



# Lived Employment Experiences of Persons with Physical Disabilities in Nepal: A Phenomenological Study

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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## ABSTRACT

The study collates preliminary evidence of perceived enablers, barriers, and solutions in employment participation in Nepal through the experiences of persons with physical disabilities. A qualitative study was conducted in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, with 12 face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and validated before being analysed thematically. The study followed the COREQ checklist while reporting the results. Thirteen themes were derived and grouped into enablers, barriers, and solutions in employment participation. Results demonstrate that over-protective behaviour from family members, discrimination by employers in recruitment, and continuance in employment were barriers. Childhood education, family support, priority during the recruitment process to encourage employment participation, and disability-friendly policies are the key to enabling employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 1 defines a person with a disability as ‘someone who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’ (UN 2006). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 15.3% of global citizens have some form of disability, with 2.9% having severe functioning limitations (WHO and World Bank 2011). More than 80% of persons with disabilities reside in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Gottlieb et al. 2009; WHO 2015), such as Nepal, and they are the marginalised and vulnerable in society (WHO 2017).

The deep-rooted misconceptions of disability are subject to each individual’s interpretation of traditional beliefs (Devkota, Kett & Groce 2019). Within many families, a person with a disability is considered a burden and is disfavoured because disability is perceived to be a result of past life sins (Baral 2018). As a result, persons with disabilities are largely limited within their homes and excluded from community engagements like education, sports, and employment (Rawal 2017). Discrimination and social barriers are mentioned as major hindering factors for persons with disabilities’ participation in employment opportunities (Kuznetsova & Yalcin 2017).

The employment rate of persons with disabilities is meagre compared to the typical population (Friedman 2020; Morris et al. 2018) and is also declining (Mitra 2008). The employment rate differs between developed countries and LMICs and by socio-demographic characteristics (Mitra & Sambamoorthi 2006; Morris et al. 2018). Family and society further marginalise women with disabilities from exercising their rights in education, employment, and marriage as many LMICs, such as Nepal, majorly favour male children (Devkota, Kett & Groce 2019). Moreover, the exclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce is higher in LMICs, and without adaptive employment, socio-economic dignity is unlikely to be achieved (Lamichhane 2012).

Persons with disabilities are likely to be financially dependent on the family because of employment constraints (Poudyal et al. 2018). The challenges persons with disabilities face in employment participation hinder the global poverty reduction strategy (Lamichhane, Ballabha & Kartika 2014; WHO and World Bank 2011). If global poverty is to be reduced, persons with disabilities must participate in and benefit from the development process (Commonwealth of Australia 2015; Lamichhane, Ballabha & Kartika 2014), including adaptive employment. Working is not only about economic wellbeing; it is a way of human life and enhances skill development in areas like socialisation, communication, and self-esteem (Wehman 2011). Research done in Nepal found that households with at least one person with a disability had lower living standards, while those living in rural areas were poorer than in urban areas (Eide, Neupane & Hem 2016). The co-existing limitations of disability and poverty directly impact the participation of persons with disabilities in society because of poor finances and being excluded from access to rehabilitation services, such as prosthetic services (Järnhammer et al. 2018). At a national level, the economic consequence of excluding persons with disabilities from employment is a 3% to 7% loss in any nation’s gross domestic product (Buckup 2009). Moreover, when a high unemployment rate is combined with barriers in attitude, communication, and physical accessibility, it may affect the national economy of any country (Banks & Polack 2014).

A systematic review shows that personal and environmental factors, such as low accessibility of medical and transport services and lack of educational qualifications and skills, were significant barriers to employment for persons with disabilities (Morwane, Dada & Bornman 2021). However, most research is done in high-income countries and has mainly focused on barriers. Studies from LMICs and research studying perceived solutions for the employment enhancement of persons with disabilities by themselves are scant (Morwane, Dada & Bornman 2021; Vornholt et al. 2018). It is necessary to identify factors that restrict and support persons with disabilities’ employment to suggest solutions promoting and enhancing their employment prospects in LMICs such as Nepal.

To address this issue, CRPD has strongly advocated for the rights of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others, without any barriers, under Article 27 (UN 2006), which Nepal ratified in 2010. Within seven years of ratifying the CRPD, Nepal formulated the Act

Relating to the Rights of Persons with Disability (2017) to adopt a dignified human rights-based approach towards persons with disabilities and to comply with the stipulations of the CRPD (Government of Nepal 2017). The act developed from the Protection and Welfare of the Disabled Persons Act 1982.

While few steps seem to have been accomplished by Nepal regarding CRPD in general, a gap is still there for persons with disabilities to participate in work and employment. Therefore, this research collates preliminary evidence from persons with physical disabilities on their experiences of employment in Kathmandu, Nepal, and also the perceived situation of employment participation or the fulfilment of the projections of CRPD Article 27, Work and Employment. Furthermore, the research was conducted to identify specific perceived enablers, barriers, and solutions for persons with disabilities in employment participation.

## METHODS

### STUDY SETTING

The Nepal national census reported that almost 2% of the population has a disability, with 0.7% having a physical disability, and among the population with a disability, 36.3% have a physical disability. At 6,030 people, Kathmandu district reported the highest prevalence of physical disability (CBS 2012). Kathmandu was chosen as the research site because Kathmandu Valley is the centre of employment openings for people with disabilities in Nepal, and literature on people with a physical disability residing in Kathmandu Valley was found to be quite limited.

The current phenomenological study using qualitative design was conducted in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley in July 2018.

### STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

The research team prepared a list of prospective participants in consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and not-for-profit organisations working in the disability sector in Kathmandu. People with a physical disability having any employment participation experience, residing in Kathmandu, and between the ages of 15 and 65 were considered while preparing the list. A total of 43 persons with disabilities were identified, and samples were purposively recruited. Data saturation was achieved with 12 in-depth interviews when interview answers and codes became repetitive with no new data and emerging themes. Participants ranged from 28 to 50 years of age, with a mean age of 39 years.

**Table 1** shows intersectional diversity among participants regarding socio-demographic and disability-related characteristics.

### DATA COLLECTION

In-depth interviews were carried out applying a semi-structured interview guideline. The instrument was pilot tested by people with lived experience fulfilling the inclusion criteria for a contextual depth of research inquiry. Interviews were conducted face to face in participants' preferred settings. The interview duration ranged from 45 to 60 minutes.

The in-depth interview guideline was set to capture responses concerning CRPD Article 27 section 1, such as discrimination during recruitment, hiring, and employment; support from the employer to persons with physical disabilities; and a disability-friendly workplace. Further, it examined if the labour market is open, inclusive, and accessible for persons with disabilities. The details of the semi-structured questionnaire are in *Additional File 1*.

The research team met at the end of each day to review the findings, and when no new information had arisen, we concluded that data saturation had been reached and stopped collecting data.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were transcribed verbatim in Nepali language and then translated into English. These transcribed data were further supplemented with the interviewer's notes. To validate the data collected, all transcribed data were compared with the recording. Member checking technique,

VARIABLES	NUMBER
<b>Age group</b>	
25–34	7
35–50	5
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	6
Female	6
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Brahmin/Chhetri	5
Dalit	1
Indigenous	6
<b>Educational status</b>	
Higher secondary education	2
Undergraduate	4
Post-graduate	6
<b>Impairment</b>	
Amputation	1
Leg Length Discrepancy	1
Post-Polio Residual Paralysis (PPRP)	5
Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)	5
<b>Assistive technology</b>	
Crutches	1
Electric scooter	1
Prosthesis	3
Special shoes	1
Wheelchair	6
<b>Participation in Disability Movement</b>	
Yes	10
No	2
<b>Employment status</b>	
Currently Employed	10
Employed in the past	2

**Table 1** Diversity of participants.

also known as participant validation or respondent validation technique, was then applied to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and to address researcher biases (Birt et al. 2016). This was done by emailing the transcribed data, handing it in-person to the participants, and having phone conversations to ensure validity. Next, thematic analysis was applied to generate codes and derive relevant themes from codes collated (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas 2013). After that, generated themes were reviewed to see their relation to the codes. Finally, the themes were refined with specific titles by collapsing and adding code categories. This resulted in 339 codes generating 13 specific themes. The Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) were used to report the findings (Tong, Sainsbury & Craig 2007).

## ETHICS APPROVAL

Ethical approval was received from the Ethical Review Board of Nepal Health Research Council in July 2018 with an approval ID as 351-2018. The persons with physical disabilities were ensured of their confidentiality, voluntary participation, and right to refuse participation at any time. Before conducting interviews, all participants gave their verbal and written consent. Their identity was kept anonymous using identification codes, and data has been managed with strict confidentiality.

## RESULTS

The study found 13 themes for the employment participation of persons with physical disabilities. Furthermore, based on the characteristics, themes were divided into three groups (described in *Table 2*). Thus, three themes that facilitate employment are grouped as enablers, six themes that hinder employment participation are grouped as barriers, and four themes that can address barriers in employment participation are grouped as solutions.

S. NO.	THEMES	
1	Family support for quality education and employment	<b>Enablers</b>
2	Personal factors; acceptance of disability and building motivation	
3	Need for social identity and portrayal of positive message in society	
4	Family's over-protective behaviour hinders the social and functional independence of persons with disabilities	<b>Barriers</b>
5	Recruiters doubt the working capacity of persons with disabilities	
6	Discrimination in continuance of employment	
7	Intersectional experiences in the job market	
8	Limited access to job information	<b>Solutions</b>
9	Inaccessible recruitment settings and workplaces	
10	Giving priority to persons with disabilities during the recruitment process	
11	Build awareness about disability laws	
12	Continued partnership between OPDs and EDPs required for inclusion in the diverse employment sector	
13	Government should develop innovative employment support schemes	

**Table 2** Derived themes on employment participation among Nepalese persons with physical disabilities.

## ENABLERS

### Family support for quality education and employment

Participants strongly emphasised that many families enrol their children with disabilities in schools to ensure the child goes to school. However, when families take a keen interest in enrolling their children in quality schools where they can optimally learn and participate overall, it can highly contribute to positive educational outcomes.

Family and society must prioritise to send their child with a disability to a good school, not just any school. (28 years, Female)

When participants linked employment to the quality of education they had received, many reported feeling disadvantaged in the employment sector because they lacked the perceived level of competencies required, such as English language skills, confidence, and other professional foundations. One participant expressed how strong educational foundations lead to employment, and such support should be provided to persons with disabilities from early on.

Creating a strong educational bottom foundation in an enabling environment then providing employment preparation support to work in a reasonably adjusted workplace is highly needed. Families must make these timely choices while the government should take responsibility at a national level to make education and employment accessible. (34 years, Male)

Family encouragement to hold a job has also enabled employment participation for the participants. One participant said,

My family has always encouraged me to find employment. So, they were happy to learn that I got a teaching job in a secondary school, a comfortable job that suited the functional capacity of my physical disability. (33 years, Female)

Another participant shared separate perspectives of her two families—the residential organisation where she grew up and her biological family, her relatives—highlighting their encouraging role for her education and employment:

I consider the residential organisation where I grew up like my family. They always supported me to study and encouraged me to work. This enabled me to become self-

sustainable and a contributing member of society after I transitioned to living in the community. (29 years, Female)

### **Personal factors; acceptance of disability and building motivation**

Participants emphasised that persons with disabilities must avoid the mindset that they should be hired exclusively because of their disability. Instead, they must accept their disability because it is vital to building motivation and preparing for and finding jobs to become financially independent in the long term.

Persons with disabilities should build a positive mindset that disability is a part of society; it can happen to anyone and accept that everyone including persons with disabilities can be a part of society. (50 years, Male)

Participants reported that personal factors play an essential role in elaborating knowledge and skills. Persons with disabilities should focus on improving the skills necessary for their desired job or task and take up internships and volunteering work to motivate themselves and hone knowledge and skills to prepare for employment.

Another reiterated,

Persons with disabilities must develop the urge to improve skills in areas of interest and believe that our capabilities can be useful. (39 years, Male)

### **Need for social identity and portrayal of positive message in society**

Many participants expressed that being employed meant having a dignified status in society, portraying a positive message that persons with disabilities can contribute to the labour force.

As a person with a disability, being employed gives a positive message in the society, like that of being a role model. (50 years, Male)

Another participant linked being employed as proof against the segment of society that discounts the capacity of people with disabilities.

For me, being employed proves to society that I have the capacity and strength to become independent because most families disregard their child with disability thinking of them as a burden with no capacity to do anything. (35 years, Male)

## **BARRIERS**

### **Family's over-protective behaviour hinders the social and functional independence of persons with disabilities**

Many participants expressed that, in Nepal, families are overly protective of a person with a disability, which is more harmful than good for the child or persons with disabilities in general. Parents will complete all tasks for the child, taking away the person's right to learn new skills to function independently in any given environment. While these actions arise from love or safety reasons, participants were against it.

Despite the severity of a disability, one day persons with disabilities are likely to live on their own without parents or caretaking family members. Family and society should not be pitiful and easily provide or do a task for them; instead, they should allow the person to learn and complete a task independently. Over protectiveness from families can make persons with disabilities dependent in the long run and leave them with no capacity to do daily tasks independently when caretaking family members are not by their side. (36 years, Male)

Additionally, building internal family and social relationships can lead to optimum functional independence.

Families should encourage sibling bonding and give equal affection and time to all children to foster siblings' love and care for each other. (33 years, Male)

Another participant shared,

My relatives have a “charity-based mindset”. When I got my first job, they asked me why I felt the need to work and invited me to stay with them, so they could care and provide for me. They assume participating in employment and functioning outside of the home is quite challenging because of my disability which is not always the case. However, I don’t agree with them as I prefer to be as self-sustainable as I can, so I fight my way through. (29 years, Female)

### Recruiters doubt the working capacity of persons with disabilities

Participants reported that clearing job interviews were difficult because recruiters showed their disbelief that persons with disabilities could do the task as per the job description. Recruiters mostly demonstrated their belief that persons with disabilities are non-skilled and the employer would be obligated to make the infrastructure disability-friendly after hiring them as staff, which will increase costs.

Persons with disabilities are not being considered active contributors in the workforce or even as a qualified labour force which makes it difficult for us to get employment. (31 years, Female)

Another said,

Physical infrastructures, in general, are not accessible, and employers are not keen to hire persons with disabilities to their organisation. (29 years, Female)

Other participants working in an already accessible physical rehabilitation facilities or OPDs did not face discrimination in recruitment and continuance of employment. They said they applied and got their jobs after hearing from their networks about the vacancies. Two were also headhunted and offered the jobs they held.

I went through the formal process of recruitment. I applied for it and passed the recruitment process. (31 years, Female)

### Discrimination in continuance of employment

Several participants said they were not being provided with equal opportunities to continue employment when working in offices that hired both persons with and without disabilities.

I was placed on low priority for career advancement, precisely promotion, and was excluded from decision-making meetings compared to staff without disability. This made me feel like a token representation of disability in the office. Additionally, being a wheelchair user in one of my previous workplaces, my mobility was limited to the floor I was on; thus, there were office areas where I could never engage with colleagues. (29 years, Female)

Participants were not only excluded from senior decision-making roles and given lower priority for promotions, salary raises, and official social invites, but also inaccessible physical infrastructures, such as office space, vehicles, and social events, appeared to be factors against their employment continuation.

A participant reiterated,

Sometimes I feel left out during decision-making meetings that involve travelling because I am a wheelchair user. (35, Male)

Another shared,

Sometimes, I feel ignored and excluded by colleagues because of my disability. I have leg length discrepancy, which makes it difficult for me to keep up the pace every time with my colleagues, so I am left out in official retreats and social outings organised in places that are not physically accessible or disability-friendly. At times I am compelled to go even though I am not interested. I have found this humiliating and annoying often. (33 years, Female)

## Intersectional experiences in the job market

Participants belonging to the indigenous ethnic group expressed triple discrimination in the employment market because of their indigenous ethnicity, female gender, and disability. This intersectionality placed them further behind even among the disability population. Non-indigenous participants said they felt no discrimination based on their ethnicity.

In my previous employment, they had a negative perception of indigenous women. For example, my character was negatively judged for wearing a sleeveless top in hot weather. (28 years, Female)

That said, one male participant belonging to an indigenous background expressed how he felt doubly discriminated against based on his ethnic background and disability but not on his gender.

I was not selected as a brand manager in an eastern part of the country because of my ethnicity and disability, although I was a deserving candidate. In Nepal, I belong to what is perceived as the lowest of the low caste. (50 years, Male)

## Limited access to job information

Most of the participants said that they had limited access to information related to employment. Participants were heavily reliant on their networks for information on job vacancies. Out of all participants, three were offered their current or most recent jobs through their networks.

Networks make it easy to access employment. (29 years, Female)

The information collected found that most participants wanted access to employment information but were not yet aware of where or how to access it.

I find it difficult to find employment because I do not have access to relevant information on electronic media and I have limited relevant networks. (34 years, Male)

Another participant emphasised both social networks and relatives in the relevant employment sector helped him find jobs.

Finding employment is hard because firstly, I don't know where to find the news about job openings. I always seem to be unaware of job availability and advertisements. I believe that having networks in the right place or having relatives in the offices where you want to work also matters in job recruitment process which I lack. (34 years, Male)

## Inaccessible recruitment settings and workplaces

Participants said that inaccessible physical infrastructures posed a considerable challenge in their recruitment as many workplaces are physically inaccessible, hindering their employment participation. Sometimes when participants knew beforehand that interview venues were physically inaccessible, they withdrew from going there, while others have been stranded on the ground floor because of the unavailability of ramps or elevators to reach the recruitment room.

One participant shared,

I remember I was planning to apply for a vacant role, but I felt tense thinking about the department being on one of the higher floors and did not apply. (36 years, Male)

Another participant shared a similar incident:

One of the jobs that I was interested in working was located on the fourth floor. As the building was inaccessible for me because of my wheelchair, I did not make it through. (29 years, Female)

Participants stressed that physical infrastructures should be accessible for all, including people with disabilities. They reiterated that the environment is not yet disability-friendly.

**Giving priority to persons with disabilities during the recruitment process**

Participants suggested that because the possibility of persons with disabilities getting rejected during the recruitment process is likely, making 'person with disability' a preferred criteria of selection during the recruitment process could address the exclusion in employment to some level.

Persons with disabilities face many difficulties in the physical environment due to inaccessibility. Yet, despite experiencing those many restrictions, they come out of their homes and compete for the job role with candidates without disabilities who have had better access to education and other aspects. Especially, for this reason, I feel persons with disabilities should be given priority for selection during recruitment. (36 years, Male).

Participants suggested that government, private companies, and external development partners (EDPs) hire persons with disabilities to empower them equally and realise the provision of job placement rules stated in different laws.

Donor agencies can mandate their partner organisations to hire at least five percent of employees with disabilities as a part of the project. (36 years, Male)

Six participants said that after recruiting a person with a disability, on-the-job training sessions and capacity-building opportunities must be provided for supported employment integration. Additionally, when a person with a disability is recruited and joins the office, all staff should be oriented on how a disability-sensitive workplace environment could be maintained.

**Build awareness about disability laws**

Participants said that although there has been progressive realisation because of the Welfare of the Disabled Persons Act 1982 and the Disability Rights Act 2017, there is a gap in full implementation. Further, monitoring of the implementation of laws was weak.

Many stakeholders of the employment sector who must abide by the laws are not even aware of the laws' provisions and mandates. Therefore, more advocacy and lobbying are needed to create awareness about the existence of the laws in society. (33 years, Female).

Nevertheless, some participants remarked the disability movement and changes in society are progressive.

There are many achievements because of this act. If you go to the international airport in Kathmandu, you will see employees with a disability there. Earlier, there were no staff with disabilities, and now I think there are four or five. Many persons with disabilities have passed the civil services exams based on their merit and are now working in the government services as well. (29 years, Female)

**Continued partnership between OPDs and EDPs required for inclusion in the diverse employment sector**

Participants elaborated on a continued partnership between OPDs and EDPs to promote inclusion in the diverse employment sector. For example, more disability-friendly accommodation facilities are needed to enable persons with disabilities to seek employment and education in various locations. Similarly, other enablers for employment, such as assistive technology, skills development, and job training opportunities, were reported to be needed.

Participants were asking for OPDs and donor agencies' efforts to work beyond low income, self-employment, and administration jobs for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are aware of the employment sector being limited for them; they want to see work being done to enhance their skills for better jobs.

The perception that persons with disabilities are most suitable in table work, stitching, handicrafts, and small-scale vocational activities need to be changed. (29 years, Female)

In Nepal, OPDs funded by donor agencies are seen conducting various awareness and capacity-building events. However, participants were critical of the quality of the training being provided by OPDs themselves, saying, instead, they should focus on advocacy.

Training should never be provided by OPDs as OPDs are more of advocates and lobbyists. Training should be provided by technical professionals. (33 years, Male)

### **Government should develop innovative employment support schemes**

The participants' stated a strong need for employment support services, suggesting the government could develop specific resources and agencies to support persons with disabilities find suitable jobs. Seven out of 11 participants had heard of work readiness programs conducted by the National Federation of the Disabled-Nepal and other NGOs. These organisations have reportedly supported curriculum vitae development, the employment application process, counselling skills analysis, identifying employment providers, and coordinating with employers.

Employment support services would be a sustainable strategy to address one time or short-term charity-based employment activities which are persistent. (33 years, Male)

One participant expressed concerns about limited employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector and associated it with the expense related to reasonable accommodation that has to be provided by the hiring company.

The government should make it obligatory for all settings including banks and business complex to employ a certain percentage of persons with disabilities. To support this, the government can develop a financial scheme wherein the government and the employer contribute funds to create reasonable accommodations in the workplace. (36 years, Male)

## **DISCUSSION**

Persons with physical disabilities in Kathmandu continue to face numerous barriers in employment participation despite Nepal ratifying the CRPD over a decade ago. In relation to CRPD Article 27, findings show that persons with disabilities want the labour market to be supportive, open, and accessible across all sectors, arguing it should not be limited to self-employment and the informal market. Employment discrimination was persistent in recruitment, tenure, education, career advancement, and equal remuneration for work of equal value, which violates CRPD Article 27 Section 1(a) and (b). In addition, accessible infrastructures, mindset towards job candidates with disabilities, and the quality of education persons with disabilities receive were also compromised, putting participants at a disadvantage in equal employment participation.

Results indicated that the quality of education influences the employment participation of persons with disabilities as educational foundations lead to employment. Family support played a crucial role in educational participation. The higher the educational attainment, the more chances to be employed (Boman et al. 2015). Poorer educational attainment limited economic opportunities for persons with disabilities (Commonwealth of Australia 2015). Children, in general, have diverse learning needs, and children with disabilities have additional obstacles due to disproportionate access to educational institutions, suitability of content, and mode of delivery. Educational participation by children from marginalised communities and remote geographical settings had not improved (Ministry of Education 2016). The educational exclusion was associated with lower employment and earning capacity, increasing the likelihood of poverty (Banks & Polack 2014). In the Nepalese context, people with more years of education are likely to be employed regardless of their disability type (Lamichhane 2012). However, many families enrolled their children without caring about the education quality. Thus, although educated, some participants faced a disadvantage in employment participation because they had poor educational outcomes. Further, children with disabilities' access to and experiences in school in Nepal have been challenged by the attitude of teachers, the low capacity of schools, and the friendliness of their peers (Rohwerder 2020). Removing these barriers could improve the educational outcome of persons with disabilities, leading to better employment.

Other themes resulting from the study were relevant networks and self-motivation as the key to success in employment opportunities. Similar findings have been reported in other LMICS and developed countries (Ebuenyi et al. 2019; Netto et al. 2016). Self-motivation (Juurlink et al. 2019) and supportive employers are other fundamental factors that enable persons with disabilities to find employment opportunities (Ebuenyi et al. 2019). In Nepal, most persons with physical disabilities are working in the development sector (Lamichhane 2012), and having good networks of people working in this sector helps make getting a job easier regardless of disability. However, the findings revealed that persons with disabilities are against being token representation in offices and are advocating to be treated as equal contributors to the team. Being employed portrayed a positive message regarding the employment capacity of persons with disabilities and was a motivating factor for employment. Additionally, if education and family support are coupled with personal attributes, such as a positive drive and capabilities, it favours acquiring and retaining employment (Lindstrom, Doren & Miesch 2011). This reinforces the participants' responses to why familial and personal factors enable employment for persons with disabilities. Employment of persons with disabilities does not only create financial empowerment, but also builds the self-confidence and motivation required to foster higher challenges and jobs for them (Vornholt, Uitdewilligen, & Nijhuis 2013).

Though persons with disabilities can perform almost all jobs in a disability-friendly environment (WHO and World Bank 2011), our findings showed that persons with disabilities perceived that recruiters lacked this awareness as they showed their disbelief that persons with disabilities could do the task as per the job description. In Kathmandu, the notion that persons with disabilities would show up for recruitment as job-seeking candidates was not yet a mainstream concept. Candidates with disabilities stood out during recruitment and were subject to interview questions different from those without disabilities, with most interview questions focussed on disability. This supports previous research showing that persons with disabilities were vulnerable to being mistreated and unsuccessful in recruitment, and if employed, they faced salary discrimination by earning less than colleagues without disability (Järnhammer et al. 2018; Prasai & Pant 2018). Low economic opportunities for people with disabilities in the labour market only create lower employment rates and continued workplace discrimination (Commonwealth of Australia 2015). Our findings elaborate that not only are persons with disabilities excluded from senior decision-making roles, but also they are given less priority for promotions, salary hikes, and receiving official social invites.

Although accessible physical infrastructure creates economic opportunities and is critical to prevent poverty, participants revealed that most recruitment venues and workplaces were not reasonably accommodated (Palmer et al. 2015; Prasai & Pant 2018). This was evident in our findings that inaccessible physical infrastructures, such as office spaces, vehicles, and social events, also seemed to be factors that discriminated against participants in recruitment and continuance of employment.

Furthermore, this research adds to the handful of literature from South Asia demonstrating gender plays a significant role in reinforcing employment discrimination. Persons with disabilities are likely to face multiple discrimination because of their ethnicity (Prasai & Pant 2018), and gender (Lamichhane, Ballabha & Kartika 2014; Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis 2013). In Bangladesh, women with disabilities were perceived as incapable of income generation and mostly anticipated to be confined at home to complete house chores or do nothing (Quinn et al. 2016). The perspective that income generation was a man's area of capacity made women poorer than men overall (Quinn et al. 2016). In the Nepalese context, persons with disabilities are already marginalized, and if they are women and from indigenous groups, they could be more exploited because of their gender and ethnicity. Further, families might not have invested in a female child due to her condition, believing she could not be economically active.

If persons with disabilities are to be effectively supported in employment, recruiters and employers must develop a positive perception of disability. In one study, persons with disabilities were retained longer and were dedicated workers (Houtenville & Kalargyrou 2015). Furthermore, employing persons with disabilities will successfully create a diverse workforce.

Participants want affirmative action during recruitment as stated in CRPD Article 27 Section 1(h) and support finding, obtaining, maintaining, and returning to work as per Section 1(e) and (k). Specialist-assisted employment services, such as employment counselling, training, curriculum vitae preparation, job search, and placement can help people with disabilities build or improve on their ability to compete in the job market and promote inclusion (WHO and World Bank 2011). However, employment rehabilitation or employment support services have not been a mainstream employment strategy in many countries, due to which persons with disabilities are primarily only associated with small-scale livelihood projects (Adamecz-Völgyi et al. 2018). Participants seemingly want a long-term vision regarding employment integration and want the government to create employment support services. This finding links to the theme of limited access to the job, which is supported by the CRPD Article 27, stating that the labour market should be freely open to choose. Creating such services will provide an avenue to access employment information or to be able to direct persons with disabilities to the information they require to obtain successful employment.

Despite the fact that many countries' legislation requires firms to hire persons with disabilities, many of them do not (Vornholt et al. 2018). Similarly, in this study, participants said that although the Welfare of the Disabled Persons Act 1982 mandates a certain percentage of employment reservation seats, employers and persons with disabilities themselves remain unaware about this stipulation. Building awareness for employers could be another solution to overcome the barriers and discrimination persons with disabilities face during the employment process (Vornholt et al. 2018). Having a disability could be made a preferred criterion during the selection process to boost the employment of persons with disabilities. Moreover, the government could adopt innovative approaches, like creating a pool of persons with disabilities seeking jobs, from which government, non-governmental, and private companies hire qualified persons with disabilities (Bonaccio et al. 2020). Having ratified the CRPD, the disability laws need to be effectively implemented and regulated. The need to increase collaboration between OPDs and EDPs was endorsed by all participants, which has appeared to be lacking in LMICs. However, this is one of the vital supports required by persons with disabilities for a long-term effect (Juurlink et al. 2019). Moreover, to influence policymakers on disability issues, OPDs, federations, and their allies should expand advocacy to mainstream disability in national policies and programmes (MacLachlan et al. 2014). Similar to China, where literature has not paid much attention to transformational disability policy (Zhao & Zhang 2018), literature needs to be built upon in Nepal to increase the employment participation of persons with disabilities. Therefore, it is critical for the government and its development partners to fund disability-specific research to support evidence-based policy and program formulation for better community development and to inform the development agenda (MacLachlan et al. 2014).

This research appears to be the first in the literature to examine and document the perspective of people with physical disabilities regarding the fulfilment of CRPD Article 27, Work and Employment in Nepal. However, this research has some limitations, such as lack of representation and perspective from nine other categories of disabilities set by Nepal's Disability Rights Act 2017. Further, the study has not included personal attributes of persons with disabilities, such as resilience, learning aptitude, and confidence, among many others. However, some barriers presented here are interlinked with personal factors, such as education and skills.

## RESEARCH IMPACT

The qualitative data has generated preliminary evidence examining the fulfilment of CRPD Article 27 section 1 and subsections (a), (b), (e), (h), (i), (j), and (k) regarding the employment participation of persons with disabilities in Kathmandu Valley. This research has the potential to be used by government policymakers, pro disability lobbyists, advocates, and development agencies to formulate evidence-based legislation, policies, and/or programs to promote effective employment participation of persons with disabilities. Specifically, this research can be used to ensure the operationalisation of Article 27 of the CRPD in Nepal through the identification of specific solutions. Globally, it can be useful for disability-inclusive development stakeholders, researchers, and scientific-based practitioners. Facilitating employment participation will also support the ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention No. 159 (1983).

## CONCLUSION

Nepal must work towards facilitating an inclusive and enabling environment for the working population with disabilities. The need to ensure a fair and prejudice-free atmosphere is paramount. This research provides preliminary evidence to better understand the barriers, enablers, and solutions for employment of persons with disabilities' in Kathmandu, Nepal. The present study clearly shows that quality education, family support, self-belief, and social identity are enablers. In contrast, over-protective family behaviour, limited access to job information, and workplace discrimination are barriers. Persons with disabilities can perform better in the job if they are provided with opportunities and an enabling environment. Therefore, the government needs to develop innovative approaches or a regulatory body to increase participation in employment by implementing strict follow-up of national provisions, making all stakeholders aware of the provisions, booking penalties for those not abiding by the law, and fostering an enabling employment environment for people with disabilities.

## ADDITIONAL FILE

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Additional File 1.** Examples of research inquiry questions related to CRPD Article 27 Section 1 and its Sub Sections. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.860.s1>

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

SR designed the research project from the ground up, including study planning, designing methods and research instruments, and the fieldwork. She gathered data, analysed, and produced the initial draft manuscript. NM and PG contributed to the design of the methods and instruments. They also assisted with data gathering, analysis, and interpretation, as well as editing the manuscript. KPS assisted in designing research methods. Further, he contributed to data analysis and interpretation, as well as drafting and critically rewriting the manuscript to integrate intellectual content. All authors have read the final manuscript and approved it for publication.

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