



The Link Between Corruption and Poverty: Impact on Persons with Disabilities in Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT

The current qualitative study examined the relationship between corruption and poverty amongst persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe, informed by the Critical Disability Theory (CDT). It adopted a single case study where thirteen participants: eight students with various impairments (four physical, two hard of hearing and two visually impaired), three lecturers with impairments (one visually and two physically impaired) and two general hands with hearing impairment took part. The data were gathered through face-to-face individual interviews and focus group discussions using interview guides and focus group discussion protocols, respectively. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and a thematic analysis was conducted. The findings of the study revealed that persons with disabilities are deprived of their rights to socio-economic participation due to some malpractices by certain individuals, thus rendering them vulnerable to adverse living conditions. Persons with disabilities are used as instruments for sourcing funds, goods or services which are supposed to benefit them. However, the sourced funds, services or goods are abused by some individuals. In some cases, persons with disabilities do not access certain services as they may not afford paying for bribe. In light of these findings, several strategies were suggested, including the need to promote self-representation in issues that concern persons with disabilities in sync with their mantra “Nothing for us without us”. Overall, the principle of transparency and accountability must be observed.

Key Words: Corruption, Development, Ethic, Human rights, Poverty, Social justice.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2011), an estimated 1 billion people, 15 percent of the world's

population, lives with some form of disability and 80 percent are living in developing countries. The Zimbabwe Statistics (ZIMSTAT, 2022) census report indicates that 9.2 percent (1 380 000) out of the 15 000



000 people in this country have some form of disability. People with disabilities are ranked among the poorest of the poor worldwide. According to Rohwereder (2015), having a disability is a driver of chronic poverty, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa where evidence demonstrates lower levels of employability, school attendance rates, reduced health care and access to overall levels of economic well-being for persons with disabilities. The exclusionary and malpractices, including corruption by the society, have contributed to the challenges persons with impairments are facing. Corruption has become an issue of concern the world over. This is a serious malpractice in the public domain that has affected many countries in the world (Ranga, 2022), Zimbabwe included, ruining the lives of the common people, including those with disabilities in their societies. Due to the pre-existing inequalities and intersectional discrimination, corruption has a disproportionate impact on marginalized populations, including persons with disabilities, as they are often reliant on public goods and services and have limited means to look for alternative means (International Council on Human Rights Policy [ICHRP], 2009). Corruption is viewed as a cause of low development and exacerbates poverty where poverty prevails. In its various guises, corruption imposes wide-ranging social consequences, especially when established long-term, to the extent of having become 'normal' and networks have reached community and domestic contexts (ICHRP, 2009). For example, in the case of the IAAC survey in Mongolia, parents of children with disabilities paid an average amount of

USD200 in order to transfer their child to another school. This means most parents cannot afford such amounts as disability and poverty are related and this is a contravention of the global human rights instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and many others. All these instruments and protocols reiterate the fundamentality of education as a basic human right that should be free, compulsory, and accessible at the nearby school of choice of the learner. Since most persons with disabilities are poor, most children with disabilities are denied their right to meaningful education, thus widening the poverty gap, since education is regarded the great engine of personal development (Mandela, 1994).

According to the UN Joint Statement on Corruption and Human Rights (JSCHR, 2021, p. 1), "corruption undermines the realisation and enjoyment of human rights, as well as the functioning of and legitimacy of public institutions and processes and the rule of law." Corruption manifests in a whole host of contexts, often with pervasive and extensive negative impacts, thereby affecting the human rights protected by numerous international treaties. However, it is worth mentioning that the government of Zimbabwe has put in place several measures to minimize corruption, chief among them being legislation and policies, as well as the creation of the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC), incepted through the Anti-Corruption Commission Act [Chapter 9:22]. ZACC is a government agency mandated to lead the fight against corruption through the investigation of complaints of

such incidents reported to it. The current study, therefore, sought to investigate the link between corruption and poverty among persons with disabilities in the Zimbabwean context.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The background literature has shown that having a disability is a driver of chronic poverty, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Rohwereder, 2015). The problem is that persons with disabilities continue to live less productive lives in community given exclusionary practices society imposes on them. They are, like any other community peer, subjected to socio-economic hardships that make them vulnerable to corruption since their bread and butter issues remain unsolved.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study sought to:

1. explore the lived corruption experiences of people with disabilities.
2. establish the effects of corruption and poverty towards the lives of persons with disabilities.
3. suggest strategies that can be adopted to minimize corrupt practices for the benefit of persons with disabilities and the society at large.

METHODOLOGY

This section of the study presents a brief description of the research methods and methodology followed in investigating the relationship between corruption and poverty among persons with disabilities.

Research Approach

The research approach for this study is qualitative. This approach is in line with the beliefs held by interpretivists, an example of which is the contention that knowledge and meanings are co-constructed. The qualitative approach relies heavily on naturalistic methods (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006) and focuses on exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups attach to a social or human phenomenon without any interference or manipulation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Thus, in the current study, we interacted with the participants through the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion to solicit their lived corruption experiences views on the effects of corruption on their lives and also suggest strategies that can be adopted to minimize corrupt practices.

Research Design

A single case study design was adopted for this study as it captures participants' lived experiences and thoughts (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). In this study, we chose a case study design because it examines a particular instance in a great deal of depth and is very intensive. This methodology was useful in the study as it enabled us to collect in-depth data on the phenomenon under study. However, Zvitambo (2017), criticises case studies for their lack of rigour and for the inclination by researchers to have a biased interpretation of the data.

Sample and Sampling Technique

To make our study manageable, we selected a small geographical area (a teachers' college) and a limited number of individuals (13 participants) as participants for our study. The sample consisted of 8 students, 3 lecturers and 2 general hand staff members, all with disabilities. Participants were recruited voluntarily in line with Quin and Cochran (2002). Participants were selected using purposive/judgmental sampling. The technique involves the identification and selection of individuals that are proficient and well-informed on the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Thus, the use of the purposive sampling technique facilitated access to the holders of information needed for this study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

This study made use of the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions as well as interview guides and focus group discussion protocols as data collection methods and instruments, respectively. Adoption of the two methods and instruments enhanced validity and reliability of the research findings (Fateme, 2004). The interviews were tape-recorded, with the permission of the participants.

Data Analysis

The data collected were thematically analysed. The data were systematically (a) transcribed, (b) catalogued, (c) sorted and (d) arranged, according to their meanings (Creswell, 2014). Negative or discrepant information that ran counter to the themes

was disregarded. Upholding the principle of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research results was observed and adhered to.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, permission to carry out the study and participation was sought and secured from the institution and participants, respectively. Since the current study involved students with disabilities, we observed their rights and also initiated the use of an acceptable code of conduct. The following ethical principles were also observed: confidentiality, anonymity, protection from harm, informed consent and honesty among others.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was guided by the Critical Disability Theory (CDT). We chose the CDT as a theoretical basis for this study because it engenders the rights and voices of persons with disabilities (Mudzingwa, 2022). It impresses upon the researchers to be guided by the theory which promotes the inclusiveness, equality, equity and self-representation of persons with disabilities in socio-economic activities. This theory also aspires for social justice to be demonstrated on a daily basis in the lives of persons with disabilities (Mhiripiri & Midzi, 2017). The CDT is also in line with the social model of disability which views the challenges persons with disabilities are manmade. Given this, the researchers were able to investigate how the societal malpractices have adversely affected the lives of persons with disabilities.

FINDINGS

The data in this study are presented according to themes generated from individual interviews and focus group discussion. The participants gave their experiences, views and responses on the three research questions as stated earlier on. To provide detailed explanations, participants' words were quoted verbatim to permit the readers to do their interpretation of the data gathered. Participants were assigned some codes as follows: students were coded S1-S8, lecturers L1-L3, and general workers G1 and G2. Three major themes emerged from the data gathered and were presented as follows:

4.1 The lived corruption experiences of persons with disabilities

The study's findings revealed that the participants had experienced corrupt practices in their day-to-day lives. Abuse and embezzlement of funds intended to benefit PWDs was mostly expressed by the majority of participants. In addition, participants also expressed that their right to education was mostly violated as the services they were supposed to be rendered were compromised because the budgeted money was diverted for some other uses by some institutions. Most of the assistive devices are imported, hence some organisations for and of persons with disabilities do not provide assistive devices which are durable and reliable; instead, they would prefer cheaper qualities which are of poor quality. Further to that, some participants expressed that in some cases, they do not secure gainful employment since they cannot afford money for bribe for them to be employed. All these corrupt tendencies have negatively impacted the quality of lives

for PWDs. Their basic human rights are being heavily compromised. S3 opined that:

I remember when I was a student at high school level at the special school I was, quite a number of my colleagues dropped out of school as they could not stand the living conditions. There was one time when we were fed with a very poor diet but we understand the money had been diverted for other uses? Just imagine, these students could not enjoy their right to education and it is through education that one can secure gainful employment.

Similarly, G2 had this to say:

For me to be a general hand was not my wish, I had also plans to become a doctor or engineer, however, all my dreams and ambitions were shattered as the money that was meant to support my education was diverted for other uses by my relatives as both my parents were late. Surely being disabled and orphan at the same time made some people to take advantage to deprive me to enjoy my right to education.

L2 said this:

The poverty that we persons with disabilities are experiencing is not because we are not able to live an independent life, but the societal negative practices like corruption have negatively affected us to the extent that some PWDs are beggars. I remember some time during my youthful time, there was a certain

organization for PWDs. They sourced for funds which was supposed to benefit PWDs but the funds were diverted for personal use and only a handful were assisted. We only realized this malpractice through the media when the organization was under investigation for such act. Surely, the society at large should be committed and adhere to acceptable moral standards.

The extent to which corruption has affected persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe

Three participants cited habitual and rampant begging by PWDs along streets and on public transport systems as indicators of the side effects of some of the corrupt societal practices. Most PWDs are deprived of their right to education, gainful employment and overall empowerment to live independently. In addition, some participants expressed that even when PWDs may have the necessary qualifications, they cannot secure jobs commensurate with their qualifications due to corrupt practices and negative attitudes. The research findings reveal that some Non-Governmental Organisations of and for persons with disabilities have been grossly affected by corruption, to the extent that the quality of services they are offering is of low standard. Given such a scenario, it is only the PWDs that bear the brunt of such malpractices. Transparency and accountability principles are not upheld, to the detriment of PWDs as the services they receive are not empowering, thereby affecting their quality of life. The participants' views and perceptions are

revealed as demonstrated by the following excerpts:

L1 explained:

It's pathetic when you look at the number of PWDs begging in the public spaces and buses, this shows there is something wrong within the way PWDs are groomed. It does not mean that all these people are not able to be self-reliant if granted the opportunities.

L2 had this to say:

I had a chance to listen to a television program for PWDs, surely PWDs are struggling with life, they lack gainful employment, business startups even if they have ideas to make a living due to some corrupt practices perpetuated against them by the society. Some PWDs narrate how they were deprived their right to participate in economic activities. All these acts have resulted in PWDs being unable to live decent lives

G2 expressed that:

There was a time when we were called to register for housing stands but later realized that only very few PWDs benefited and most of the stands were grabbed by those without disabilities. This has resulted in most PWDs being homeless.

S4 asserted:

I have spent much time making a follow up of my fees payment and right now, the activities of a certain

NGO for persons with disabilities are at a stand-still.

G1 commented:

Corruption practiced by some NGOs for and of PWDS through embezzlement and diversion of funds for unintended purposes have resulted in some of these organisations not securing funding

L1 revealed:

At the special school I attended, there was no PWD in the school's administration whether it was by choice or default although there were teachers with impairments. This means teachers with impairments do not enjoy some of the benefits commensurate with such responsibilities and in the process widening their poverty gap considering the current economic situation which is unfriendly.

Strategies that can be adopted to minimize corrupt tendencies against PWDs

The research participants of the current study put forward suggestions that NGOs and the government should implement to minimise corrupt tendencies towards PWDs and the community at large. Key among these were implementation and enforcement of anti-corruption legislation, engaging in awareness campaigns on the rights of PWDs, self-representation by PWDs, imparting of advocacy skills in PWDs and inclusive education. Participants' suggestions are as follows:

L1 said:

There is a need for both the government and partners to engage in raising awareness on the rights of PWDs. PWDs should enjoy the same rights as those without. The rights based approach is the only means corruption can be minimised against PWDs and the community at large. Given this, PWDs will be fully empowered and cannot be vulnerable to corrupt tendencies by the society.

L2 had this to say:

PWDs have to be equipped with advocacy skills so that they can demand for their rights or sue for lack if deprived such. Persons without disabilities take advantage of PWDs because they may lack advocacy skills.

S5 opined that:

Our education must be empowering by being inclusive since education is the most empowering tool for everyone. So if PWDs are granted empowering education, vulnerability to corruption is minimized since they will be able to make informed decisions and also secure gainful employment.

L1 said:

Effective anti-corruption legislation and its enforcement is of paramount importance since it will act as a deterring measure to would be perpetrators for the benefit of PWDs and the society at large. There is also a need to appraise the general populace on steps they make in the

event they have witnessed corrupt practices or they have been exposed to such practices.

DISCUSSION

The concepts of poverty, corruption and disability are inter-related as they directly influence each other. When poverty strikes, corruption can emerge. Inversely, when corruption prevails in any community, poverty is attracted. Disability, on the other hand, can lead to poverty just as well as disability can promote emergence of corruption. Poverty and corruption, therefore, mutually reinforce each other in further disablement of PWDs. All these scenarios undermine prevalence of social justice and enjoyment of human rights.

Literature points to the fact that persons with disabilities are exposed to corruption in a number of ways, including, in the context of care provision, the embezzlement of funds intended to benefit persons with disabilities (Jenkins & McDonald, 2022). This means that corruption has the effect of seriously affecting PWDs.

Since “corruption and human rights are closely associated with each other, corruption is detrimental to all areas and aspects of human well-being” (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, [UNODC], 2020, p.7). The practice and prevalence of corruption in Zimbabwean societies is a contravention of the dictates of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UNUDHR], 1948. Habitual practice of corruption is a recipe for violations of specific human rights, at the same time representing a structural

impediment to the execution, accomplishment and gratification of all individual rights (Wouters, et al., 2013; UNHRC, 2015).

People with disabilities in developing and under-developed nations live with poverty, leading to their suffering being double to that of their peers without disability (Groce et al., 2011). Poverty coupled with disability becomes a double jeopardy for those living with impairments. This is also a haven or sanctuary for the emergence of social evils such as corruption. It is sad to note that while people with disabilities in Europe and America are often worried about equality and anti-discrimination legislation, those with disabilities in developing nations are more worried about bread and butter issues against the background of pervasive poverty (Turmusani, 2003). Prioritization differs from region to region, leading to poor people in Africa, for instance, Zimbabwe included, resorting to corruption, which ultimately impacts more on PWDs. Thus, there is a need to do away with possible causes of poverty and corruptions if at all PWDs are not to fall victims.

CONCLUSIONS

- There is a strong link between poverty and corruption among PWDs.
- PWDs are vulnerable to corruption because of the pre-existing disadvantages they experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, our recommendations are presented, in addition to those suggested by the research participants as follows:

- Adopting and implementing anticorruption legislation, policies and action plans.
- Adopting strong, efficient and time-bound measures to prevent and combat corruption.
- Combating attitudes in society so that corruption is not perceived as unavoidable.
- Raising awareness on the negative impact of corruption to all citizenry.
- Ensuring full investigation of corruption cases, as well as accountability for those responsible.
- Establishing and adequately resourcing independent national anticorruption bodies.
- Integrating human rights principles, such as participation, access to information, equality and non-discrimination, transparency, monitoring and accountability into development and anti-corruption policies.

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