

Barriers to Participation of Women Students with Disabilities in University Education in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper discusses barriers to the participation of women with disabilities in Kenyan university education. While studies have shown that students with disabilities are increasingly enrolling in and completing university education, the number of women with disabilities in higher education remains low. This paper highlights the factors that contribute to this low participation in a Kenyan context. Among the factors examined are poverty, sexual abuse, discrimination, indifferent reactions, limited learning resources, and physical access. Recommendations for improvement are provided.

Keywords: Women, Disability, Kenya, Barriers, University/Higher Education

Research studies in Sub-Saharan Africa show that women continue to experience constraints in participating in postsecondary education¹. These constraints to educational achievement have subsequent implications on the individual development of women and the continent's overall development (Amutabi, 2003; Sifuna, 2006). Educating women is considered key to human development (World Bank, 2004). Education not only improves women's earning capacity but also society's general health and well-being (Psacharopoulos, 1994; Schultz, 2002; World Bank, 2004). In spite of these realities of the importance of education for women, attaining gender equity in education in higher education contexts in Africa has remained a challenge (Sifuna, 2006). Gender inequities in higher education in Africa date back to the colonial period when establishment of universities was dedicated to the production of colonial subjects to inherit masculine and ableist structures put in place by the colonialists (Mama, 2003; Opini, 2009). These structures persist to date and as a result few women with disabilities² in Africa have a high school or college diploma, let alone vocational training.

Background and Educational Policy Context

Until 1960, education in Kenya was offered to three distinct demographic populations: African, Asian and Arab, and European (Anderson, 1970; Bogonko, 1992). The colonial government's greatest interest was in educating the European and Asian populations and by the time of independence, educational infrastructure was more highly developed in these areas (Anderson, 1970). At independence in 1963, the government sought to reform the education system to meet local needs (Bogonko, 1992). Different Commissions were established to chart the way for these reforms. For people with disabilities, three commissions in particular had significant implications for the education of students with disabilities. These were the Ominde Commission of 1964, the Kamunge Report of 1988, and the Koech Report of 2000.

The Ominde Commission of 1964 sought to reform the education system and make it more responsive to the needs of the country (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006). The Commission recommended measures to address the Government's role in coordination and improve-

¹ This paper uses the words postsecondary education, higher education and university education interchangeably to refer to university.

² The terms people with disabilities and disabled people are also sometimes used interchangeably. The use of disabled people connotes Oliver's (1996) argument that individuals are disabled by their environment.

ment of service, quality, and delivery strategies in the disability sector (Ministry of Education, 2006). These recommendations set the pace for Government leadership in the provision and coordination of services to persons with disabilities and in the provision of technical, industrial, and vocational education for young adults with disabilities in Kenya. The Kamunge Report of 1988 focused on improving education quality and financing (Ministry of Education, 2006). The Report led to the introduction of the policy of cost-sharing between government, parents, and communities. This shift affected students with disabilities, especially those from poor backgrounds, because parents lacked the finances to support them. The Koech Report of 2000 looked into ways and means of enabling the education system to facilitate national unity, mutual social responsibility, accelerated industrial and technological development, life-long learning, and adaptation in response to changing circumstances. It also looked at the special educational needs of people with disabilities and ways of increasing their participation in day-to-day activities (Ochoggia, 2003).

The recommendations from these three reports prompted the Kenyan Government to recognize the existence of persons with disabilities among its citizenry (Ochoggia, 2003). Since then, considerable efforts have been made to increase government involvement and interest in the education of people with disabilities in the country (Ndurumo, 1993) but greater focus has been on primary education. Policies that address the educational needs of students with disabilities at secondary and postsecondary levels of education remain limited, showing that disability still occupies a low profile in Kenya's higher education. This is not to deny the significant steps the country has made in addressing the needs of people with disabilities since independence, as seen, for example, in the passing of the Persons with Disabilities Act (PDA) - ACT NO. 14 of 2003. The argument is that more needs to be done, particularly in terms of enforcing these laws and policies in higher education contexts.

Persons with Disabilities Act (PDA) - ACT NO. 14 of 2003

The Persons with Disabilities Act (PDA) was enacted by the Kenyan parliament on December 2003. The Act seeks to provide for the rights and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, with the ultimate goal of achieving equalization of opportunities for people

with disabilities (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2004; Kenya Law Reports, n.d.).

The passing of the PDA in Kenya was a result of both internal and external influences. Internally, the various organizations for people with disabilities in the country advocated for their rights and a legal framework that defines those rights. Externally, the international Disability Rights Movement and passing of legislations in countries such as the USA had an effect. Organized advocacy for the rights of people with disabilities started to be seen in Kenya in 1964 when a group of people with disabilities spent a whole night camping outside the state house in Nairobi. They wanted the then president, Jomo Kenyatta, to intervene in their discrimination in society (Disability Rights Promotion International [DRPI] Africa, n.d.). Beginning in the 1980s, disability activism in Kenya increased with corresponding global changes. African disability activists had been involved in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities since the historic advent of Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) in 1981 (Wakene, 2011). Following the United Nations (U.N.) Declaration on the Rights of Disabled People in 1975, the Kenyan government declared 1980 the National Year for Persons with Disabilities. Awareness campaigns on disability were launched during that year and continued during the U.N. International Year, 1981 (DRPI Africa, n.d.). In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law. The ADA, which borrowed a leaf from the civil rights movement, provided comprehensive civil rights protection for people with disabilities. The ADA interprets disability discrimination as a civil rights issue and mandates equal opportunities and reasonable accommodations for disability difference (Kaplan, n.d.). The ADA influenced disability law and activism in several countries around the world, Kenya included. In fact shortly after its passing, the Attorney General of Kenya appointed a Task Force to review laws relating to people with disabilities in 1993. This Task Force presented a report and a draft Bill to the Attorney General in 1997. The draft Bill was signed into law [the Persons with Disability Act] in December 2003 (DRPI Africa, n.d.).

The Persons with Disability Act (PDA) prohibits all manner of discrimination against persons with disabilities (African Union of the Blind [AFUB], KUB & CREAD, 2007). In terms of education, Section 18 of the PDA stipulates that: (1) No person or learning institution shall deny admission to a person with a dis-

ability to any course of study by reason only of such disability, if the person has the ability to acquire substantial learning in that course; (2) Learning institutions shall take into account the special needs of persons with disabilities with respect to the entry requirements, pass marks, curriculum, examinations, auxiliary services, use of school facilities, class schedules, physical education requirements and other similar considerations (Kenya Law Reports, n.d). With respect to accessibility, Section 21 states that "... persons with disabilities are entitled to a barrier-free and disability-friendly environment in order to enable them to have access to buildings, roads and other social amenities, and [are entitled to] assistive devices and other equipment to promote their mobility" (Kenya Law Reports, n.d).

Since the enactment of the PDA in 2003, efforts have been made to enhance access to education for people with disabilities in Kenya, but there are still gaps. In education, the Act provides a very general explanation of the discriminatory practices that are not allowed and also calls for establishment of special schools and institutions for people with disabilities. Although these provisions are important, they can be improved further by identifying some key aspects that educational institutions, especially universities and colleges, ought to address to improve access to higher education for people with disabilities.

Moreover, while the PDA challenges discrimination in education, training, employment, and social participation, it fails to acknowledge the diversity among peoples with disabilities. The Act does not pay attention to how disability affects people in relation to factors such as age, gender, religion, or social economic background. In addition, and as Mugo, Oranga, and Singhal (2010) argued, instead of addressing education as a human rights issue, the PDA takes a charity approach. The Act states that the government should make provisions for assistance to students with disabilities in the form of scholarships, loan programs, fee subsidies, and other similar forms of support in both public and private institutions (Section 7). Though the right to admission in learning institutions is strongly stated in section 18 (1), the Act is silent on circumstances where such a person cannot afford the costs of education (Mugo et al., 2010). Thus, while there is an emphasis on admission, there are neither compelling directives for the universities to provide supports and accommodations for students with disabilities upon admission nor clearly spelled out procedures and

consequences to ensure compliance. This leaves the quality and quantity of accommodations for students with disabilities at the discretion of the universities. Although the universities under study made attempts to develop procedures for ensuring compliance with the PDA, much of these efforts were a result of student and staff advocacy. One could argue, therefore, that the PDA lacks a strong implementation and evaluation framework (Mugo et al., 2010). The section that follows explains university admissions in Kenya.

University Admissions in Kenya

University education in Kenya is largely offered through public universities that have been established by Acts of Parliament. University education is also offered through private institutions with a charter (fully accredited), through private universities with a letter of Interim Authority, and through private institutions without a charter. Admission decisions concerning entrance into an undergraduate degree program in a public university are undertaken by a centralized body called the Joint Admissions Board (JAB) (Teng'o, 2003). The admission requirements for undergraduate programs are determined by the performance of students from year to year. However, the minimum requirement is an aggregate of C+ in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination or its equivalent. Applicants must also meet specific degree program subject cluster points. These entry requirements are the minimum and do not entitle an applicant to a place in a public university. Students who meet the aggregate grade set for that particular year get admission into university as "regular students" [also called JAB students] and are entitled to a student loan from the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) of Kenya. Students who do not meet the aggregate grade set for admission for that particular year, or those who want to join university as mature entrants, have to do so as "self-sponsored students" [also called parallel or private students] and their tuition fee is higher. Students wishing to join university as mature entrants qualify for the HELB loans if they are below 25 years of age. If they are over 25 years, the university has to make a case for them for HELB loans to be granted. Some of the reasons offered during that advocacy include disability and low social economic status. The majority of students with disabilities do not qualify because of curriculum barriers, among other challenges (Mugo et al., 2010). Thus, they end up joining the university as parallel students [i.e.,

private] and pay higher tuition fee than students who have been admitted through other means.

Women and Higher Education in Kenya

Enrollment in Kenyan universities has been increasing since the establishment of the first university, the University of Nairobi, in 1970. Total enrollment in public universities rose from 3,443 students in 1970 to 142,556 (52,945 females and 89,611 males) in 2009-2010. Despite these increments, the sector is still faced with issues of access, equity, and quality (Republic of Kenya, 2005 cited in Lelei, 2005, p. 155). Girls and women continue to be under-enrolled at the primary, secondary and university education levels. This gender gap widens as women enter university (Institute for Economic Affairs [IEA], 2008).

Table 1 shows that a greater population of men than women was enrolled in universities in Kenya between 2004 and 2007. Some literature shows that female student enrollment is much higher in private universities, where their numbers are well above 50% of the student body (Chege & Sifuna, 2006; Lelei, 2005). Most of these women do not have disabilities and come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, they can afford to pay for their education (Kigotho, 2011). Moreover, higher admissions in private universities do not suggest that there are fewer barriers for women in Kenya's private universities. The challenges are there but in most cases private universities offer admissions

to students who may have obtained the aggregate of a C+ but did not meet the average grade set for admission to public universities during a given year. Chege and Sifuna (2006) also explained that the higher enrollment of women in private universities is a result of the fact that these universities offer more arts-based programs (Bachelor of Arts programs) and more women are likely to go into such programs, compared to those that offer math and science-based subjects.

Gender also determines who is given time and resources to gain educational skills and, as a result, participate in economic roles in the public sphere (Kiluva-Ndunda, 2001). Girls continue to be seen primarily as potential mothers with the major responsibility of childbearing and childrearing, while sons are seen as future heads of households and breadwinners. Economic difficulties combined with the implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 1990s have also undermined efforts to equalize educational opportunities in Kenya (Nyaigotti-Chacha, 2004). Women are not only poorly represented in higher education as students but also as workers (Kamau, 1996; Onsongo, 2006). The conditions are worse for women with disabilities who are rarely represented as academics let alone administrators. There is scant information on their participation rates in Kenyan universities both as students and as academics. What we know in general is that the enrollment of students with disabilities in Kenyan schools is low. For example, a report issued

Table 1

Student Enrollment by Type of Educational Institution and Sex (1000s)

Enrollment	2004		2005		2006		2007	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Primary	3,815.5 (51.6%)	3,579.3 (48.4%)	3,902.7 (51.4%)	3,688.8 (48.6%)	3,896.6 (51.1%)	3,735.5 (48.9%)	4,258.6 (51.1%)	4,071 (48.9%)
Secondary	490.5 (53%)	435.6 (47%)	494.2 (52.9%)	440.0 (47.1%)	546.1 (53.1%)	484.0 (46.9%)	6393.9 (54.2%)	5408.7 (45.8%)
Universities*	58.0 (63.3%)	33.6 (36.7%)	58.8 (63.6%)	33.5 (36.3%)	68.3 (60.9%)	43.9 (39.1%)	70.8 (59.9%)	47.5 (40.1%)

* (1) Kenyan students in national Universities and accredited Universities

Notes: Sources: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2007); Ministry of Education (2010)

by the Elimu Yetu Coalition (2007) revealed that approximately 25% of the 3.5 million people with disabilities in Kenya (out of a total population of 38 million) are school-aged children and youths. About 80 to 90% of this population does not receive any services to help them engage in education. Additionally, on average, children with disabilities go to school when they are older than their counter parts (eight years and above); they become adults before they complete their educational programs. Low enrollments of children with disabilities at lower levels of education in Kenya translate into their low access to higher education, especially for women with disabilities. It is against this background that the larger project on which this article is based sought to examine the experiences of women students with disabilities in university education in Kenya. This article focuses on findings relating to the barriers women with disabilities who are enrolled in universities in Kenya face in successfully participating in the education system.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework informing this study was Goffman's theory of stigma. Goffman posits that in every society some persons have greater power than others and that those with power generally impose their norms, values, and beliefs on those that are without power. Those with power (the non-disabled) set the standards that are to be expected of all individuals within a given culture. They also determine how each member of that culture is to be categorized (Becker & Arnold, 1986) such that if one does not concur with those standards, then that individual is perceived as being "deviant" (Goffman, 1963). Goffman identified three forms of stigma which act to mark the less powerful as "different": (a) abominations of the body or various physical deformities, (b) blemishes of character or weak will, domineering or unnatural beliefs, values and attitudes, and (c) tribal stigma or race, nation and religion (see also Titchkosky, 2003). Each of these instances of stigma marks the individual who bears them as having "undesired differentness." That individual, thus, becomes perceived as being "deviant" or not quite human (Goffman, 1963). These different forms of stigma show how stigmatization creates a shared, socially maintained, and determined conception of a normal individual (the normate), sculpted by a social group attempting to define its own character and boundaries (Garland-Thomson, 1997). Dominant

groups construct stereotypes which stigmatize groups that they deem inferior and thus facilitate the exercising of authority over them (Goffman, 1963; Ainlay, Becker, & Coleman, 1986). This process also governs the treatment of people with disabilities in society. The dominant groups (who often happen to be the non-disabled) create standards, and those who do not fit those standards are seen as "different." This "differentness" is abstracted or reinforced by stigmatization, and this stigma facilitates social influence and control. One will find stigmatizing terms such as " 'cripple', 'crip' and 'gimp' and descriptors such as 'victim', 'unfortunate' and 'helpless' being used, wittingly or unwittingly, to reinforce the status of people with disabilities in society" (Tompkins, 1996, p. 38). These terms reflect the dominant group's tastes, opinions, and idealized descriptions of what is normal (Garland-Thomson, 1997). Stigma, therefore, is a comparative or scaling tool that is used to construct "in" and "out" groups in society.

Although Goffman's theory does not provide further explanations as to why society responds to people with disabilities in negative ways (Oliver, 1990; Titchkosky, 2003), his work still "underpins the nascent field of disability studies in the social sciences" (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 32). Goffman's theory places disability in its social context in order to show that disability is a result of complex intersecting social and cultural relations. The theory provides an understanding of the ways in which power relationships between the people with disabilities and those without disabilities are structured. It underpins the ways in which those without disabilities construct those with disabilities as "deviant" by creating standard rules that render the latter as "outsiders." Such domination limits people with disabilities' access to wealth, power, and other opportunities in society. Goffman's theory promotes a critical engagement with the relations of power embedded in societal institutions/structures that serve to reproduce and maintain social discrimination and inequities. Such a perspective is important in understanding the barriers women with disabilities face in Kenyan universities.

Methods

As already noted, the research findings reported in this paper are based on part of a larger research study that was conducted in Kenya in 2006. The study examined the experiences of women students with dis-

abilities in university education in Kenya. The goals of the study were to: (a) understand ways in which women with disabilities perceive their participation in university education in Kenya; (b) understand how disability impacts the lives and education of women with disabilities; (c) examine policy issues and generate recommendations for enhancement of inclusive practices in education, aimed at promoting access to higher education for women with disabilities in Kenya.

The participants were 20 female students with disabilities and four university officers drawn from two public universities in Kenya. The universities were selected based on their age, size, and availability of accessible transportation. The female students with disabilities who participated in this study had a range of disabilities (visible and invisible) and were either graduate or undergraduate students enrolled in the selected universities. The university officials interviewed had worked with students with disabilities in a university setting for at least one year.

Research participants were first recruited by contacting faculty known to the researcher in the selected sites and requesting them to assist in identifying potential interviewees, both students and university officers. Faculty were provided with copies of the research recruitment notices for distribution to potential study participants. Following these initial recruitment initiatives a few female students with disabilities came forward expressing interest in the study. After interviewing these initial women, the snowball sampling approach to recruitment was adopted henceforth (see Table 2). Participants were requested during the interviews or through informal conversations, to recommend other individuals who could be interviewed (Creswell, 2005; Trochim, 2002).

Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a supplementary questionnaire conducted by the author. The goal of the supplementary questionnaire was to gather demographic data about the study participants and was distributed at the end of each interview. Semi-structured interview guides were used to interview the female students with disabilities and the university officials regarding their experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and policies relating to disability in the university. Documents including statements of philosophy, strategic plans, student and faculty handbooks, as well as websites of the universities in question were reviewed to examine the stated policies and support systems put in place

to address the needs of students with disabilities. The findings from these documents were compared with information generated through the interviews regarding ways universities support students with disabilities.

Research interviews started with general discussions of daily happenings so as to create rapport with the interviewees (Bogdan & Bigden, 2006). The interviews then proceeded as conversations, although conversations with a “guided purpose or plan” (Najarian, 2006). This allowed for maintenance of some order in the interviews and facilitated asking similar questions of each respondent, while leaving room for the participants to discuss their experiences in their own way. Participants were also encouraged to talk about their personal biographies and experiences in order for them to have some control over what was discussed. This approach led to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences (Vernon, 1996). Probes were used to elicit more information whenever participants raised useful points that needed further elaboration (Creswell, 2005). For instance, when students talked about challenges with the curriculum and accommodations, the author asked them to elaborate on those challenges. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Because of distance and communication limitations, member checking was not done once transcripts or initial thematic analyses. This was explained to the participants during the interview process and the participants consented.

Research data were analyzed qualitatively. Findings from document analysis and those from the interviews with the students with disabilities and university officers were triangulated to verify information provided during the face-to-face interviews. Triangulation was followed by a refocus in the literature for further analysis and interpretation of research findings.

Results

Barriers to Participation in University Education

The female students with disabilities interviewed for this study identified a number of obstacles that hindered them from successfully participating in university education. These were a blend of social, economic, cultural, and political factors. Specifically, they identified five categories of obstacles including poverty; risks of sexual abuse and harassment; discrimination; insufficient learning resources; and physical access, accommodation and transportation.

Table 2

Female Students with Disabilities [Note: All names used herein are aliases]

Name	Age	Type of Disability¹	Self-Sponsored JAB²	Program of Study/Level	Marital Status	Name of University
Afya	Mid 40s	Blind	Self-sponsored ³	M.A.	Married	Ongozi
Aminia	Early 20s	Physical	JAB	B.Ed.	Single	Khafee
Aziza	21	Partially Blind	Self-sponsored	B.Ed.	Single	Ongozi
Dada	Mid 40s	Physical	Self-sponsored	B.Ed.	Single	Ongozi
Dhahabu	23	Blind	Self-sponsored	B.Ed.	Single	Ongozi
Faizah	48	Physical	Self-sponsored	B.Ed.	Divorced	Ongozi
Fedha	Early 20s	Physical	JAB	B.A.	Single	Khafee
Feruzi	24	Physical	Self-sponsored	B. Comm.	Single	Khafee
Hawa	23	Partially Blind	Self-sponsored	B.Ed.	Single	Ongozi
Hereni	24	Physical	JAB	B.Ed.	Single	Khafee
Jamila	Mid 30s	Deaf	Self-sponsored	M.A.	Single	Khafee
Johari	23	Physical	Self-sponsored	B.A.	Single	Khafee
Karuli	22	Physical	Self-sponsored	Law	Single	Khafee
Lulu	44	Blind	Self-sponsored	B.Ed.	Married	Ongozi
Mkufu	23	Physical	JAB	B.Comm.	Single	Ongozi
Nadra	24	Partially Blind	Self-sponsored	B.Ed.	Single	Ongozi
Pete	34	Physical	Scholarship	B.A.	Single	Khafee
Shani	28	Blind	JAB (for undergraduate)	M.A.	Single	Ongozi
Yakuti	22	Physical	JAB	BScN	Single	Khafee
Zumaridi	Early 20s	Physical	Self-sponsored	B.A.	Single	Khafee

Note¹: None of the study participants had psychiatric or learning disabilities. From my interviews with the university officers, they indicated that these students rarely come out because of stigma and also because they can easily pass unless one has close interactions with them. Efforts to recruit this group of students were futile.

Note²: JAB students are those who meet the aggregate grade for university admission set for a particular year and therefore get admission into university as “regular students.” They are entitled to a student loan from the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) of Kenya.

Note³: Self-sponsored students may meet the minimum requirement for university admission in a particular year [i.e., an aggregate of C+ in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination or its equivalent] not the aggregate grade set for that particular year to get admission. They end up joining university as private stream students also called “self-sponsored” or “parallel” or “private” students. Their tuition fee is higher and they may not necessarily get HELB loans.

Poverty

Research shows that women and children with disabilities experience higher levels of poverty mainly because of structural inequalities in resource distribution (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). Consequently, girls and women with disabilities have limited access to education, especially in low income countries (UNESCO, 1995 cited by Barnes & Mercer, 2003, p. 144). Participants explained that poverty prevented most female students with disabilities from participating in higher education. Many of the women with disabilities in the university came from low socio-economic backgrounds and were self-sponsored students, meaning that they paid higher tuition fee, compared to students admitted directly through the universities' joint admissions' board (JAB students). Although they got government loans, the money was not enough for their fee, accommodations, learning materials, and general upkeep. Lulu, a visually impaired Bachelor of Education student from the University of Ongozi, explained:

Most of us come from very poor families, yet we come here as self-sponsored students, which mean[s] we pay more. Right now, private stream students pay over 60,000 shillings [about 600USD]. Imagine a person like me paying that much. I have a family and my three children also need school fees in high school and for other upkeep. The government just gives us that little amount which is not enough.

Poor students with disabilities face significant challenges meeting high tuition costs in Kenyan universities. These high costs are an additional concern to mature students with disabilities who have families to support. In Kenya, high school education is not free, students have to pay tuition and accommodation fees (for those in schools offering boarding facilities). Lulu's concerns call for a review of the way higher education students in Kenya are supported. Without proper financial supports, many students with disabilities will not be able to attend university, even when they get admission as noted by Yakuti, a nursing student at the University of Khafee who has a physical disability:

There are many disabled students who I know got admission to come to university, but because their parents cannot afford the fee, they decided to take them to colleges, which are cheaper and which run

two-year courses. Others did not even go to those colleges because of lack of money. Some come, but may end up dropping out, if they don't get financial help.

Dhahabu, a visually impaired Bachelor of Education student from the University of Ongozi, narrated the problems she faced when she had not completed paying fees:

I haven't cleared the fee... before you get an exam card you are harassed in the exam room to the extent that sometimes you even end up missing the exam. You are disturbed in accommodation, your door is locked in the room where you stay, your beddings are taken away and you sleep on a bare bed. ... Housekeepers come and say they have been authorized by the manager and they pick the beddings when you are there. You sleep on the bare bed until you pay; that is when they will return your beddings.

Here, Yakuti and Dhahabu are talking about the consequences of lack of finances on the part of students with disabilities once enrolled in university in terms of paying tuition, learning, and accommodation. This leaves them unsettled and therefore affects their learning.

Risks of Sexual Abuse and Harassment

The women remarked that the problem of sexual abuse and harassment affected the transition of girls with disabilities from high school to postsecondary education. As such, a majority of the women interviewed identified "dealing with men" as one of their biggest challenges in the university:

One of my greatest challenges is the men. Once the men realize that you have a certain problem, they will want to take advantage of your situation. So I have been very vigilant and I have been very aggressive, especially when I realize that that is the motive. So I put them off immediately. (Nadra - visually impaired, Bachelor of Education, Ongozi University)

In the above response, Nadra points to men's tendency to think of women with disabilities as "easy subjects to prey on" (Wagner & Magnusson, 2005), a practice men see as part of exercising their masculinity (Weiser, 2005). Nadra learned to be firm and on

guard, and noted that, if she did not defend herself, there were chances of being abused and this would disrupt her education.

Dhahabu added that risks of sexual abuse and harassment created fear and insecurity in women with disabilities:

Sometimes you fear to walk around the university because there are so many things happening around you. You fear to walk alone because of fear of being raped and there have been some rape cases on campus. Or sometimes I am in the room alone and I find myself fearing that maybe if I open the door someone will get in and will start beating me at night or raping me. You just fear.

Dhahabu explained female students with disabilities' feelings of insecurity on campus, especially at night. Although she did not provide succinct evidence of how widespread cases of sexual abuse and harassment were on campus, she showed signs of being worried about her safety in our conversations. When asked about measures taken to ensure safety on campus, one of the officers interviewed from the University of Khafee insisted that campus was very safe and shrugged off students with disabilities' claims of possibilities of sexual abuse and harassment on campus. Such "politically correct" responses minimized the problem of abuse and left students with no clear understanding of measures to take to ensure their safety, hence their fears and concerns. As Wane and Opini (2006) argued, loopholes in school structures, administration, and leadership contribute to the increased cases of gendered violence in Kenyan schools. Serious concerns remain regarding the ability of women with disabilities and women in general to pursue their education and complete it in a risk-free environment.

Discrimination

Study respondents pointed to discriminatory experiences in student associations, leadership, in the classroom, and in familial contexts. Some of these discriminatory experiences were linked to age differences and to having a disability. Faizah, a Bachelor of Education student at the University of Ongozi with a physical disability, narrated how younger students perceived mature students when they initially joined university:

When we came, these young ladies and men (referring to JAB students) felt like we are invading their assets, we are not supposed to be here, we are supposed to be somewhere else - we should leave this compound for them. So they used to talk about old people, calling them names. But you find that when these young people go to class they are not serious with studies, because they don't face the same level of problems, since they are being sponsored by their parents, and since they get HELB loans and are more comfortable. They even miss classes and go for outings, but when it comes back to class work and during exam time you find them panicking because they have not covered much and the old wazees (mature students) are relaxed. So when they realized the wazees are doing better than them, that thing stopped. Now they are friendly, they come to visit, borrowing stuff and we work with them very well.

Some students with disabilities come to university as mature students and this is challenging. Faizah illustrated how younger students tended to look down upon older/mature students. She pointed to rifts that occurred between the two groups when they first joined university. Those rifts narrowed following better academic performance by mature students, and due to the latter's problem-solving skills and life experience.

The problem of discrimination also extended to student leadership and representations. Fedha, a Bachelor of Arts student from the University of Khafee who has a physical disability, revealed how students with no disabilities were reluctant to appoint students with disabilities as student representatives on claims that their impairment will deter them from performing their duties:

When it comes to representing others in the university, there are those disabled students who have been vying but I have not seen any of them being elected. It is like they are kind of discriminated against because you can find some posters like maybe someone has been told like you, you don't walk, how will you run around and lead people when we are organizing for strikes? They even hold campaigns and talk like that.

Dhahabu equally explained how impairment was also equated to "not [being] a good student" especially

when lecturers required students to engage in cooperative learning activities:

When you are in a class and people are forming groups, discussion groups or groups to write some kind of term papers or even doing research on a certain question, some people tend to choose themselves and leave the disabled students alone. You find that in most cases disabled students are in one group. Some students are not willing to make a group with you because they claim that they will be going to the library alone to look for the relevant books and you won't be there so there is not much help you will provide. They won't accommodate you in their group.

All these narratives demonstrate the intolerance displayed by students without disabilities and their tendency to look down upon students with disabilities thinking that the latter are incapable of academic success. These findings call for a need to dismantle ableist gazes that are deeply entrenched in the students' minds and in society as a whole.

Outside campus, students with disabilities also experienced discrimination from peers. One respondent explained how non-disabled peers tried to discourage her from pursuing university education while another one suggested that she go for surgical reconstructions to "normalize" her body:

Sometimes I could meet people who are very negative and they discourage me from continuing with school. When I was in Form One this lady wanted me to go do surgery so I could look more "normal" and yet I was not sick. But I didn't give up. Although when it comes to doing stuff, we could do it slower and take much more time, but it is okay. (Mkufu – Physical impairment, Bachelor of Commerce, Ongozi University).

Mkufu's experiences point to hooks' (1992) observation that there is "power in the looks." People with no disability are so caught up in a culture that emphasizes physical appearance as a form of cultural capital that whoever does not match up to those looks is compelled to conform to belong. Mkufu's response also confirms Goffman's (1963) assertion that the powerful in society set particular standards, such that those who do not meet those standards are considered "devi-

ants" that need to be "normalized." The lady assumed that there was something "wrong" with Mkufu's looks, which translated into limited chances of academic success. Mkufu fell short of the idealized "normal" image and needed some fixing (Porter, 1997). Nonetheless, Mkufu chose not to conform to these physical ideals. She was contented with who she is and hence, challenged the stereotypical assumptions of "excellence" often reserved for non-disabled bodies.

Aminia, a Bachelor of Education student at the University of Khafee with a physical impairment, added that the "misreading" of the "disabled body" also occurs within families:

In our area there was this lady with a physical disability. Her parents are not very well off. She did not go to school, not even to nursery, but the parents took other kids to school. She died in 2005. They didn't take her to school in the name of not having money but others were taken and they are now in fact working. Even the siblings who were working then did not support her; they didn't appreciate the way she was. Both of her legs were paralyzed. She could not walk so she relied on people to move her around.

Aminia reveals the plight of a woman with a disability who was discriminated against within her own family and who could not get the required support to help her lead an independent life. Evident here is how families make choices in terms of who to invest in because they have expectations of returns of some kind, monetary or otherwise. Women with disabilities are disadvantaged as it is presumed that they may not contribute much in return (Kiluva-Ndunda, 2001).

Insufficient Learning Resources

Study participants reported a lack of resources such as consistent readers (for blind students), enough books, Braille materials, and sign interpreters for deaf students. For visually impaired students, the absence of reliable readers affected their successful participation in the learning process.

We could get readers at the beginning of the semester, volunteers could come - maybe five or six - but all of them are students and they also have their work to do. You could make a timetable with them but out of the five or six maybe only two may show

up, keep the time and come and read for us; so reading was a problem. (Afya – Visually impaired, Master of Arts, Ongozi University).

Visually impaired students had to deal with uncertainties when it came to accessing learning information that is in regular print. Since they relied on students to serve as volunteer readers, these readers got busy in the middle of the semester and failed to honor their volunteer commitments. This left students with disabilities stranded at times. Braille materials and books were also a huge problem as explained by Afya:

The college does not supply materials like Braille papers. One has to buy. I was taking religious studies and we wrote very many notes. So I was to spare maybe KShs. 2,000 for Braille papers per semester. If I did not have those papers, I could not write the notes. And also the fact that there were no Braille books was a challenge when an individual wanted to read and there are no readers to help.

The narratives above demonstrated that insufficient resources worked against women with disabilities' learning needs and this compromised their overall academic achievements.

Physical Access, Accommodation, & Transportation

Participants from Khafee University described how their halls of residence were completely inaccessible and had no accessible washrooms. The same applied to the library, administrative buildings, and lecture halls:

The hostels have nothing like ramps or elevators. As I told you, even the accountant is carried up the stairs. The library used to have lifts (elevators) but they are not functional anymore. The classes are sometimes held in the lower buildings and others in the tall buildings over there which have no lifts either. (Hereni – Physical disability, Bachelor of Education, Khafee University).

Ongozi University respondents noted that their halls of residence were fairly accessible but there were some challenges that needed to be addressed, too. Dhahabu explained:

I think there is also discrimination in the hostels,

like these ones for the ladies. The rooms that are reserved for the visually impaired or the disabled in general are now being given to these university students' organization officials. So, visually impaired students who are supposed to be in single rooms, we are meant to stay two or three, like here it should be one person but we are two; room six is a [university students' organization] official and they are not willing to come out; they should at least do something about it. And have you reported this to the dean of students or to any other official? Yeah, we have tried so much but they are not willing to come out, we don't know what is happening up there [meaning administration].

There is favoritism in offering accommodation services. Students are put into hierarchies and those in positions of power (i.e., student union officials) are given preference when it comes to allocation of single rooms, which are meant to be reserved for students with disabilities. This shows how power operates at the expense of disability.

With regard to transportation, study participants from Khafee noted that there were no such services organized by the university, whereas those at Ongozi remarked that the university was trying, even though these services had been deteriorating over the years:

There is nothing like transportation for disabled students in Khafee. (Zumaridi- Physically disabled, Bachelor of Education, Khafee).

The tuk-tuks are very few, only two and we are about 50, so they cannot help all of us. They are not always there. They have been breaking down with no replacements because they say there are no spare parts in the market. Subsequently, they are not reliable that much, especially when going to class. (Dhahabu - Ongozi) - [Tuk-tuks are motorized rickshaws (three wheeler motor vehicles) commonly used as a mode of transportation (especially for taxi business) in India and Thailand. They are popular amongst tourists for their novelty value. Tuk-tuks are occasionally faster than taxis in heavy traffic as weaving in and out is easier, but generally about the same or slower (<http://www.into-asia.com/bangkok/tuktuk/>)].

In the above responses, participants are concerned

about lack of or continued deterioration of transport services for students with disabilities. It is clear that the universities have failed to make the institutions accessible to students with disabilities. During a discussion with one of the officials at Khafee University, she indicated that “no one really cared about students with disabilities” and that services such as transportation were not a priority for the university (Sauda – University Officer). This shows that the universities do not recognize that inaccessibility further disables students with disabilities (Holloway, 2001). It also shows how, within the universities, “physical access means provision of ‘minimum’ facilities rather than ‘optimal’ facilities which are required to enable students with disabilities participate equally in the learning process” (DES, 1984, p. 1 cited in O’Connor & Robinson, 1999, p. 92).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has examined barriers to the participation of female students with disabilities in university education in Kenya. Study participants identified five categories of factors that limited their participation in university which included poverty, sexual abuse and harassment, discrimination, lack of sufficient learning resources, and a constraining physical environment. In spite of these challenges, the female students with disabilities in this study persisted. Many demonstrated that disability is not inability. Such a positive attitude and resilience is worth emulating especially by those thinking of furthering their education.

With regards to poverty, participants pointed to financial constraints and talked of the high tuition costs for self-sponsored students compared to regular students. The differences in fee charges have implications on transitions from high school to university, persistence, and completion rates on the part of women with disabilities. The introduction of the HELB loan programs by the Ministry of Education and scholarships in an attempt to assist needy students is to be hailed. However, policies governing the awarding of these loans and scholarships need to be reviewed. Students with disabilities incur additional disability-related expenses in their pursuit of higher education compared to non-disabled students. The ministry should take into account these additional costs and consider providing additional funding to enable these to students meet their educational expenses with lesser

strain. Additionally, there is the constituency development fund (CDF) which is supposed to assist students in need. Although students with disabilities applied for these funds, only a few were successful. The government should review the rules governing these funds to ensure that they more fully benefit deserving students, especially those with disabilities. Research should also be done to evaluate the successes and/or failures of the CDF in addressing the challenge of limited access to education due to financial constraints and explore the possibility of free secondary education. Future research should also explore possibilities of allowing students with disabilities to join university as JAB students as part of the affirmative action policy and assess the implications of such a move to both disabled and non-disabled students.

It is clear that disability discrimination persists not only in the university system but also in the Kenyan society as a whole. For example, having a disability and being older exacerbated the marginalization that respondents experienced. Younger non-disabled students found it a bit “odd” studying with mature students. What is happening in higher education institutions is a reflection of the wider society. Changes focusing on government and universities or other educational institutions alone are not sufficient. The problem of ableism should be redressed, starting at the family level, through disability awareness campaign programs and other strategies that debunk ableist ideologies and sensitize society that disability is by no means inability. Research examining how such campaigns can be implemented would be helpful.

The women also talked about inaccessible campus buildings and lack of transportation. They recommended a reevaluation of in-campus transportation so as to serve students with disabilities adequately. The slow response of the university to addressing physical access issues made these students feel that the university was neglecting them, putting the needs of students with disabilities as a low priority to the university, or unable to understand their needs (O’Connor & Robinson, 1999). These findings challenge the universities to look at improving physical access as an institutional responsibility.

Sexual abuse and harassment of women with disabilities needs to be addressed. Abuse leads to emotional distress, anxiety, and anger, all of which have implications for academic outcomes. Fighting this vice requires that universities develop a comprehensive

approach that takes into account the socio-cultural factors that contribute to sexual abuse. This approach must be supported by legislation and policies to protect women with disabilities and to ensure that their learning environment is risk-free. The women should continue taking precautions especially walking at night on campus and also pressure the university to offer walk-safer programs.

Additionally, research findings confirm that lack of sufficient learning resources affect the learning experiences of women with disabilities at the university. Efforts should be made to ensure there are sufficient library materials, accommodation services, curriculum, extra-curricular support services and other facilities. The university should also ensure that distribution of these resources is carried out in an equitable manner free of favoritism.

Lastly, this paper acknowledges the limitations of reflecting on the experiences of women students with disabilities who have been successful in attending university and who were able to stay in university and continue with their studies. This focus left out important voices of women who were perhaps unable or discouraged and, therefore, did not get to attend university or those who got into university and dropped out for different reasons. Future studies should consider including these women's experiences, too.

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