023.



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## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

From the following questions: How work preferences were described by PWDs in their work? How challenges in workplaces were faced by PWDs? What are the goals of PWDs relative to their employment? From the analyses of data, three themes resulted, these are flexible work schedule, permanent status of employment, and increase in salary.

The first theme concerns flexible work schedules. The majority of the Participants believed that flexible work schedules such as working from home would reduce the difficulties relative to their daily work routine, including difficulties in competing to ride public transport with able-bodied workers in coming through and forth home and workplaces, especially during the rush hours. In addition, most of the participants hope that a flexible work schedule will also reduce their struggle due to the lack of facilities for PWDs in some of their workplaces.

The following statements were provided by the participants:

1. Malipayon kami kon matutuman. Dako nga bulig sa kada adlaw nga amon kakurian. "Happy if granted. It will be a big help to our daily hardships."
2. Naglalaum ako nga pamatian kami san amon gintrabahuan. "I hope that employers will listen to us."
3. Mas makakaupay sa amon ngan para liwat mas damo an amon matrabaho "It will be good for us and for more output"
4. Maiibanan amon kuri labi na sa mga oras nga damo an tawo sa kalsada tisulod ngan tiuli tikang sa trabaho "It will reduce difficulties brought by the rush hour."
5. Mas makakatutok kami sa amon trabaho "We can focus more on work"

A similar study conducted by Bosua and Gloet (2020), provides that people with disabilities face unique challenges accessing and participating in work. From a digital inclusion perspective, an uptake of anywhere working arrangements may hold significant promise for people with disabilities. However, the barriers encountered by disabled workers seeking access to flexible working arrangements include management attitudes, physical and infrastructure problems, social isolation misconceptions, insufficient flexible work opportunities, inadequate management knowledge of IT support and reasonable adjustment for people with disabilities, cultural intolerance towards diversity and disability in general, as well as lack of policies and processes that create a supportive environment for people with disabilities who wish to engage in flexible working arrangements. This study is relevant to the current study since both focused on the concerns of PWDs in their workplaces.

The second theme, the permanent status of employment requires urgent consideration. PWDs feel that they are less given the opportunity to have permanent status of employment. In general, PWDs are complaining about the temporary nature of their employment resulting in unstable livelihood and uncertain future.

This was illustrated by the following statements of the participants:

1. Damo na akon gintrabahuan. Waray pa ka permanente dara san akon deperensya. "I already work for different institutions. I never became permanent due to my disability."
2. Kon mapermanente ak sa akon trabaho, mas maupay akon kabubuwason. "Permanent status will bring me a bright future."
3. Mas sigurado an akon pangabuhin sa bug-os ko nga kinabuhin. "It will assure me of a livelihood for a lifetime."
4. Dako nga bulig sa pangabuhin san akon pamilya. "A great help to my family's finances."

In the study of Shahidi et al. (2023), it was found that due to the numerous barriers they are known to face in the labor market, persons with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to the threat of precarious employment. A lack of overall employment opportunities could, for instance, place undue pressure on persons with disabilities to accept any available job even a low-quality job. Both studies were similar, while Shahidi cited barriers to the employment of PWDs making them vulnerable to the threats of precarious employment, the current study looked at the disparities in the employment experiences of PWDs.

The third theme, salary increase revealed the economic conditions of PWDs and the problem of insufficient income from their employment.

This was illustrated by the following statements of the participants:



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1. Naglalaum ak nga unta mag umento amon sweldo. "Looking forward for increase in our salary."
2. Dako nga bulig kon mg umento amon sweldo para makapalit kami san amon kinahanglan.  
"Increased salary will help us provide our needs."
3. Mabubuligan namon an panginahanlan sin kwarta san amon pamilya. "We can help the financial needs of our family."
4. Di na ak mangangaro sa akon pamilya, Makapalit ak san akon kinahanglan. "We can provide our own needs without asking from our family."

Similarly, Golden (2020) revealed that the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits a covered entity from discriminating against a qualified individual based on disability regarding employee compensation or other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. Yet some researchers have found that 30 years after the law's passage, pay gaps persist for individuals with disabilities. This current study also provides that despite of the laws passed in the Philippines protecting PWDs' right to employment, still, employment opportunities among PWDs are still very limited.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The persisting employment problems encountered by PWDs about their employment as a result of this study is a serious matter that requires important consideration. Despite the universal declaration of human rights protecting PWDs, supplemented by the various laws enacted by the Philippine government, as well as local ordinances, still PWDs employment problems continue to persist leading to discrimination and deprivation of their rights to employment with equal remuneration and benefits as able-bodied employees as accorded by law. The outcome of this study can be a good measure for policy redirection that will help enhance strict observance of PWDs' employment rights and benefits, leading to improved employment experiences among PWDs. Moreover, this study gives a clear picture of the conditions and problems encountered by PWDs in Calbayog City, Samar, in their employment, with their rights of employment not properly recognized by employers depriving them of what is lawfully due to them, constituting serious disregard of the existing laws.

It is recommended that the government should give urgent consideration to the negative employment experiences of PWDs, enact, revise, or amend existing laws on PWD rights, and above all provide for its stricter implementation. A sound financial condition will make PWDs self-reliant, active citizens, and effective partners of the government towards national development. Further studies with a more in-depth focus on other related PWD experiences, especially within the local government units are recommended.

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