

ENSURING HEALTHY LIVING AND WELL-BEING FOR LIBRARIANS WITH DISABILITIES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

BY

ANGULU Ruth Kwatlat

Assistant Librarian-in-training, Library Department,
University of Jos. Nigeria
Email: kallumr@unijos.edu.ng

Phone: 08068064448

ABSTRACT

There has been increasing attention to diversity in Librarianship; little attention has been given to librarians with disabilities. It is challenging to meaningfully address concerns for librarians with disabilities without understanding more about what their concerns are. This paper attempts a review of existing literature using content analysis method to highlight some of their concerns in the workplace that affect their physical health, job satisfaction, and the barriers faced within the context of cultural assumptions about disability and work. From the review, studies on work experiences of people with disabilities has consistently lack negative social constructions and stereotypes of disability as less productive, and the invisibility of disability within the workplace as major barriers. Positive factors influencing the work experience of librarians with disabilities include a collegial environment, effective structures, an accessible physical environment, and, most importantly, an understanding of disability and awareness of disability-related workplace.

KEYWORDS: Librarian, Disabilities, Healthy Living, Wellbeing, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Disability is part of the various challenges that confront human beings at different places in the world. This is to say that disability is a phenomenon that transcends national boundaries, cut across gender, class and race. It manifests in various forms ranging from physical disability, emotional, sensory, intellectual, and psychological among others. Sometimes, traumatic experiences which people had could render them incapacitated thereby hinder their ability to function optimally well in the society where they live (Kidd, Wapling, Schjoedt, Gelders, Bailey-Athias, Tran, & Salomon, 2019). It was estimated that about one billion people, who accounted for 15% of the global population has one form of disability or the other (Onalu & Nwafor, 2021). The World report on disability published in 2011 said about 25million Nigerians had at least one disability while 3.6million of these had very significant difficulties in functioning. As at 2020, there are reportedly 27million Nigerians living with some form of disability (WHO, 2021).

Across the world, people with disabilities have poorer health outcomes, lower education achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities; this is partly because many people with disabilities do not have equal access to health care, education, and employment opportunities, do not receive the disability-related services that they require, and experience exclusion from everyday life activities (WHO, 2011). These difficulties are exacerbated in less advantaged communities thus undermine their health and well-being (WHO, 2020). According to Haruna (2017), about 90 percent of Nigerians view people with disability as liabilities; those who require charity, who should be assisted in form of giving financial aids, support and other forms of humanitarian assistance. Based on these perceptions, the predominant attitude towards a disabled person in Nigeria is exclusion and pity even in the workplace.

Good health and well-being are central to human development. Generally, there are grave implications on the social, psychological, economic, political and overall wellbeing of people living with a disability (Amadasun, 2020). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a powerful framework to guide local communities, countries and the international community towards the attainment of disability inclusive development (United Nation, 2015). The adoption of the SDG 3, which is to ensure healthy lives and the promotion of well-being for all at all ages holds the potential to improve the plight of people with disabilities especially librarians with disability.

Although, the word disability is not cited directly in all SDG goals, they are indeed relevant to ensure the inclusion and development of persons with disability everywhere thus, all institutions, stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership are expected to help national government attain the SDGs (Dadzie et al 2016). The intervention of SDGs therefore comes in good time not only to reaffirm commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, but also to expand beyond them to cover new issues that merit urgent global attention such as the health and well-being of PWDs especially academic librarians in Nigerian tertiary institutions in Plateau State. The Nigerian government

recently approved Discrimination against Person with Disability (Prohibition) Act in 2019 however; social protection for disabled people in Nigeria is still relatively weak. For instance, librarians with disabilities form a substantial minority within librarianship in other climes with an estimated 3.7 percent in the United States and 5.9 percent in Canada (Oud, 2018). In Nigeria, statistics on librarians with disabilities is not even available in literature. This may be ascribed to the negligent and social exclusion of this minority group or the limited conceptualization of disability and negative public perception people with disabilities (Arowosegbe, & Ode, 2020)

There is a growing extant body of work that explores the issues and challenges of library users or patrons with disabilities (Nkiko, Idiegbeyan-ose, Ilo, Ifeakachuku, & Ifijeh, 2020; Gibson & Hanson-Baldauf, 2019; Pionke, 2016a, 2016b; Pontoriero & Zippo-Mazur, 2019; Zaid & Zaid, 2017; Ejedafiru & Isebe, 2013; Echezona, Osadebe, & Asogwa, 2011;). There is little extant research about librarians with disabilities; much of it centered on the experiences of academic librarians (Oud, 2018; Oud, 2019; Schomberg, 2018; Schomberg & Cole, 2017; Hollich, 2020; Moeller, 2019). Much of these literatures focusing on librarian with disabilities were conducted in settings outside Nigeria where the laws on the protection of people with disabilities are enforced. There is a literature gap on ensuring the wellbeing and good health of librarians with disabilities in Nigeria especially in Plateau State.

It is challenging to meaningfully address concerns for librarians with disabilities without understanding more about what their concerns might be. However, less attention has been focused on the minority disabled group within librarianship; as a result, the concerns of this group are less well understood. This paper attempts a review of existing literature to highlight some of their concerns in the workplace, physical health, job satisfaction, and the barriers faced within the context of cultural assumptions about disability and work. Based on a theoretical framework used in disability studies, this study is situated within the context of existing research on the issues encountered by librarians with disabilities in the work environments. The paper hope to broaden understanding of an overlooked minority group in the profession and extend knowledge on librarians with disability and chart a course to ensure they attain healthy living and well-being. This study adopted content analysis method to evaluate existing literature on librarians with disabilities. A number of journal articles and books were consulted in the preparation of this article as well as statistical information on the status of disabled people in Nigeria and the world in general.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarification

The Concept of Disability

Disability is an evolving concept which is subject to regular changes. The field of disability studies and disability activism adopts a different view of disability, one that does not focus on a disabled individual but instead focuses on the social, political, and economic factors that define disability and create barriers to equality. According to the World Health Organization WHO (2011), a disabled

person is anyone who has “a problem in body function or structure, an activity limitation, has difficulty in executing a task or action; with participation restriction”. The United Nations UN (2009) defines disability as a broad umbrella term that can be conceived in two parts; disabilities are “long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinders full and effective participation in society.” The bottom line is that the impairment has a substantial and long term adverse effect on the ability to perform normal day to- day activities, that border on their survival within the society.

Before recently, disability was conceptualized as visible and physical impairment but in reality, majority of disabilities are invisible (Oud, 2018). Many disabilities are invisible to the casual observer, such as some learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and mental health disorders. There are also physical disabilities that may have no obvious outward effects, including conditions like diabetes, hypertension, chronic pain, endometriosis, and infertility (Hollich, 2020). Hollich broaden the conceptualization of disability to include people who may not label themselves “disabled” but who may still belong to one of these categories or meet the criteria outlined in certain legal definitions. The American with Disability Act (ADA)(2008) defines a person with disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activity; this include people who have record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. In the study by Oud (2018), the large majority of librarians with disabilities reported having invisible disabilities, 72% reported that their disability was invisible, 14% that their disability was visible and 14% that they had both visible and invisible disabilities.

According to Oud (2018), librarian reported chronic illness, mobility issues, pain disorder, hearing loss, mental health issues and learning disabilities. Librarian with invisible or hidden disabilities reported encountering suspicion or disbelief because they are seen as having “real” disabilities. Those with hidden disabilities often receive two-fold stigmatization; there is the stigma that comes with being a disabled individual, such as rejection, ableism, and discrimination (Hollich, 2020). Fearing negative judgments, librarians with invisible disabilities are often reluctant to tell people their disability. This suggest that disability in our workplace especially among librarians is likely more than what we think because of the constricted focus on visible and physical disability in Nigeria.

Some scholars have tried to link the rate of disability in Nigeria with the rate of poverty. The major argument has been that poverty increases people’s vulnerability to disability. According to Amadusun (2020), the effect of disability in a society characterized by poverty can be very devastating. For Haruna (2017), disability is both a cause and consequences of poverty. This cannot be contested against, given that poverty may restrict people’s access to good health care, whereas severe health conditions, such as polio if not treated, can render people permanently incapacitated. In a similar vein, the rate of disability in Nigeria is attributed to the frequent road accidents, the outbreak of infectious and chronic diseases like polio, smallpox, and meningitis, stroke, among others which render people incapacitated (Onalu & Nwafor, 2020).

MODELS OF DISABILITY

There are multiple ways to approach the idea of disability, and the scholarly literature throughout the last few decades has used various theory-driven models to ground work in disability studies (Hollich, 2020). It is worth briefly examining the history and development of these different models of disability in order to provide an appropriate context for this work.

The medical and perhaps rehabilitation models of disability are the most prevalent. The medical model dominated much of the early- to mid-20th century and focuses on individual impairments, often without acknowledging the person behind the impairment. This model is still dominant in much of the medical field's training and discourse (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). In this model, disability is treated as a problem to be fixed with medical correction. Similarly, the rehabilitation model views disability as a problem that, even if medical intervention fails, can be solved by an individual learning to use assistive devices or other strategies to mimic as closely as possible the behaviors and activities of an abled person. Both models have their roots in a moral model of disability that views disabled people as inferior, objects of pity or scorn, and/or symbols of sin and vice that are in need of charity and grace. Under these models, disability is a personal problem, applicable only to the disabled individual, and the onus is on the disabled person to conform to abled societal standards.

Disability activists, beginning in the mid- to late-20th century, began to develop new ways of thinking about disability as a direct reaction to these models. Social models of disability are based on the premise that disability itself is a neutral condition. This is the model that led to person-first language, which was a direct attempt to counter the dehumanization that was common with earlier medical models of disability (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). Rather than as a moral failing or a problem that needs to be fixed, the social model sees disability as a social construct imposed upon an individual by society at large. In this model, for example, the problem lies not with the individual who uses a wheelchair for mobility but rather with the society that lacks ramps and automatic doors. The onus is on society to provide accommodations and conditions that are accessible for all people rather than to force disabled individuals to conform.

Critical disability studies, including disability critical race studies (or DisCrit); take the social model of disability one step further. Inherent in the social and critical models of disability is the idea that disability is an integral part of an individual's identity (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). Therefore, it may not be possible or even desirable for disabled individuals to conform to societal standards of "normalcy." Like minority models in related fields, critical disability studies contend that the lived experiences of a disabled individual are important in their own right and that they provide useful and necessary insight into the power dynamics of our culture (Reaume, 2014). Models like DisCrit ask us to see disability as one of a number of marginalized identities and to recognize that disabled individuals are a group disenfranchised from mainstream society in ways similar to those who are disenfranchised because of race, class, gender, or sexuality.

TYPES OF DISABILITIES

Globally, it has been observed that health librarians often operate within three environments. These include academic, medical, nursing or health sciences libraries in the universities and higher education sector; hospital and health services libraries as well as libraries with a focus on health in voluntary, private, government, state and semi-state agencies (Henderson, 2014; Kelly, 2009). In the view of Kelly (2009), librarians in any of these environments provide resources and services that support the teaching and learning, clinical practice and research activities undertaken in these settings. The five most common types of disability in Nigeria are visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical impairment, intellectual impairment, and communication impairment (Umeh, & Adeola, 2016). However, the most common type of disabilities observant among library workers includes physical and hearing impairments. These categories of disabilities are visible but the invisible disabilities are often not reported in Nigeria thus the types of disabilities among librarians are still not fully understood.

HEALTHY LIVING AND WELL-BEING OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

Health is defined as a “state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 2011). Some determinants of health include the social and economic environment, the physical environment and the person’s individual characteristics and behaviors (WHO, 2011). Specifically, they include factors such as income and social status, education, physical environment, social support networks, genetics, health services and gender. Good health is a prerequisite for participation in a wide range of activities including education and employment. Article 25 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) reinforces the right of persons with disabilities to attain the highest standard of health care, without discrimination (2). This means that good health is a resource to support individual’s function in a wider society, rather than an end in itself.

Mental and physical health is probably the two most frequently discussed types of health. Spiritual, emotional and financial health also contributes to the overall health of an individual. Medical experts have linked this to lower stress levels and improved mental and physical well-being. Primary health condition is the possible starting point for impairment, an activity limitation, or participation restriction. Examples of primary health conditions include depression, arthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, ischemic heart disease, cerebral palsy, bipolar disorder, glaucoma, cerebrovascular disease, and Down syndrome. A primary health condition can lead to a wide range of impairments, including mobility, sensory, mental, and communication impairments (WHO, 2011).

A person who has good physical health is more likely to have bodily functions and processes working at their peak. Rockville (2005) argued that with good health, people with disabilities have the freedom to work, learn, and engage actively in their families and communities. A good health opens the doors to employment and education for persons with disabilities just as it does for who do not have disabilities. Persons with disabilities generally have more health-care needs than others both standard needs and needs linked to impairments and are therefore more vulnerable to the impact of low quality

or inaccessible health-care services than others. The call to ensure good health and wellbeing for people with disability is in recognition that health is critical to success in the work place.

EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

There is some existing work about library workers with disabilities, much of it centered on the experiences of academic librarians (Oud, 2019; 2018; Schomberg, 2018; Schomberg & Cole, 2017). The winter 2019 issue of *Library Trends* devotes an entire section to the experience of library workers with disabilities (Brown & Sheidlower, 2019; Pionke, 2019; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2019), and a recent article in *American Libraries* highlighted the barriers that disabled library workers face when job-hunting (Ford, 2018). Much of this work reports similar findings. Library workers with disabilities face discrimination and harassment due to their disability and are less likely to hold management or supervisory positions; they may be assumed to be less capable, less skilled, or less productive (Oud, 2019). Awareness of disability-related issues by librarians in management or supervisory positions is reportedly low, which means that those who are in positions of power most capable of making workplaces more inclusive and accessible are unlikely to do so since they are unaware of the problem (Oud, 2018). Schomberg and Cole (2017) note that;

For a person with disabilities, the social and cultural power dynamics; the inaccessible physical spaces in which they must operate; and the struggle with their specific impairments or body image can have lasting impacts on how they perceive themselves, on how others perceive them, and on how they understand the ways in which others perceive them (p.97).

Furthermore, workplace and societal circumstances mean that some people with disabilities will never disclose their conditions due to fear of disrespect or lack of confidentiality, eliminating their ability to receive necessary workplace benefits. Some library workers, due to a fear of hostility or suspicion if they are “ousted” as disabled, will spend much time and effort to “pass” as abled, often by concealing their identities or minimizing the effects of their disabilities to be seen as “normal” (Schomberg, 2018). Oud (2019) discusses evidence that there is unconscious bias towards librarians who are disabled. Other workplace barriers include: “the invisibility of disability at work, a lack of understanding of disability, and stereotypical views of people with disabilities as less capable workers, leading to both overt and subtle forms of discrimination.

Like other minority groups, librarians with disabilities face equity concerns within the profession. Although legal protections at the federal level and at either the state level in Nigeria prohibit discrimination against employees with disabilities in the workplace, these legal protections are problematic in practice (Arowosegbe, & Ode, 2020). Studies of professional accountants, lawyers, and university employees all find that major workplace barriers include the invisibility of disability at work, a lack of understanding of disability, and stereotypical views of people with disabilities as less capable workers, leading to both overt and subtle forms of discrimination (Duff & Ferguson, 2011). Canada’s laws are on the surface more inclusive and disability friendly, and employment cases have been more positive for people with disabilities. Despite this, the Canadian Human Rights Commission

reports that more than 50 percent of its complaints are related to disability-related discrimination and that 84 percent of those are workplace-related (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2015).

A number of studies do however look at the workplace experiences of librarians, especially related to their job perceptions and work satisfaction. These studies have found that librarians tend to have a relatively high level of job satisfaction. The most frequently mentioned component of librarian job satisfaction is the intrinsic characteristics of the job itself (Millard, 2018; Moniarou-Papaconstantinou & Triantafyllou, 2015; Morgan, 2014). Judging by the results of these studies, librarians tend to find their work interesting and rewarding and to be highly committed to their career. Another major component of librarian job satisfaction, however, relates to their work environment. Apart from the job itself, the most frequently mentioned factors contributing to librarian job satisfaction are relationships and support from supervisors and colleagues (Morgan, 2014). These studies help identify factors contributing specifically to job satisfaction in a library work environment. However, they tend to treat librarians as a homogenous group, without analyzing potential differences due to minority status within the profession. In another study, librarians with disabilities perceive their job experiences as positive because of helpful, collegial environments with strong support from colleagues and supervisors (Jodi, 2005).

Social workers and Psychologists alike have often discussed the importance of social inclusion and social support for people living with a disability. Social support helps to reduce psychological stress, enhance the quality of life and achieve social inclusion. Lack of social support increases the risk of depression, social exclusion, maladaptive behaviors and mortality (Onalu & Nwafor, 2020). Generally, there are grave implications on the social, psychological, economic, political and overall wellbeing of people living with a disability (Amadasun, 2020).

O'Neill & Urquhart (2011) examined Irish library managers' perceptions about employees with disabilities, and found that managers tended to have negative attitudes towards accommodations related to changes in work patterns, such as flexible working conditions or hours. Another surveyed public librarian attitudes to having people from minority groups as colleagues, and found that respondents had an unconscious bias towards white, able-bodied librarians (Brown, 2015).

A few studies do look at the job perceptions and satisfaction of specific minority groups within librarianship, visible minority librarians. Some factors contributing to job satisfaction for this group overlapped with the factors found for librarians in general, most notably supervisor and colleague support (Preston, 1998; Thornton, 2000). Other factors influencing job satisfaction for visible minority librarians were different from those found in studies of librarians in general. These included a concern over the lack of diversity within their organizations, leading to feelings of isolation (Kumaran & Cai, 2015). Some studies reported discrimination and racism at work, and found that higher levels of support for workplace diversity and equity, and sensitivity to the challenges faced by visible minority librarians led to greater job satisfaction (Kandiuk, 2014). Many studies show that employees with disabilities have lower levels of job satisfaction than employees without disabilities (Jones, 2016; Schur

et al., 2017; Snyder, Carmichael, Blackwell, Cleveland, & Thornton, 2010; Uppal, 2005). Like the research on job satisfaction in librarians, research on people with disabilities indicates that key factors influencing job perceptions and satisfaction include support from coworkers and supervisors (Schur, Kruse, Blasi, & Blanck, 2009; Snyder et al., 2010; Uppal, 2005). Like visible minority librarians, employees with disabilities report higher rates of discrimination and harassment at work (Schur et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2010; Villanueva-Flores, Valle-Cabrera, & Bornay-Barrachina, 2014), and a critical factor influencing job satisfaction is the level of workplace support for diversity and equity, particularly supervisor and colleague attitudes toward disability (Schur et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2010). Other factors influencing positive workplace perceptions of workers with disabilities include perceptions of justice and fairness at work (Schur et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2010; Villanueva-Flores et al., 2014), involvement in decision-making (Schur et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2010), and high levels of workplace autonomy and flexibility (Jones, 2016; Schur et al., 2009). These studies suggest that librarians with disabilities may have different job perceptions and satisfaction levels than other librarians.

The study by Oud (2018) found that librarians with disabilities felt that their workplace was less accepting of diversity than non-disabled respondents did. In short, librarians belonging to any minority group, including those with disabilities, found their workplace less inclusive than non-minority librarians, although only librarians with disabilities were less satisfied with workplace levels of accessibility and disability awareness. From the literature, it is obvious that studies on librarians with disability are lacking in literature. Most of the disabilities library studies are focused on library users. These suggest that there is a literature gap on studies on librarians with disabilities in Nigeria.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Disability is undoubtedly among the most vulnerable conditions at risk of social exclusion. Librarianship is a caring profession and as such library workers often take on the role of care-giver; however, library workers with disabilities sometimes need to receive care. Research on the work experiences of people with disabilities in professional positions has consistently found that major barriers include a lack of understanding of disability, negative social constructions and stereotypes of disability as less productive, and the invisibility of disability within the workplace (Oud, 2019; Amadasun, 2020). The high number of workplace-related disability complaints indicates that despite legislation, employees with disabilities in Nigeria tend to have significant equity concerns at work. Evidence suggests that people with disabilities may lack opportunities for promotion, because their employers are reluctant to place them in roles where they manage others. The implication of disability on the economic, social and psychological well-being of the disabled is most severe in a society characterized by poverty, discrimination and lack of social welfare like Nigeria.

Almost all jobs can be performed productively by someone with a disability, and given the right environment; most people with disabilities can be productive. Based on the literature, social support was identified as a life saver. It is apt to note that people with disabilities are trainable with innate potentials and the ability to be productive, thus they require functional social support from people to

utilize their potentials. Several studies have shown that those that have supported are less vulnerable to stress. Through social support, problems are minimized and people's social, psychological, emotional, economic and political wellbeing are positively affected. The paper also argues that social support for people with disability should not be limited to providing information, giving emotional support, tangible gifts or materials; rather it encompasses demolishing structural barriers towards people with disabilities such as social exclusion, marginalization and stigmas which are most common in the work place.

THE WAY FORWARD

To achieve the long-lasting, vastly better development prospects and wellbeing of librarian with disabilities which lies at the heart of the sustainable development goals, removing the barriers which prevent them from participating actively in their work environment and having their voices heard is strongly advocated. Re-conceptualizing work and the workplace by leveraging the critical disability theory can help create a more inclusive environment. Expanding our conceptions of who belongs in the workplace and how we engage in work can improve organizational health for everyone. It is necessary to design safety net interventions to promote labor market inclusion of disabled people by including assistance and support services or covering the additional costs incurred by those who enter employment such as the cost of travel to work and of equipment. Monitoring and evaluating labor market programs aimed at facilitating and increasing employment of persons with disabilities in librarianship as well as scaling up those that deliver results with focus on inclusiveness is suggested. If librarians in positions of influence are not able to see that the workplace needs to be more inclusive and accessible, it is unlikely that progress will be made. Therefore, one major recommendation arising from this study is that all librarians could and should improve their awareness of disability-related issues in the workplace especially those in management positions. The use of ramp, elevator, good hand railings, pathway, low level shelves, light switches and sockets are necessary to attract people with disability to work and gain satisfaction in their workplace. Architecture of library buildings must take care of their needs as contained the Nigerian disability Act to enhance the wellbeing of librarians.

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