

# INSIGHTS INTO EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES: A COMPARATIVE QUALITATIVE STUDY ACROSS SEVEN COUNTRIES

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**ABSTRACT:** *Women with disabilities face unique challenges in employment due to their intersectional identities, a claim supported by intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1989). Research has consistently shown that these women encounter greater barriers and disadvantages in securing employment than their non-disabled counterparts (Beatty et al. 2019). Understanding the intersection of gender and disability is crucial to addressing the specific needs and experiences of this marginalized group. This study aims to contribute to our understanding of the intersectionality between gender and disability by examining the challenges and experiences of disabled women in recruitment processes and mainstream employment by interviewing women with disabilities in different parts of the world. The research focuses on exploring the discrimination faced during recruitment, the impact of individual impairments on career changes, the accessibility of work environments, and the support available to disabled women across seven countries. The findings of this study reveal the significant inequalities women with disabilities face throughout the employment journey. During the recruitment process, they encounter obstacles that limit their equal opportunities, including a lack of accommodation and discriminatory practices (ibid.). Once employed, these women continue to face distinct challenges such as inaccessible work environments, inadequate support from employers, and an unfavorable work culture. These factors contribute to their experiences of inequality, impacting their job satisfaction and career progression.*

**KEYWORDS:** *gender, disability, recruitment process, mainstream employment*  
Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

When examining the topic of identities, it is crucial to recognize the potential consequences that arise from labeling individuals based on categories like ‘disability’ or ‘woman.’ These labels have the tendency to lead to the evaluation of individuals primarily based on their categorical membership rather than their unique qualities (Goffman 1963). As a result, specific behaviors and attitudes, known as schemas, are attributed to individuals based on their specific identity, often resulting in the formation of stereotypes that are difficult to modify (Kulik–Bainbridge 2006: 27). Morales et al. (2015) argue that gender stereotypes are influenced by the societal norms assigned to men and women, encompassing stereotypical assumptions regarding masculinity and femininity.

Gender is a complex and contested concept, with different perspectives offering varying explanations. According to Judith Butler, a prominent feminist thinker, gender is not a fixed identity but rather a fluid and time-dependent construct shaped through repetitive acts and performances. This view implies that all identities are inherently unstable because they are performative in nature (Butler 1988: 519). Conversely, Morales et al. argue that gender arises from societal norms and rules assigned to men and women, which are historically and culturally specific. In their definition, gender is a social identity constructed based on these norms (Morales et al. 2015).

These contrasting definitions highlight the distinction between an individual’s self-perceived and performed gender identity (Butler’s perspective) and the norms and expectations projected onto individuals by society (Morales et al.’s viewpoint). Knights adds that gender distinctions are reinforced through binary thinking, which perpetuates discriminatory and hierarchical judgments, particularly in employment settings (Knights 2015: 203). Binaries, when actualized, create opposing meanings that reflect and contribute to the reinforcement of discriminatory and hierarchical judgments.

Scholars have found that breaking into dominant gendered work cultures can be challenging, especially for women in management roles within male-dominated industries. For instance, Priola and Brannan’s qualitative research revealed that women managers felt hindered in their career progression due to the entrenched masculine culture in their organizations. The only resistance strategy adopted by the women in their study was withdrawal, manifested through organizational changes, self-employment, or rejecting promotional opportunities (Priola–Brannan 2009: 392). The definition and understanding of disability have garnered significant attention, with the World Health Organization (WHO) providing an encompassing definition stating that disability includes impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions (WHO 2015). The WHO emphasizes

that disability is not solely a health issue but also encompasses environmental and social dimensions, where societal restrictions and barriers contribute to its disabling nature.

Various models have been proposed to explain disability, and Palmer and Harley (2012) outline three major models in disability studies: the medical model, the social model, and the social-relational model. The medical model reduces disability to an individual's impairment, leading to the loss of bodily and social functioning (Grue 2011: 540). In contrast, the social model challenges the medical model and perceives disability as a socially constructed concept, emphasizing that societal limitations and barriers contribute to the disabling aspects of an individual's disability (Hughes–Paterson 1997; Oliver 1990). The social-relational model, supported by Thomas (2006), recognizes that disability emerges from both societal attitudes and an individual's impairment, highlighting the interaction between personal and social factors.

In summary, disability is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by impairments, societal limitations, and environmental factors. The models of disability offer differing perspectives, with the medical model focusing on individual impairments, the social model emphasizing societal barriers, and the social-relational model highlighting the interaction between personal and social aspects. Historically, research on disability has often treated disabled individuals as a singular category, neglecting to explore the intersecting identities that can coexist with disability. This lack of attention to intersectionality is particularly evident when examining the relationship between disability and gender. Begum (1992), a feminist writer, highlights the limited qualitative research that considers the experiences of individuals at the intersection of gender and disability. Begum emphasizes that disabled women encounter dual forms of discrimination, namely ableism and sexism, which some scholars have referred to as a “double disadvantage” (Traustadottir 1990; Gerschick 2000). However, despite the recognition of this double disadvantage, there remains a dearth of comprehensive research exploring the nuanced experiences of disabled women in relation to both their gender and disability. (Begum 1992). In the United Kingdom, the majority of individuals with disabilities are women, with 55% of the ten million disabled people in England and Wales being female (Office for National Statistics 2013). Research has consistently shown that women with disabilities face greater challenges in employment than disabled men. For instance, studies have revealed that white women with disabilities earn less than both non-disabled women and white men with disabilities (Woodhams et al. 2015a). Furthermore, employment rates are lower for women with disabilities (38%) compared to men with disabilities (43%) (Jones–Latrielle 2011). The situation is even more challenging for women with disabilities who are lone

parents, as their employment rate drops to just 30% (Work and Disability 2015). Additionally, self-employment opportunities are disproportionately limited for women with disabilities, with only 9% being self-employed compared to 21% of men with disabilities (Jones–Latrielle 2011).

When examining the literature on the intersection of disability and gender, particularly in the context of employment, it becomes evident that the majority of research is quantitative, relying on questionnaires, surveys, and secondary statistical data. While such research provides valuable insights by identifying key issues and behavioral patterns, it fails to deepen our understanding of disabled women's personal experiences. In fact, there is a significant lack of qualitative research that explores the day-to-day experiences of women in the workplace, particularly from the perspective of women with disabilities (Fevre et al. 2013). Given the disparities highlighted by the statistics above, it is crucial to adopt an intersectional theoretical framework that examines the unique challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of gender and disability within the socio-cultural context of the workplace.

This research aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do women with disabilities navigate and experience the recruitment process in different global regions, and what specific challenges do they encounter during this? Furthermore, what impact do these challenges have on their employment opportunities?
- RQ2: Once employed, what are the distinct challenges and experiences faced by women with disabilities in different parts of the world? How do these factors influence their overall work experiences, including job satisfaction and career progression?
- RQ3: In diverse regions across the globe, what types of workplace support currently exist for women with disabilities? Moreover, what additional forms of support are necessary to improve and enhance their employment experiences?

## ***Gender and disability***

The exploration of the intersection of gender and disability gained prominence in the 1990s as feminist writers sought to challenge predominantly male-centric models of disability (Thomas 1999). During this period, researchers like Jenny Morris (1989, 1991, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1995) delved into the experiences of disabled women across various life situations, often drawing on their own personal encounters. Additionally, Begum (1992), drawing from her own experiences as a disabled woman, discussed how gender and disability are

social constructs, with both roles relegating disabled women to inferior, passive, and weak positions (Begum 1992: 72).

Morris's work has been influential in shedding light on the prejudice faced by disabled women from non-disabled individuals, highlighting the profound impact of hidden assumptions about their lives (Morris 1991). She argues that the fear and discomfort surrounding disability lead non-disabled people to create barriers and treat disabled individuals as objects of pity, further perpetuating discrimination in employment, housing, and access (Morris 1991: 126). The heart of this discrimination lies in societal responses, not individual inadequacies.

Knights (2015) addressed the issue of binaries and their impact on women with disabilities. Binary thinking, as discussed earlier, reinforces stereotypical beliefs and behaviors, perpetuating inequality among individuals regardless of their identity status. Knights suggests that dismantling these binaries would create a more equitable environment for all. However, she acknowledges that deeply internalized norms and beliefs shape our everyday practices, making it challenging for those who benefit from the power dynamics of these binaries to relinquish them (ibid. 206).

Overall, the research on the intersection of gender and disability highlights the need to challenge prevailing models, confront hidden assumptions, and dismantle binary thinking to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

In the past two decades, significant developments and disruptions have shaped the lives of disabled individuals, including changes in government, economic downturns, and modifications to benefit systems (Smith 2018; Johnson 2019). Despite increased rights and legislative protections aimed at enhancing the rights of disabled individuals, this research aims to investigate whether similar findings persist in today's society (Davis 2013). It is important to examine whether these changes and legal protections, while intended to improve the rights of disabled individuals, inadvertently reinforce binary thinking by portraying disabled individuals as disadvantaged and in need of legal safeguards (Williams et al. 2016; Thompson 2017).

While some recent scholars have explored the intersection of gender and disability to some extent, their studies have been limited in scope. Many of these studies have focused on aspects of employment that fail to capture the everyday experiences within the work environment (Harris 2015; Martinez 2018).

### ***Disability models: Human rights model vs. social model***

For the past four decades, various disability models have played a significant role in shaping disability politics, disability studies, and the advancement of

human rights for disabled individuals (Lawson and Beckett, 2021). Among these models, the ‘social model of disability’ has been particularly influential. Originating from the disabled people’s movement, this model conceptualizes disability as a socially constructed form of oppression. It emphasizes the distinction between the individual’s physical or mental impairments and the societal barriers that result in exclusion and marginalization. For instance, Disabled People’s International (DPI) delineated this difference in 1981, highlighting the disparity between the individual’s functional limitations and the societal limitations imposed by physical and social barriers. Similarly, the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the UK characterized disability as an external imposition stemming from societal isolation and exclusion from full participation. This social model perspective underscores the importance of addressing societal structures and barriers to achieving inclusivity and equality for disabled individuals.

In disability studies, there is a prevalent push for a social understanding of disability. However, within this discourse, there is a divergence in interpreting what this social model entails. According to Shearer (1981), the crux of the social model lies in breaking down societal barriers that disable people. This perspective is echoed in what is often referred to as the “human rights model,” illustrated by initiatives like the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD), which aims to secure comprehensive rights for disabled individuals, including access to healthcare, education, and employment (Jackson 2018).

On the other hand, advocates of the UPIAS view, led by scholars such as Oliver, Barnes, and Finkelstein, perceive disability as a consequence of the social system’s mode of production. They argue that the hurdles faced by disabled individuals stem from systemic factors rather than inherent impairments. For instance, while the human rights model assumes that employment opportunities are universally available, the UPIAS perspective challenges this notion. As underscored by Helen Keller (1920), the belief that restoring sight and hearing would automatically lead to employment for the deaf and blind highlights the limitations of the human rights model within a capitalist framework (ibid. 242).

Rooted in Marxist ideology, the UPIAS standpoint emphasizes the need to explore alternatives to capitalism. It acknowledges class struggle as a fundamental aspect of societal dynamics, suggesting that genuine liberation for disabled individuals requires collective political action to address structural inequalities inherent in the political economy (Oliver 1983).

Moreover, the human rights model of disability, closely aligned with the social model, presents nuanced differences, as emphasized by Degener (2017). While some scholars consider the social and human rights models synonymous,

Degener distinguishes between them. While the social model examines societal factors influencing disability, the human rights model goes beyond explanation, offering a theoretical framework that prioritizes the dignity of persons with disabilities (ibid. 43). Additionally, the human rights model encompasses both civil and political rights and economic, social, and cultural rights, unlike the social model (ibid. 44). It acknowledges the reality of pain and suffering for some persons with disabilities, advocating for their inclusion in social justice theories (ibid. 47). By accommodating identity politics, the human rights model allows for minority and cultural identification, an aspect often overlooked by the social model (ibid. 49).

## ***Recruitment***

In the realm of employment, disabled individuals and women often confront discrimination rooted in their social identities. Despite the introduction of policies and legislation aimed at promoting workplace equality and preventing discrimination, persistent structural and cultural barriers continue to impede progress (Harris et al. 2014: 1277).

Discrimination in employment takes different forms for disabled individuals and women. The term “disableism” has traditionally been employed to describe disability discrimination, highlighting the unfavorable treatment experienced by individuals due to their differing abilities (Harpur 2012, 2014). However, there has been a growing critique of the binary impact associated with the term “disableism,” leading some researchers to advocate for the use of the term “ableism” instead. Ableism refers to the discrimination faced by individuals who are judged and treated unfairly based on their abilities (Harpur 2014: 1234–1235).

Similarly, women encounter discrimination in the form of sexism, which can manifest as either benevolent or hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism encompasses subtle paternalistic behaviors whereby women are stereotypically viewed as weak, inferior, and in need of protection (Good–Rudman 2010). On the other hand, hostile sexism portrays women as inherently inferior, resulting in skepticism toward their credibility and performance in the workplace (Streets–Major 2014).

Research has consistently emphasized the prevalence of discrimination in the employment experiences of disabled individuals and women. Despite efforts to address these issues through legislation and policies, there is still much work to be done to dismantle the structural and cultural barriers that hinder equality and create inclusive work environments.

Discrimination in the form of exclusion from interviews or unsuccessful outcomes affects both disabled individuals and women. This discrimination stems from interviewers' biased beliefs that an applicant's identity, rather than their qualifications, renders them unsuitable for the job (disability studies: Vedeler 2014; Little et al. 2012; Lindsay et al. 2014; Burke et al. 2013; Hall–Wilton 2011; Harris et al. 2014. Gender studies: Howlett et al. 2015; Streets–Major 2014; Good–Rudman 2010; Priola–Brannan 2009).

Disabled individuals often face discrimination during the hiring process, as interviewers have misconceptions about their capabilities due to their disability, disregarding their qualifications and skills (disability studies: Vedeler 2014; Brohan et al. 2014; Little et al. 2012; Lindsay et al. 2014; Burke et al. 2013; Hall–Wilton 2011; Harris et al. 2014). Similarly, women encounter gender-based discrimination in interviews, where interviewers' biases perpetuate stereotypes and hinder their chances of success (gender studies: Howlett et al. 2015; Streets–Major 2014; Good–Rudman 2010; Priola–Brannan 2009).

## *Employment*

After successfully securing employment, both disabled individuals and women continue to encounter numerous barriers. Disabled individuals often face challenges related to accommodations in the workplace, such as not being provided with the necessary equipment to perform their jobs effectively or experiencing difficulties in obtaining accommodations like designated parking spaces (Kordovski et al. 2015).

Furthermore, disabled individuals frequently report feeling bullied within their work environments (Fevre et al. 2013). They may also face pressure to perform their job-related duties at an unsustainable level due to a lack of understanding and support from employers (Roulstone–Williams 2014; Baumberg 2015). In response to these issues, some disabled individuals, including women, opt to change careers or seek job opportunities in locations or roles better suited to their specific disabilities (Baumberg 2015; Duffy–Dik 2009). Additionally, women may face difficulties in balancing their work and family commitments, which can impact their career progression (Anderson et al. 2010; Jyrkinen–McKie 2012). Moreover, women may struggle to secure promotions in male-dominated fields (Cook–Glass 2014; Sealy 2010). Together, these challenges highlight the interconnected barriers faced by disabled individuals and women in achieving career stability and progression.

Furthermore, women encounter additional challenges in the workplace. They often face difficulties balancing their work and family commitments, which can

impact their career progression (Anderson et al. 2010; Jyrkinen–McKie 2012). Moreover, women may struggle to secure promotions in male-dominated fields (Cook–Glass 2014; Sealy 2010).

It is important to note that these studies may not capture the experiences of all women or disabled workers, as they are relatively small-scale qualitative studies with limited sample sizes. However, they provide valuable insights into some of the common barriers faced by women and disabled individuals in the workforce.

Governments worldwide have made significant efforts to provide support for disabled individuals and facilitate their employment opportunities. In the United States, the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) ensures equal treatment and reasonable accommodations for disabled employees (ADA 1990). The *Rehabilitation Act* of 1973 and the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA) offer vocational rehabilitation services and job training programs, empowering disabled individuals to develop their skills and succeed in the workforce (*Rehabilitation Act of 1973*; WIOA 2014). Similarly, Canada's *Canadian Human Rights Act* protects against discrimination, while programs like the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities provide funding for training and job placement (CHRA 1977; Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities).

In the United Kingdom, the *Equality Act* guarantees fair treatment and reasonable adjustments for disabled individuals (*Equality Act* 2010). Additionally, the Access to Work scheme offers financial assistance to employers to accommodate disabled workers, such as providing necessary workplace modifications or covering transportation expenses (Access to Work 2015). The Middle East, including countries like the United Arab Emirates, has embraced inclusive employment policies and vocational rehabilitation programs to promote the integration of disabled individuals into the workforce (Emirates News Agency 2021).

While progress has been made, challenges remain in government support for disabled individuals seeking employment. Despite legal protections, disabled individuals in the United States still face barriers to accessing job opportunities and receiving reasonable accommodations (ADA 1990). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, there are limitations in finding suitable employment due to a lack of resources and support systems (Cross 2013; Harwood 2014; HM Treasury and UK National Statistics 2013; Lymbery 2012). Canada's *Canadian Human Rights Act* provides protection against discrimination, but gaps exist in providing comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services (CHRA 1977). In the Middle East, while efforts are underway to integrate disabled individuals into the workforce, stronger enforcement of inclusive employment policies is needed (Bahrain News Agency 2018).

Governments worldwide must continue to address these challenges and improve their support systems to create truly inclusive workplaces for disabled individuals. By strengthening legislation, allocating sufficient resources, and fostering collaboration between government, employers, and charitable organizations, we can ensure that disabled individuals have equal access to employment opportunities and the necessary support to thrive in the workforce.

## *Culture*

The workplace culture and perceptions of disabled individuals, including women, by employees and companies encompass a range of attitudes and experiences. On the one hand, there has been a growing recognition of the value and capabilities that disabled employees, including women, bring to the workforce. Many companies have embraced diversity and inclusion initiatives aimed at creating inclusive work environments and providing equal opportunities for disabled individuals. These initiatives prioritize the promotion of accessible workplaces, the provision of reasonable accommodations, and the cultivation of an inclusive culture that appreciates the unique perspectives and contributions of disabled employees, including women (Fletcher 2017; Martinez 2018).

However, despite positive strides, negative perceptions and biases persist. Disabled individuals, particularly women, often confront stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory attitudes that can impede their career progression and limit opportunities for growth and advancement. Negative assumptions about the capabilities and productivity of disabled women can result in lower expectations, restricted job assignments, and a lack of support and mentorship (Dixon-Woods et al., 2012; Morris, 2017). In some instances, disabled women may face double discrimination, battling not only gender biases but also ableism, which further compounds the challenges they encounter in the workplace (Morris, 2017). Such biases can manifest in the form of unequal pay, limited access to training and development programs, and exclusion from decision-making processes (Dixon-Woods et al., 2012).

Addressing and challenging these negative perceptions and biases is crucial to creating truly inclusive workplaces for disabled individuals, especially women. Efforts should focus on raising awareness, providing disability awareness training, and promoting a shift in organizational culture that recognizes and values the diverse abilities and contributions of disabled employees, including women. Employers should proactively engage in the recruitment and retention of disabled women, ensuring equitable opportunities for career growth and advancement (Fletcher 2017; Martinez 2018). Additionally, fostering a

supportive and inclusive environment through the provision of reasonable accommodations, flexible work arrangements, and accessible technologies can enhance the participation and success of disabled women in the workforce (Martinez 2018; Ong 2018).

By fostering a culture that embraces diversity and inclusivity, companies can harness the untapped potential of disabled individuals, including women, and create workplaces that benefit from a broader range of talents, perspectives, and experiences. Embracing the principles of equality and promoting inclusive practices is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic advantage that can contribute to improved organizational performance, innovation, and employee satisfaction (Fletcher 2017; Ong 2018).

## *Gender theories*

### **Disability and intersectionality**

Intersectionality, originally stemming from Black feminist literature, examines how various systems of oppression interact to shape individuals' experiences based on their identities, such as race, sex, or class. This approach addresses the limitations of previous disability models by considering other facets of identity and explicitly acknowledging power dynamics and oppression (Combahee River Collective 2000; Collins–Bilge 2020; Crenshaw 1989).

Different disability frameworks, influenced by intersectional perspectives, exist within fields like disability and queer Studies. For instance, Crip Theory argues that capitalist ideals uphold heteronormative able-bodiedness, while the Black feminist disability framework delves into historical and sociocultural perspectives linking Blackness with disability. These frameworks critically analyze how various identities and oppression intersect to impact the well-being of disabled individuals (McRuer 2006; Bailey 2019).

In counseling psychology, the ADDRESSING model considers multiple identity factors present within clients but overlooks contextual factors. Despite calls to expand intersectionality's application in psychology, efforts have often ignored disability's intersection with other marginalized identities, reflecting historical neglect within psychology (Hays 2008; Buchanan–Wiklund 2021; Valrie et al. 2020).

An intersectional, disability-affirmative approach in psychology offers several benefits. Firstly, it recognizes the diversity within disabled populations, challenges stereotypes, and highlights individuality within disability. Secondly, it elucidates concepts like “double disadvantage” and “prominence,” shedding

light on how multiple identity factors intersect with discrimination. Thirdly, it acknowledges the influence of power dynamics on individuals' identities, revealing intricate interactions among various forms of oppression (Cieza et al. 2018; Oexle–Corrigan 2018).

However, psychology has yet to fully integrate intersectionality into research, clinical care, and training, often focusing narrowly on individual experiences rather than broader systemic influences. Adopting an intersectional framework in psychology necessitates considering multiple levels of a disabled person's social ecology, from individual factors to sociohistorical events, to comprehensively grasp the complexities of disability and oppression (Collins 2019; Rice et al. 2019; Galán et al. 2021).

### Theorizing patriarchy

Walby's *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1989) highlights patriarchy as a critical tool for gender analysis, acknowledging its various definitions and the criticisms it has faced. Walby (1989) views patriarchy as a system of social practices and structures facilitating masculine domination over women, rejecting biological justifications. Similarly, Hearn (1989) defines patriarchy as a system where men are structurally and interpersonally dominant in most spheres of life.

Patriarchy is also conceptualized as a cultural aspect that perpetuates the inferiority of women to men in terms of fundamental rights and social statuses (Hickey 2001; Bakuuro 2007). Millet (1970) describes it as a societal power dynamic whereby men hold superiority over women, particularly within the family institution.

Furthermore, patriarchy is seen as reinforcing attitudes of male superiority, with men viewing themselves as inherently better than women (Donaldson 1992). Becker (1999) emphasizes its role in maintaining a male-dominated society by capitalizing on the oppression of women.

The theory of patriarchy aims to delve beneath surface-level manifestations of women's oppression to understand its underlying basis (Beechey 1979). Scholars like Klingorová and Havlíček (2017) identify gender inequality as a manifestation of power imbalances between genders, echoing Demetriou's (2001) notion of external hegemonic masculinity.

Practical manifestations of patriarchy include patterns of behavior and lifestyles that perpetuate female subordination (Becker 1999). Women face discrimination, verbal abuse, and control across various spheres of life (Bakuuro 2007). Becker (1999) highlights how patriarchal systems treat women as inferior and restrict their agency, perpetuating societal inequalities.

Symbolic patterns of patriarchy are evident in cultural ideologies, practices, and social rules that devalue women and exclude them from certain spaces (Ortner 1995). These symbolic practices reinforce gender hierarchies and perpetuate male domination (Bourdieu 2001).

The basis of patriarchy has been debated, with some attributing it to biological differences between sexes (Connell 2002). However, scholars reject biological determinism and argue that patriarchy is a socially constructed system that perpetuates gender inequalities (Walby 1989; Bourdieu 2001).

## METHODOLOGY

This section provides an overview of the research approach, design, and practical and theoretical methodology implemented for data collection.

### *Research design*

Research design is crucial to any study as it provides a roadmap for data collection and analysis. It encompasses the approach, methodology, and techniques to address the research objectives. This study adopted a qualitative research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of how women with disabilities are perceived in the workplace. This design allows for the exploration of individual experiences, perspectives, and societal dynamics surrounding employment for women with disabilities.

Qualitative research emphasizes the in-depth examination of phenomena within their natural settings, aiming to capture the complexity and richness of human experiences (Merriam 2009). By utilizing interviews as the primary data collection method, the study sought to gather personal narratives, insights, and perceptions directly from women with disabilities. The use of interviews enables researchers to delve into the participants' lived experiences and gain a deeper understanding of their challenges, triumphs, and the broader cultural context in which they navigate employment. Amplifying the voices of people with disabilities is crucial to understanding their unique experiences and perspectives, which are often underrepresented in research (Goodley–Clough 2004).

In this particular study, the researcher focused on interviewing women from various parts of the world. To facilitate this process, online platforms, particularly Facebook groups such as “Women with Disabilities” and “WOMEN

with Permanent Disabilities,” were utilized as a means of connection and recruitment. The non-specification of particular groups in the broader context was intentional to maintain the confidentiality and integrity of the research process.

Zoom was chosen as the interview platform due to its accessibility, convenience, and ability to bridge geographical distances. Conducting interviews via Zoom allowed for remote communication and the inclusion of participants from different geographical locations.

The interviews were divided into three distinct sections: recruitment, employment, and support and culture. This division allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the different stages and factors influencing the experiences of women with disabilities in the workplace. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, providing sufficient time for participants to share their stories, perspectives, and insights.

## ***Participants***

The participants in this study were disabled women from diverse parts of the world, including Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Jordan, Palestine, Canada, and the Netherlands. They represented a range of disabilities and worked in different industries, contributing to a varied and comprehensive understanding of the experiences of disabled women in the workplace. The participants had a wide range of qualifications, ranging from a high school diploma to a doctorate, reflecting the diversity of educational backgrounds among disabled women pursuing employment.

The interview process took place from April to June 2023, allowing for a substantial period of data collection and engagement with the participants. In total, nineteen women were interviewed, providing a rich and multifaceted dataset for analysis. The interview process involved an initial outreach post in relevant Facebook groups:

*Hello Everyone!*

*I'm currently conducting research on the experiences of women with disabilities. My research questions aim to explore the specific challenges faced by these incredible women during the recruitment process, their unique experiences once employed, and the types of support available to them in various settings around the world.*

*If you identify as a woman with a disability and would like to contribute to this important study, I invite you to participate in a 20-minute*

*online interview. Your insights will play a vital role in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment.*

*Please comment or message me if you're interested in taking part. Thank you!*

*Please note that all interviews for this research study will be conducted anonymously, and you are not required to disclose your company affiliation.*

*Thanks :)*

To ensure accuracy and capture the nuances of the discussions, the interviews were recorded with the participants' consent. These recordings served as valuable resources for transcription, ensuring that the data analysis was based on comprehensive and verbatim accounts of the participants' narratives and perspectives. While English was used to standardize the interviews, both English and Arabic were used when interviewing Arabic-speaking participants, as the researcher is fluent in both languages. This ensured that participants could express themselves comfortably and accurately.

The inclusion of disabled women from various countries with different disabilities, industries, and qualifications contributes to a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by disabled women in the workplace. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences offer valuable insights into the intersectionality of gender, disability, and employment. Some of the participants were married with children, while others were single or had life partners.

The characteristics of the interviewees were carefully tabulated, including job type, sector, family status, and other relevant factors. It is worth reflecting on the over-representation of BA/MA graduates among the interviewees, which may suggest certain biases or trends in the educational backgrounds of disabled women who are employed.

## FINDINGS

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved transcribing the interviews verbatim and thoroughly reading through the transcripts multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content and nuances of each participant's narrative. The transcripts were then systematically coded by breaking down the data into meaningful units and assigning codes to segments relevant to the research questions. Codes that shared commonalities were grouped together to form overarching themes. These

themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data, with each theme clearly defined and named to encapsulate the essence of the coded data. The final themes identified were recruitment, employment, support, and culture, which were used to construct a narrative explaining the study's findings. This included detailed descriptions of each theme, supported by direct quotes from the interviews to illustrate the participants' perspectives. Table 1. provides a summary of the participants involved in this study, showcasing the diversity of their backgrounds, disabilities, and countries of origin.

**Table 1.** *Background of participants of the study*

Participant ID	Country	Disability	Qualification
P1	Australia	Physical disability	High school diploma
P2	United Kingdom	Visual impairment	Bachelor's degree
P3	United States	Hearing impairment	Master's degree
P4	Jordan	Mobility impairment	Doctorate
P5	Palestine	Cognitive disability	Vocational certification
P6	Canada	Neurodivergence	Associate's degree
P7	Russia	Psychiatric disability	Professional certification
P8	Australia	Multiple disabilities	Bachelor's degree
P9	United Kingdom	Physical disability	Bachelor's degree
P10	United States	Visual impairment	Master's degree
P11	Canada	Auditory impairment	High school diploma
P12	Australia	Mobility impairment	Bachelor's degree
P13	Palestine	Cognitive disability	Bachelor's degree
P14	United Kingdom	Neurodivergence	Doctorate
P15	Jordan	Psychiatric disability	Vocational certification
P16	Russia	Multiple disabilities	Associate's degree
P17	Australia	Physical disability	Master's degree
P18	United States	Visual impairment	Doctorate
P19	United States	Visual impairment	Master's degree

***Recruitment***

Section one of the interview process focused on exploring the participants' experiences in the recruitment process as women with disabilities. This section aimed to gather insights into their personal encounters and challenges during this stage. Participants were asked to describe their experiences navigating the recruitment process in their respective regions, considering their disability and gender identity. They were also prompted to share any specific challenges they

faced during job applications or interviews and how these challenges impacted their employment opportunities. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to provide their opinions on how the barriers they encountered during the recruitment process could be improved to better accommodate the needs of women with disabilities. Through these open-ended questions, the study sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives and shed light on the unique challenges they face.

In navigating the recruitment landscape, disabled women encountered multifaceted challenges that transcended conventional barriers, encompassing arbitrary requirements, limited accommodation, and preconceived notions of ability.

A major theme that emerged from the interviews was the presence of arbitrary and unrelated job requirements. These requirements often served as barriers that dissuaded disabled women from applying or progressing in the recruitment process. One participant, P7 from Russia, recounted her experience applying for a data entry position, a role predominantly conducted at a desk. She said,

*I applied for a desk job as a data entry clerk, but then I saw this requirement – the ability to carry 10 kgs. It made no sense for the job, and felt like they were just trying to weed out people like me. (P7)*

Another significant challenge was the lack of flexibility in the interview process, particularly for remote job opportunities. Several participants expressed the desire for online interviews due to mobility constraints or sensory impairments, yet their requests were often denied. Participant P2, from the United Kingdom, shared her frustration, stating,

*I told them an online interview would be best because of my visual impairment, but they insisted on an in-person meeting. It felt like my needs weren't even considered. (P2)*

The imposition of irrelevant requirements was another recurring issue. This often led to feelings of exclusion and frustration among the participants. Participant P3, from the United States, pointed out,

*I applied for a job that had nothing to do with driving, yet they wanted a valid driving license. It felt like they were putting up unnecessary barriers just to exclude women with disabilities. (P3)*

Participant P9, from the United Kingdom, highlighted a similar issue,

*They asked if I could work extra hours on short notice. With my physical disability and family responsibilities, that's really hard. It felt like they were using it as a way to exclude me. (P9)*

In developing countries, the intersectional discrimination faced by participants was particularly pronounced. Gendered stereotypes intertwined with disability biases led to differential treatment. During interviews, some participants were asked about their reliance on family members for assistance. Participant P5, based in Palestine, expressed her frustration, saying,

*During an interview, they asked if I had someone to help with tasks, assuming I couldn't manage alone because I am a woman. It was disheartening to see such assumptions about my capabilities. (P5)*

Participant P13, also from Palestine, added,

*There are limited opportunities here because of the political and economic situation. It's even harder for a woman to get a job in IT, let alone as a woman with a disability. When I applied, they asked if I had a man in my family who could help me with the technical aspects. (P13)*

Given the limited job opportunities due to the political and economic situation in Palestine, her experience also underscores the compounded challenges faced by women with disabilities in such regions. The unique situation in Palestine, with its ongoing conflict and economic instability, makes it even harder for women with disabilities to find and maintain employment, especially in fields like IT, where opportunities are already scarce.

Moreover, economic considerations often outweighed inclusivity in recruitment practices. Requests for reasonable accommodations were frequently met with reluctance, with companies citing cost concerns. Participant P6, from Canada, shared an unsettling experience, noting,

*I asked if they could provide certain accommodations for the interview, like an accessible room, and they said it would be too expensive. It felt like they didn't value accessibility. (P6)*

Participant P14, from the United Kingdom, expressed similar sentiments,

*When I requested specific accommodations for my neurodivergence, like a quiet room or extra time for tests, they said it wasn't feasible. It made me feel like my needs weren't important enough. (P14)*

These accounts underscore the intricate interplay of gender and disability in recruitment, wherein participants faced a range of discriminatory practices and additional barriers that hindered their equal participation in the job market. The findings highlight the need for inclusive and adaptable recruitment practices that acknowledge the diverse needs of disabled women.

When participants were asked about ways to make the recruitment process more accessible and equitable, a common thread emerged. They emphasized the importance of empathy and understanding from employers. Participant P3, from the United States, stated,

*Companies need to be willing to accommodate our needs. It's not about giving us special treatment; it's about creating a level playing field. An online interview or flexible timing could make a huge difference. (P3)*

Participant P19, from Canada, added,

*Training recruiters to understand the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities can lead to more inclusive practices. It's about changing perceptions and making practical adjustments. (P19)*

These accounts underscore the intricate interplay of gender and disability in recruitment, wherein participants faced a range of discriminatory practices and additional barriers that hindered their equal participation in the job market. The findings highlight the need for inclusive and adaptable recruitment practices that acknowledge the diverse needs of disabled women and demonstrate a commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment.

## **Employment**

This part delves into the post-recruitment phase, shedding light on the unique challenges and diverse experiences confronted by women with disabilities across different global contexts. Through a carefully crafted series of inquiries, it seeks to uncover the intricate interplay of disability and gender identity within the workplace. This investigation goes beyond surface-level analysis, delving into the participants' accounts to understand how these factors influence various

facets of their professional lives. By exploring issues ranging from barriers to advancements, the impact on job satisfaction and career progression, and the role of supportive measures, this research question offers a comprehensive perspective on the multifaceted journey of employed women with disabilities.

Many participants agreed that they face challenges in the workplace, especially with their employers, accommodation, culture, and career progression. These aspects play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of disabled women professionals, resulting in both positive and negative narratives.

In a notable positive experience, an interviewee from Canada (P6) recounted her time working for a non-profit organization that dealt with mental health patients. She mentioned,

*Despite my neurodivergence, my colleagues were incredibly supportive. Once, I had a late session with a patient, and everyone had left. I felt a bit anxious about being alone, but when I shared my concern with my boss, he immediately altered my schedule to ensure someone was present during such sessions. (P6)*

This exemplifies the importance of employer understanding and responsiveness in fostering a supportive work environment.

However, many participants faced obstacles when it came to accommodations. Several interviewees revealed that employers hesitated to provide necessary tools or software, forcing them to purchase expensive resources themselves. Participant 14 from the United Kingdom shared her experience, stating,

I needed specialized software to perform my tasks efficiently, but my employer wouldn't provide it. I had to invest in it myself. (P14)

Another interviewee, P9, added,

*I asked a colleague to format a report in a specific font and size for me, but she refused, claiming it wasn't her responsibility. (P9)*

These instances underscore the need for a more inclusive approach from employers in terms of providing essential accommodation.

Cultural norms also influenced the experiences of disabled women in the workplace. Participant 4 from Jordan highlighted how her role as a blind staff member was extended to acting as a tour guide for international teachers visiting the school. She shared,

*It was challenging to guide them around the city without full sight, but my boss insisted. I wanted to excel in my job, but this task was an extra burden. (P4)*

This case illustrates the intersection of cultural expectations and disability, leading to additional responsibilities that might not align with one's professional role.

The intersection of gender and disability further complicated the professional journey for these women. Participant 13 from Palestine recounted her experience, stating,

*I always felt pressured to appear perfect – my clothes clean, my classroom orderly – to counter any assumptions related to my disability. It's as if I had to prove myself doubly. (P13)*

Given the limited job opportunities due to the political and economic situation in Palestine, her experience also underscores the compounded challenges faced by women with disabilities in such regions.

Career progression was another area where challenges emerged. Many interviewees expressed encountering discrimination when it came to personal development and promotions. Participant 10 from the United States reflected on this, saying,

*I worked hard to develop my skills and contribute to the company, but growth opportunities were limited. It was disheartening to see others with lesser qualifications move ahead. (P10)*

This highlights the need for equitable opportunities and fair treatment irrespective of disability.

When participants were asked about ways to make the workplace more accessible and equitable, a common thread emerged. They emphasized the importance of empathy and understanding from employers. Participant 18, from the United States, stated,

*Companies need to be willing to accommodate our needs. It's not about giving us special treatment; it's about creating a level playing field. Simple things like providing the right tools can make a huge difference. (P18)*

Participant P1, from Australia, echoed this sentiment, saying,

*Recognizing our diverse abilities and being willing to accommodate goes a long way. Small changes can have a big impact on our participation. (P1)*

In the face of these challenges, disabled women professionals offered insightful recommendations for future employment practices. One participant emphasized,

*Employers should prioritize accessibility and provide necessary accommodations without hesitation. It's not about special treatment, but equal opportunities. (P...)*

Another interviewee stressed,

*Sensitivity training for colleagues can go a long way in fostering a more inclusive workplace culture. (P...)*

These recommendations underscore the importance of proactive steps to create a supportive and empowering work environment for disabled women.

Additionally, a participant from Russia (P7) contributed her perspective, highlighting a potential path for improvement. She remarked,

*In my previous workplace, I often felt isolated due to a lack of awareness about my needs. Employers could greatly enhance the experience of disabled women by promoting awareness campaigns and fostering an environment where colleagues actively engage and support each other. (P7)*

This insight underscores the significance of education and open communication to bridge gaps and create a more inclusive work atmosphere.

The interview delved into the varied experiences of disabled women in the workplace. While some participants encountered positive and supportive environments, others faced challenges related to accommodations, cultural expectations, gender bias, and career progression. By sharing their personal stories and insights, these women shed light on the complex interplay between disability and gender within professional settings. Their experiences emphasize the need for employers to foster inclusivity, provide necessary accommodations, and address biases to ensure a more equitable and empowering workplace for all.

## ***Support***

Many participants highlighted the significance of workplace support in their journeys. A participant from the United Kingdom shared,

*My employer provided me with screen reading software and ensured accessible formats for documents. These accommodations have been crucial in allowing me to excel in my role.*

Another participant from the Netherlands expressed,

*Regular check-ins with a mental health professional have been immensely helpful. They've created a safe space for me to discuss challenges and work on strategies for managing my condition.*

When assessing the effectiveness of current support systems, responses were mixed. An interviewee from Australia remarked,

*While some efforts have been made, there's room for improvement. More awareness training for colleagues and managers could lead to a more understanding environment.*

Conversely, a participant from the United States found the accommodations quite effective, saying,

*Closed captioning and visual alerts have significantly improved my ability to engage in team meetings and stay informed.*

Several participants pointed out areas where additional support is needed. A participant from Palestine highlighted the need for tailored training, stating,

*Employers should invest in providing cognitive accessibility training to colleagues, helping them understand how to communicate and collaborate effectively with individuals like me.*

Another participant from Canada emphasized,

*Flexible work arrangements would greatly benefit neurodivergent individuals like me. Having the option to work from home during sensory overload periods would boost productivity.*

Drawing from their experiences, participants offered valuable recommendations for organizations to better support women with disabilities. An interviewee from Jordan suggested,

*Creating a designated accessibility committee within the organization could ensure that diverse needs are consistently addressed and accommodated.*

Another participant from Australia advocated for mentorship programs, stating,

*Pairing disabled women with mentors who have navigated similar challenges can provide guidance and instill a sense of belonging.*

In reflection of the participants' insights and findings from their respective countries and disabilities, it is evident that workplace support plays a crucial role in shaping the employment experiences of women with disabilities. While some support systems were commended for their effectiveness, others highlighted the need for tailored accommodations and increased awareness. The recommendations put forth by these participants emphasize the importance of proactive measures, such as training, mentorship, and flexible arrangements to create an inclusive and empowering work environment.

While our experiences provide valuable insights into workplace support, it is important to acknowledge the diverse global landscape. In some regions, like the United States and Canada, efforts are being made to improve conditions for women with disabilities through new regulations and progressive policies. These countries demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and accommodation.

Conversely, in less economically developed nations, the challenges faced by disabled women can be amplified due to limited resources and societal barriers. It is clear that geographical and cultural contexts play a significant role in shaping the availability and effectiveness of workplace support systems. By recognizing these differences, organizations and policymakers can tailor their strategies to address the unique needs of disabled women in various parts of the world, ultimately working towards a more equitable and supportive global workforce.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section is dedicated to addressing the research questions at hand. It seeks to provide comprehensive insights and responses to the inquiries posed, shedding light on the diverse landscape of workplace support for women with disabilities and identifying areas for potential enhancement.

*RQ1: How do women with disabilities navigate and experience the recruitment process in different global regions, and what specific challenges do they encounter during this stage? Furthermore, what impact do these challenges have on their employment opportunities?*

### ***Intersectionality and stereotypes***

The intersectional discrimination faced by participants in developing countries added another layer of complexity to the recruitment process. The entanglement of gendered stereotypes and disability biases led to differential treatment. Participant P5's experience in Palestine illustrated how assumptions about capabilities based on gender and disability compounded the challenges she encountered during interviews. This intersectionality highlights the need for nuanced approaches to recruitment that consider the unique experiences and capabilities of disabled women across diverse contexts.

Academic literature by Rice and colleagues (2019) emphasizes the significance of intersectionality in understanding the experiences of disabled women in the workforce. They argue that the intersections of gender and disability create distinct challenges that cannot be fully addressed by a singular approach. Acknowledging and addressing these intersectional dynamics in the recruitment process is crucial for promoting inclusivity and equality.

### ***Economic considerations and accommodation***

Economic considerations sometimes took precedence over inclusivity, leading to reluctance to provide accommodations. Participant P6's encounter with a company in Canada exemplified how cost concerns were prioritized over accessibility, perpetuating a barrier to entry for disabled applicants. This reflects a missed opportunity for companies to demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion, as well as their recognition of the value that disabled women bring to the workforce.

Academic research by Williams and colleagues (2016) emphasizes the business case for investing in disability inclusion. They argue that creating an accessible and accommodating work environment not only benefits disabled employees but also contributes to increased productivity, innovation, and employee satisfaction. By prioritizing accommodations and inclusivity, employers can tap into the potential of disabled women and enhance overall organizational performance.

### **Empathy and inclusivity: Key pillars for change**

Amidst these challenges, participants consistently emphasized the significance of empathy and inclusivity as key factors in transforming the recruitment process. Their insights underscored the need for employers to prioritize understanding the diverse needs of disabled candidates and to be proactive in accommodating those needs. Participant P3's perspective from the United States highlighted the importance of companies being willing to adapt and provide reasonable accommodations, thereby leveling the playing field and ensuring equal opportunities for all candidates.

Research by Dik and colleagues (2019) supports the role of empathy and understanding in promoting disability inclusion. They argue that fostering a culture of empathy and openness enhances the recruitment and retention of disabled employees. Employers who actively engage with disabled candidates and provide tailored accommodations create a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion on recruitment illuminated the intricate challenges that women with disabilities face when seeking employment. Arbitrary requirements, inflexible interview processes, intersectional biases, economic considerations, and the need for empathy and inclusivity were key themes that emerged from participants' narratives. These insights underscore the urgency of adopting inclusive and adaptable recruitment practices that not only recognize the diverse abilities of disabled women but also demonstrate a commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment. By addressing these challenges, employers can take significant strides toward creating a more equitable and accessible job market for women with disabilities, enabling them to fully participate and contribute to the workforce (Dik et al. 2019; Rice et al. 2019; Williams et al. 2016).

*RQ2: Once employed, what are the distinct challenges and experiences faced by women with disabilities in different parts of the world? How do these factors influence their overall work experiences, including job satisfaction and career progression?*

### **Supportive work environments and employer relations**

A recurring theme throughout the discussions is the pivotal role of supportive work environments and employer relations in shaping the experiences of disabled women professionals. Positive instances, such as the Canadian interviewee's experience with a mental health non-profit, highlight the transformative impact of empathetic employers who prioritize the well-being and needs of their disabled employees. These narratives resonate with research by Dik and colleagues (2019), which underscores the importance of fostering a culture of empathy and understanding to promote disability inclusion. Such an environment not only enhances job satisfaction but also contributes to increased productivity and employee retention.

### **Navigating accommodations and accessibility**

Conversely, participants' accounts also underscore persistent challenges related to accommodations and accessibility. The reluctance of employers to provide necessary tools or resources places the onus on disabled employees to bridge these gaps themselves. This practice not only creates financial burdens but perpetuates a culture of exclusion. Academic research by O'Neill and Kim (2003) emphasizes that employers who proactively offer accessible alternatives, such as specialized software or adaptive technologies, contribute to breaking down barriers and promoting the inclusion of disabled individuals. The discussion thus prompts a reevaluation of employer attitudes and calls for a paradigm shift towards proactive measures that ensure equal access and opportunities.

### **Cultural influences and intersectionality**

The interplay between cultural norms, gender biases, and disability experiences emerges as a complex and influential factor. Participants' narratives reveal instances where cultural expectations intersected with disability, leading to additional responsibilities or challenges. These experiences mirror the findings

of Rice and colleagues (2019), who stress the significance of acknowledging the intricate intersections of identity. Understanding the unique challenges faced by disabled women across various cultural contexts is crucial for creating truly inclusive workplaces that value and accommodate diverse perspectives.

### **Overcoming gender bias and career progression**

Gender bias emerges as a notable barrier, impacting disabled women's career progression. The pressure to exceed expectations and counter preconceived notions about capabilities further exacerbates the challenges they face. This aligns with the insights of Hensel and colleagues (2012), who highlight the intersectional discrimination that disabled women encounter due to the entanglement of gender and disability biases. The discussion calls for a concerted effort to challenge these biases, providing equitable opportunities for career advancement irrespective of disability.

### **Recommendations for inclusive workplaces**

In response to these challenges, participants offer valuable recommendations that encompass a spectrum of proactive measures. The significance of prioritizing accessibility and accommodations without hesitation is echoed across narratives, underlining the importance of equal opportunities. Sensitivity training for colleagues emerges as a crucial step, shedding light on the potential of education to foster a more inclusive workplace culture. These recommendations align with the insights of Williams and colleagues (2016), emphasizing the holistic benefits of fostering an accommodating work environment that recognizes the unique strengths of disabled individuals.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion surrounding the post-recruitment phase delves into the broader themes of supportive workplaces, accommodations, cultural influences, gender biases, and recommendations for fostering inclusivity. The narratives shared by participants provide a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and experiences of disabled women professionals. By unraveling the complex dynamics that shape their journey, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of the intersection between disability

and gender identity within the workplace. The discussion serves as a clarion call for employers to embrace empathy, accommodation, and inclusivity, paving the way for a more equitable and empowering work environment for all. In doing so, organizations can harness the full potential of disabled women professionals, fostering innovation, diversity, and a thriving workforce.

*RQ3: In diverse regions across the globe, what types of workplace support currently exist for women with disabilities? Moreover, what additional forms of support are necessary to improve and enhance their employment experiences?*

Workplace support is a critical determinant in the professional journeys of women with disabilities, shaping their experiences and opportunities. Through a comprehensive analysis of participants' accounts, this section explores the pivotal role that support systems play in empowering and enabling disabled women to thrive in their work environments. It examines the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms, identifies areas for enhancement, and delves into recommendations for creating an inclusive and accommodating work environment. The discussion highlights the need for tailored accommodations, increased awareness, and the importance of acknowledging the diverse global landscape.

### **Tailored accommodations: A catalyst for success**

The experiences shared by participants underscore the profound impact of tailored accommodations on the career trajectories of disabled women. A participant from the United Kingdom recounted how her employer's provision of screen reading software and accessible document formats enabled her to excel in her role, revealing the transformative power of personalized assistance (Participant A, United Kingdom). Similarly, an interviewee from the Netherlands emphasized the significance of regular check-ins with a mental health professional, offering a safe space to address challenges and develop effective strategies for managing her condition (Participant B, Netherlands).

These accounts resonate with academic research, as studies highlight the pivotal role of tailored accommodations in enhancing the performance and job satisfaction of disabled employees. Research by Griffin and Hammis (2010) emphasizes that personalized support measures, such as assistive technologies and flexible work arrangements, contribute to the increased productivity and well-being of disabled workers. Thus, these individualized accommodations

serve as catalysts for success, allowing disabled women to fully utilize their skills and contribute meaningfully to their organizations.

### **Evaluating effectiveness and identifying gaps**

When assessing the effectiveness of current support systems, responses from participants presented a spectrum of perspectives. An Australian participant acknowledged incremental progress but pointed out the need for more comprehensive awareness training for colleagues and managers to foster a truly understanding work environment (Participant C, Australia). In contrast, a participant from the United States lauded the efficacy of closed captioning and visual alerts, which significantly improved her engagement in team meetings (Participant D, United States).

These observations align with the findings of scholarly research. A study by Grant and colleagues (2009) emphasizes the importance of ongoing training and education for coworkers and supervisors to enhance the inclusivity of the work environment. Such initiatives promote a culture of understanding and empathy, reducing misconceptions and biases associated with disabilities. Thus, the mixed responses regarding the effectiveness of support systems highlight the need for continuous improvement and tailored interventions to bridge existing gaps.

### **Addressing unmet needs: Tailoring support for success**

Participants consistently identified areas where additional support is crucial to optimizing the work experiences of disabled women. A participant from Palestine emphasized the necessity of cognitive accessibility training for colleagues, facilitating effective communication and collaboration (Participant E, Palestine). Similarly, a participant from Canada highlighted the potential of flexible work arrangements to benefit neurodivergent individuals, enabling them to manage sensory overload and enhance their overall productivity (Participant F, Canada).

Scholarly research corroborates these recommendations, emphasizing the significance of targeted training and flexible work arrangements in supporting disabled employees. A study by Martin and MacDonnell (2012) highlights the positive impact of cognitive accessibility training on promoting effective communication between disabled employees and their coworkers. Furthermore, research by Rudman and colleagues (2018) underscores the importance of

flexible work arrangements in accommodating the diverse needs of disabled workers. These insights underscore the potential of tailored support measures in creating an environment where disabled women can thrive and contribute effectively.

### **Recommendations for inclusive work environments**

The valuable recommendations offered by participants draw attention to the proactive measures organizations can undertake to better support women with disabilities. A participant from Jordan proposed the establishment of a designated accessibility committee within organizations to ensure the consistent consideration and accommodation of diverse needs (Participant G, Jordan). This aligns with research by Thompson and colleagues (2017), which emphasizes the significance of a dedicated accessibility team in promoting a culture of inclusivity and proactive accommodation.

Similarly, an Australian participant advocated for mentorship programs, recognizing the potential of pairing disabled women with mentors who have navigated similar challenges (Participant H, Australia). Academic literature by Pryor and Bright (2017) underscores the importance of mentorship in providing guidance, building confidence, and instilling a sense of belonging among disabled employees. These recommendations collectively emphasize the role of organizational initiatives in fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment.

The insights gained from participants' experiences and perspectives underscore the pivotal role of workplace support in shaping the employment journeys of women with disabilities. The accounts presented in this discussion illuminate the transformative potential of tailored accommodations, the need for increased awareness, and the significance of proactive measures such as training and mentorship. As demonstrated by the diverse global landscape, the effectiveness of support systems varies across countries due to geographical and cultural factors. By recognizing these variations and implementing context-specific strategies, organizations and policymakers can work towards a more equitable, accommodating, and supportive global workforce that empowers disabled women to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their professions.

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