



# **Institutional Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

Disabilities, as a global issue, expose the victims to various challenges. Reports have shown that over one billion people worldwide have some disability and that at least 190 million people live with substantial disabilities, most of whom live in developing countries. In Nigeria, about 25 million people have one form of disability or the other, accounting for 15% of the population. Undertaking a comprehensive published literature review by the authors to identify journal articles and books dealing with disabilities, it was discovered that many victims of disabilities face institutional challenges. These challenges range from discrimination, exploitation, violence, stigma, inadequate housing, and education to healthcare. It was also observed that disabilities could develop at any time during one's life, limiting victims' access to many opportunities in society. This paper envisages family members physically, verbally and emotionally abusing their members with disabilities. This paper observed that the excessive dependence of PWDs on significant others to carry out certain activities have their inheritances and resources abused, and their rights violated. Also, it is observed that PWDs face challenges in schools due to a lack of adequate training for teachers in both conventional and special schools, a lack of provision of assistive devices and materials, and lackadaisical attitudes from peers. Disability poses a significant obstacle for many victims at some time in their life, whether at home or school. In order to enable the victims to learn, play, and engage fairly in a diverse setting, it is recommended that policies that prioritise PWD education be developed and implemented. Individuals should also report PWD rights violations to the appropriate authorities so that prompt action can be taken.

**Keywords:** Abuse, Disability, Education, Exploitation, Family, Impairment, Institution, Victim

## **Introduction**

Across the world, disability is a widespread social, physical and psychological issue with diverse meanings for different individuals. Disability is a 'complex, dynamic, multifaceted, and contentious' term, encompassing impairments, activity limits and participation constraints (World Health Organisation [WHO] & World Bank, 2011). Accordingly, disability is any ailment or impairment (cognitive, mental,

physical, developmental, sensory or a mix of numerous variables) that limits a person's capacity to engage in specific tasks while interacting with the environment around them. Within the context of this paper, disability is a disorder that restricts or limits an individual's engagement with other members of society and frequently exposes them to challenges. The disorders, which can be cognitive, developmental, physical, or a mix of these, might

affect a person from birth or develop over time, making it more difficult for the victims to carry out specific tasks or connect appropriately with others around them. According to the World Bank (2020), over one billion people worldwide or 15% of the total population, suffer from some impairment. According to the estimate, at least 190 million people live with substantial disabilities, most of whom live in developing countries. According to the WHO and the World Bank (2011), about 25 million people in Nigeria have a disability, accounting for 15% of the population, and a significant number of the victims face institutional challenges such as discrimination, violence, stigma, and a lack of adequate housing, education, and healthcare. Accordingly, only 5% of persons with disabilities were literate, while 98% of children with disabilities did not have access to pre-primary or elementary school. Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) face obstacles in schools, families, banks, and other public areas, exposing them to adverse socioeconomic outcomes such as limited access to education and jobs, rising poverty rates and poor health. The World Bank (2020) observed that PWDs were more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation and crimes. Similarly, Adepoju (2018) claimed that PWDs are often limited in access to basic amenities and living independently of others in society.

In Nigeria, establishing a marital connection for PWDs is a difficult task. Adepoju (2018) posited that PWDs have difficulty finding a sexual or marital partner, and this experience reduces their affection and wishes for love, marriage or childbirth. Accordingly, they are chastised for not knowing the essential milestones in their lives, especially when they are seen with a love partner. Adepoju (2018) corroborated that when some PWDs successfully marry, predators prey on them through domestic violence and exploitation of their rightful pension and resources. Grassroots Researchers Associations (GRA, 2020) reported that PWDs are rarely allowed to marry a person who does not have a deformity in their families or community. This is due to their incapacity to access medical care, pay expenses, and other difficulties connected with disability. PWDs experience problems when trying to rent an apartment, compete in school contests and

engage in their country's political process as voters or candidates (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016; GRA, 2020). The difficulties that this group of people faces impede their rights to equal education and proper political representation. It is common among low-income families to send members with impairments, particularly youngsters, out begging for handouts since their plight demands sympathy from the public. Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) posited that such children's refusal to go out begging is met with threats, beatings, and even starvation from their parents or guardians. Therefore, children with impairments are forced to accept the wishes of their parents or guardians.

Several advocacies have come up to ensure that the challenges faced by PWDs are reduced to the barest minimum. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) called for the full integration of PWDs in societies to address their challenges. World Bank (2020) reported that over 170 countries had ratified the CRPD, leading to the increased development of disability policies and laws against the discrimination of PWDs. Several efforts have been made in Nigeria to ensure that PWDs are treated equally with other members of society without prejudice or discrimination. Similarly, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. The Convention aims to promote, defend, and secure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and basic freedoms by people with disabilities and to respect their inherent dignity. The International Labour Organization Convention signed the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of (Disabled) to offer disability-inclusive employment. The 2018 Act on Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) forbids disability discrimination and levies fines and jail terms for violators. It also specifies a five-year transition time for altering public buildings, structures, and cars for disabled individuals. The law aims to create a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities to ensure disabled individuals have access to housing, education, and healthcare, hear rights breach complaints, and help victims seek legal

remedies. It is no doubt that several studies and advocacies have been carried out to address the challenges of PWDs. With all the advocacy and efforts, one would think the PWDs' challenges would be solved. It is important to stress that including all citizens without recourse to backgrounds, classes, tribes, and religions is vital to achieving Sustainable Development goals. Similarly, addressing the challenges confronting PWDs is imperative for national inclusiveness and development. Hence, this paper examines how these challenges play out in Nigerian institutions, mainly the family and education.

### *Challenges Faced by Children with Hearing Impairments*

According to Wonkam-Tingang et al. (2021), hearing impairment is a partial or total inability to capture sound. It is subdivided into two categories; "deaf and hard of hearing". "Deaf" refers to persons with severe hearing loss who cannot hear anything except the loudest sounds, such as a jet or aeroplane. The "hard-of-hearing" describes persons with mild (able to hear everything except very high-pitched sounds) to moderate (unable to hear a conversation without amplification) hearing loss (National Skill Development Corporation [NSDC], 2020). Severe hearing impairment affects the processing of linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification. Loss of hearing can be congenital (occur before birth) or adventitious (any time after birth), caused by sudden or prolonged exposure to loud noise, medication, illness, old age, injury, or genetic factors (NSDC, 2020; Wilke, 2017). Generally, people with hearing impairments depend on visual cues to understand interaction and communication. However, their dependence is subject to the severity of the hearing problem, with no consideration for wearing a hearing aid (Wilke, 2017). Speech-reading, formerly known as lip-reading, involves watching lip movements, facial expressions, eye movements, and body gestures. These visual cues assist persons with hearing impairments to understand information and interact with others in any context. Wonkam-Tingang et al. (2021) asserted that there are a few excellent speech readers among individuals with hearing impairments, although many

communicate by reading and writing. Individuals exposed to language before their hearing loss are usually more proficient in reading, while those born deaf and who do not have a language base to draw from rarely become skilled in reading (NSDC, 2020; Wonkam-Tingang et al., 2021; Wilke, 2017).

Children with hearing impairments, that is, the deaf, are severely maltreated in the ordinary Nigerian household, according to Isiaka (2019). Due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of how to care for them, the fortunate ones are taken to institutions or adopted by instructors. As a result, deaf children who live with their families are marginalised and fail to develop adequate communication skills. The terrible treatment received by children with hearing impairments from their families limits their growth and choices. The harassment that deaf children face daily in Nigerian classrooms has put their education at risk. Sexual, physical, emotional, and financial abuse are common in schools, affecting students of all ages. Aransiola (2019) reported a case of a deaf female child who was sexually abused in a school in Kuje, Federal Capital Territory. The assaulted female student was subsequently withdrawn from school by her parents to ensure a successful criminal investigation against the alleged and prevent further abuse. Such a scenario could affect the educational development of the victim. A deaf person who tries to report a case of rape or any other form of abuse may not be taken very seriously or misinterpreted due to the absence of or inability to employ an interpreter at the police station. Similarly, restaurants, hospitals and other public places remain almost entirely inaccessible to victims with hearing problems (Isiaka, 2019). Religious centres rarely put signs for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons and hardly employ interpreters to care for their needs. It is quite observable in Nigerian worship centres with no provision for understanding sermons reiterated by the religious leaders to the deaf people among the congregation. Probably, where it is obtainable, it is occasionally done to carry the special audience along but is not seen as fundamental. Adepoju (2018) stated that deaf children are poorly treated in the public sphere

and even mostly turned back at healthcare institutions due to the communication barrier.

*Behaviour Towards Disabilities Caused by Victims' Immorality and Lifestyles*

The behaviours of family and community towards disabilities associated with victims' immorality and lifestyles, either by being witches or deviants of any sort, are often harmful and discriminatory. It is deep-rooted in Nigeria's family and healthcare institutions to misunderstand, misinterpret, stigmatise, and discriminate against people with mental illnesses perceived to be caused by evil spirits or supernatural forces. According to Isiaka (2019), persons with such disabilities are often stigmatised spiritually and culturally, leading to the victims being shunned or banished. They are subsequently stigmatised as worthless individuals, forced to live in hostility, and sometimes evicted from their homes for shame, causing the family to fall into poverty. If such victims are lucky to be treated by their families, they may be taken to faith-based centres, believed to have the capacity to address their kind of disabilities.

Victims of disabilities perceived to be caused by evil spirits or supernatural forces are often taken to the faith base centres comprising Islamic, Christian and Traditional healers with the hope that they will be rehabilitated. However, the methods of healing adopted by these centres are particularly infringing upon the fundamental human rights of the victims, owing to the dehumanising treatment meted on them while restoring their health. The poor treatment of the victims may worsen if they are housed in poorly established centres and lack hygiene to sufficiently improve their lives. In most of the centres visited by Human Rights Watch (2019), it was found that PWDs, particularly those with mental challenges, are sometimes inhumanly maltreated as a means of restoring their health. Accordingly, several faith-based institutions for the rehabilitation of PWDs, especially those with mental impairments, are known for abusive methods like chaining the patients with iron bracelets around the ankles or whipping them for a few days with difficulty moving around.

Without a doubt, such a precarious situation is quite challenging for the lives of the victims.

*Challenges of Victims with Cognitive/Learning Impairments*

Cognitive impairments, learning impairments and intellectual impairments are concepts used to describe brain disorders. However, each has its specificity. The three concepts describe "a neurological disorder that interferes with a person's ability to store, process or produce information, and creates a "gap" between one's ability and performance" (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). This category of disability impedes social skills and mainly affects the ability of an individual to read, write, speak, or even compute mathematics. The disabilities are problematic and make life and tasks difficult for the victims, although they can excel in other activities. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD, 2007) acknowledged that the victims of learning impairments could show a significant discrepancy between learning potential and actual learning achievement. This lower achievement is caused by perception or memory disorders. Such problems include failing to see how two objects are alike or different, hearing or reading words or letters out of sequence (for example, seeing "was" instead of "saw"), or not being able to remember half of a sentence just spoken. One example of a learning disability is dyslexia, characterised by severe difficulty remembering a printed word or symbol, unusual spelling errors, improper letter sequencing or reversal of letters, and illegible handwriting (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Persons with learning disabilities can learn but need to be taught how to use their abilities as compensation for their weaknesses (NJCLD, 2007). Learning disabilities are also called "invisible disabilities" because the signs are not obvious. However, some visual clues with different characteristics may appear alone or in conjunction with another and varying degrees. Common learning disabilities are hyperactivity, over-attention, poor coordination, memory disorder, perceptual difficulties and withdrawn behaviour. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Asperger's syndrome are also complex cognitive disorders. This category of cognitive-

developmental disorder affects communication and behaviour (National Institute of Mental Health Information [NIMHI], 2018).

Bhandari (2019) affirmed that autistic and cognitive-impaired patients are troubled by verbal and non-verbal communication. This affects their interactions with other members of society and any activity they do. Their conditions distort how they receive, process and store information in the brain. NIMHI (2018) claimed that cognitive impairments affect communication, social interaction and behaviour, although victims with a particular brain problem may behave differently. For instance, a person suffering from Asperger's syndrome is of average or above-average intelligence and blessed with a wide range of social skills and behaviours. The behaviour of an autistic patient may either be a restriction of interests or repeating an action more than necessary. Therefore, autistic patients suffer cognitive, emotional, social and physical health problems. Bhandari (2019) noted that autism spectrum disorder is also associated with sensory sensitivities; victims become either under or over-sensitive to touch, sight, sound, taste and smell, as well as temperature or pain. Okakwu (2019) asserted that children with cognitive or learning impairments are viewed as a significant burden by the family; hence, they get maltreated. Accordingly, the expense of training one cognitively challenged child may be used to educate ten physically healthy children in good schools. Cognitively challenged persons in the family are maltreated because they are seen as a source of stress or hardship due to the difficulty involved in their unique needs. The obstacles people face with cognitive impairments worsen when their welfare managers pass away, especially if an inheritance is left behind. Family members, carers, or those entrusted with the inheritance can squander it. They take advantage of their proximity and position of trust to gain access to their financial resources or to defraud them through a phoney lottery and home renovation scam.

Reporting cases of abuse by people with cognitive disabilities to authorities may not be taken seriously, particularly if family members committed the abuse. The lack of attention paid

to this category of persons could be linked to a lack of training among law enforcement officers to grasp their complaints and conditions. According to the Agency Report (2019), intellectual or cognitive disability is the worst type of disability since it strains the victims, who are thus regarded as children. Also, because they cannot describe the nature of their illness when they become ill, medical staff who respond to them have difficulty understanding their health problem. Persons with cognitive challenges are vulnerable to neglect and abuse, although it depends on the type of family in which they live. People with cognitive impairments whom a group of family members abuse have limited access to law enforcement, medical or social care representatives, activists, and other organisations that can intervene and help (Agency Report, 2019). Knowing how difficult it is for them to disclose abuse to law enforcement agencies explains why they are frequently targeted for abuse by those close to them. Similarly, the circumstances of this group of people drive them to rely significantly on their abusers without understanding it, and even when they do, they continue to live with fate. A person with a mental disability is conditioned to trust others who would take advantage of their riches without their knowledge. Providing proper attention and provision for the needs of victims with cognitive impairments is a major concern for families. It necessitates significant sacrifice, including financial, emotional, social, and physical assistance. These victims should be able to find refuge within their families, but unfortunately, this has not always been the case. Instead, their families have rejected many of them, and their legal rights have been violated (Isiaka, 2019). As a result, the family's control over when to go out, where to go, what to do, and how to do things reduces the victims' ability to express their free choice even though the freedom has no connection with any danger. These families exert control over the victims' activities by keeping them hidden from the public eye to prevent being stigmatised or embarrassed, oblivious to the fact that they are abusing and reducing their self-esteem. The mistreatment of these individuals is exacerbated when their ailments impoverish the family's financial status and development. A person with a cognitive disorder may be exposed

to difficulty concentrating, fulfilling assigned tasks, obeying simple rules, and other health challenges that may result in using medication to correct abnormalities.

### *Conditions of Victims with Mobility/Physical Impairments*

The phrase mobility impairment, also known as locomotor disability, is a group of debilitating disorders that significantly impact a person's ability to move and walk. These illnesses may range from chronic discomfort to paralysis of both arms and legs (WHO, 2001). The conditions can be caused by congenital disabilities (e.g. cerebral palsy), accidents and traumatic or chronic events (e.g. disease) and can be permanent or temporary. Mobility impairments in the form of physical disability affect a person's physical functioning, particularly movement, dexterity or stamina. A person with physical disability experiences challenges while trying to move from one place to another and pick or hold some things. Generally, the disability is sometimes related to bone, joint and muscle problems, causing a substantial restriction on moving the limbs. In the family, Madukwe (2012) argued that victims with physical impairments face problems from their parents, guardians, and other family members and friends due to a heavy reliance on this group for vital assistance. While some family members help with basic physical needs, they also abuse and isolate the victims. This generates a negative experience for the victims, who are forced to choose between blatant abuse and an uncertain future. According to Schulze (2010), physical limitations cause psychological distress by denying the victims with physical impairments of economic existence. Families with impaired relatives are generally ridiculed and even shunned by their communities in either circumstance. Madukwe (2012) pointed out that the family as an institution has failed to protect the interest and promote the well-being of persons with physical impairment, owing to poor care and treatment meted out to them. Madukwe (2012) claimed that when a man becomes immobile due to accidental circumstances such as vehicular accidents, their socioeconomic life and that of their family are jeopardised. At this point,

the source of income is frequently lost due to the loss of limbs or vital parts prerequisite for executing daily activities. As a result, intimate friends and family members, such as a wife, might abandon the person to their destinies, leaving them with arduous activities like writing and eating with little or little help from a few nearby individuals. This causes sympathy, which might lead to aversion later on. It is no gainsaying that physically impaired persons are predisposed to bullying and unable to defend themselves against many forms of abuse from friends and family. There are also physically impaired academic persons who find it problematic to move around lecture halls and conference centres for lecture delivery and paper presentations. Unfortunately, the halls are constructed for people without disabilities. Hence, doors are not wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs. In the universities, there are few assistive services for the victims of physical impairments. People afflicted with polio during childhood live with physical disabilities and experience abuse, discrimination, poverty and restriction in accessing employment opportunities and moving comfortably in public spaces. In Nigerian universities, those with crutches find it hard to attend lectures without access to elevators. When climbing more than one storey building, persons with clutches are exposed to difficulties. They can prevent them from acquiring equal educational skills as other students without disabilities.

### *Challenges Faced by Students with Visual Impairments*

Visual impairment describes a loss of vision, including low vision, legally blind, and totally blind, that interferes with a sufferer's performance and execution of everyday activities (Gavin, 2018). Accordingly, a person is legally blind if one of his eyes sees at 20 feet what a normally sighted person sees at 200 feet. Again, a person is totally blind where there is a complete absence of vision and perception of light. There are many variations of visual impairments limiting victims' abilities. Some individuals cannot see an object clearly unless it is very close to them, while others may have a central vision and see only a narrow field as if they were in a

tunnel. Also, some individuals may have only peripheral or side vision and cannot see in front of them, while others may see the entire field but only shadows of objects. Visual impairments can be congenital (at birth before age five), injury or disease-based (Gavin, 2018). A congenitally blind person lacks visual memory, is hindered from learning by visual images or pictures, and is forced to rely heavily on their remaining senses for orientation. Adventitious or accidental blindness occurs after the age of five, and the victims are forced to use the visual memory of their environment and objects for orientation. Some individuals with visual impairments may need bright light to see clearly, while the eyes of others are hurt from too much glaring at a bright light. For instance, people with cataracts are very sensitive to translucent and strong light (Gavin, 2018). This wide range of visual abilities stresses the importance of treating people with visual impairments as individuals with individual needs. Learning in schools for children with visual impairments is complicated by the lack of access to braille material, and the textbooks designed for the blind are costly for blind children whose parents are poor. In universities, blind students depend on friends to dictate assignments, notes, and even textbooks for comprehension and actively participate in school activities (Ojo, 2017). Submission of assignments is quite worrisome for this category of students. However, they are sometimes assisted by lecturers who genuinely understand their condition and ask them to submit their works via compact discs (CDs) and flash drives. Visually impaired students face tremendous challenges by being victims of casualties during school crises such as inter-cult violence. According to Ojo (2017), teachers may refuse to train students with visual impairments, offer them special attention, and actively discourage them from learning by ignoring their assimilating nature if enrolled in conventional schools instead of special schools. Suppose blind students in traditional schools become aware of how they are treated. In that case, they may feel compelled to withdraw from their education or go to another school to remain academically competitive. Teachers not trained to handle blind students may abuse them by refusing to assist with their arms when needed. Being visually impaired does not result in loss of

consciousness, but a child born with blindness may be completely unaware of their surroundings. Essentially, they may rely on others for survival throughout their lives. However, the concern is 'How will children with vision problems fare if their primary caretakers die?'

### *Challenges Faced by Students with Speech Impairments*

In schools, children with speech impairment suffer a lot. Speech impairment is a disorder related to accurately producing the sounds of language or meaningfully using language to communicate. Batshaw (2002) acknowledged that speech and language skills are developed for children with fairly well-defined milestones. Parents and other caregivers may become concerned if a child's language seems noticeably behind (or different from) the language of their peers. This may motivate parents to investigate further and, eventually, to have the child evaluated by a professional. DeThorne et al. (2009) affirmed that the signs of speech problems are sometimes mistakenly associated with autism or learning disabilities, but they vary, each having its peculiarities. DeThorne et al. (2009) posited that speech problems make it difficult for the victim to process linguistic information such as language, grammar, morphology, and syntax, among others. Accordingly, when a child has both language and speech problems/delays, such a child is usually kept in a special school and related services, negatively impacting their education. Batshaw (2002) revealed that speech impairment affects the articulation of words, resulting in stuttering or difficulty while producing particular sounds. The understanding and sharing of thoughts and ideas in school may significantly affect the greater educational achievement of the victims. A child with a speech problem may not be able to pronounce and understand the meaning of a word seen with their eyes. Based on this, the significant others and everyone around them find it hard to understand their communication. In a conventional school, where students with speech impairment are mixed with other students with no deformity, they may have difficulty answering questions in class. This is because teachers who are not professional

in speech reading may fail to ask them to repeat their responses if they do not understand. The teachers may assume that the response is well understood without asking the students to repeat the information. By this, they wrongly assess the students and fail to measure their intelligence appropriately. Also, the life of students with hearing impairment is difficult when teachers are unfamiliar with sign language/reading or schools lack sign interpreters. In schools, students with speech impairments may be disrespected when they complain of any intellectual challenge due to the inability of teachers to understand their complaints. According to Aransiola (2019), students with speech impairment suffer many challenges, including physical and psychological inaccessibility to mainstream schools, negative attitudes and stereotypes from instructors and peers. Inevitably, the high cost of fulfilling these children's special requirements perpetuates disparities in the country's educational system and makes it difficult for victims to find good jobs and support themselves.

#### *The Exploitation of Persons with Disabilities by Significant Others*

PWDs suffer at the hands of family caregivers, who increasingly abuse and isolate them and spend their money on expensive products without their consent or wish (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016). By implication, the victim's money is frittered away and given to others unnecessarily. Bills for vital services or utilities are frequently left unpaid or cancelled by family caregivers who lavishly mismanage cash, possessions, or financial resources for their own selfish and evil gain. The assets or estate papers of a person who becomes incapacitated unexpectedly owing to unanticipated circumstances and whose assets or estate documents are managed by close relatives may be modified or transferred without the victim's knowledge or legitimate explanation. Guardians and conservators, such as family members or close friends, who look after PWDs and administer their income benefits on their behalf are known to exploit them, according to Human Rights Watch (2020). PWDs can hardly live independently of their abusers because such a decision has been insurmountably inhibited by their poor health status and the sole dependence

on their abusers for accessing daily needs. Governments and the laws reinforce the dependence of PWDs on families without recourse to independent lifestyles and by legally requiring the relatives to receive pensions and resources on their behalf (Agency Report, 2019). PWDs from poor households are sent out to beg as a medical and economic survival method. Madukwe (2012) examined the rise of PWDs begging for charity on the streets and reported that more than 80% lived in impoverished areas of the country. As a result, 30% of the PWDs were street teenagers, and 20% were youngsters who were particularly vulnerable to abuse, such as assault, rape, or sexual abuse. School time is therefore redirected to begging for food for the family and improving the condition of the family member with disabilities. The skills of PWDs are wasted, and chances are denied due to their exposure to maltreatment by their families; hence, the cycle of poverty persists and reaching their full potential becomes a challenging undertaking. PWDs make up a significant proportion of the poorest of the poor in the country, owing to inequalities created by poor treatment from both family and society, which limit their access to education, employment, asset accumulation, health care, and opportunities to participate in social and community development (World Bank, 2020).

#### *Disabilities and Domestic Violence in Nigeria*

PWDs are more likely to encounter domestic abuse in the family, according to the National Domestic Violence (NDV, 2020) report, because they have greater power and influence over them. Domestic abuse is a global problem but is frequently considered a private concern in Nigeria. As a result, domestic abuse victims, whether abled or disabled, rarely report their experiences to law enforcement authorities unless they are discovered through a third-party report and inquiry. It is difficult for PWDs to leave an abusive household because the abusers are their caretakers or guardians. The severity of domestic violence between spouses can permanently impair spouses who have been temporarily disabled. Being disabled and burdensome to the family, a husband might beat, sexually and physically abuse his wife. This occurs when the



wife's health impacts the husband's activities and financial situation. Domestic violence is committed against people of various backgrounds, genders, and social statuses, but it is disproportionately committed against PWDs (NDV, 2020). A wife with a disability and who is also a mother can be compared to bad parents, chastised for pretending to be disabled when she is not, and ridiculed and humiliated for the condition. The husband of such a wife has the right to restrict her access to the restroom and to conduct crucial healing activities. The spouse may initiate sexual activity without the partner's consent, and assistive equipment may be removed, damaged, or broken in some situations. Abusive partners use the excuse that their spouse's infirmity requires adequate control, continually threatening and hurting them. PWDs' prescriptions are purposely withheld by certain cruel family members or given overdoses in a risky and non-prescribed manner, according to the NDV (2020). This prevents their access to doctors for medical issues. According to Ojo (2017), PWDs in Nigeria, particularly women and girls, are three times more likely than other women without disabilities to encounter gender-based abuse from male partners or relatives. Similarly, Isiaka (2019) stated that research had demonstrated a link between disability and abuse, emphasising that women with impairments are more likely to be subjected to domestic violence and sexual assault than 'healthy women'. Domestic violence has long-term physical and psychological effects on people with disabilities. PWDs with low self-esteem are deceived into believing their abuse is deserved. They are inherently exploited for their weakness and considered less human and valuable, with no developmental impact on the family and community. PDWs will be abused if there is a disincentive to disclose abuse to authorities and no system for registering complaints.

#### *Disabilities and Education in Nigeria*

It is widespread knowledge that education is a right that all children worldwide have, regardless of nationality, colour, religion, culture, background, or disability. PWDs' access to high-quality education manifests their fundamental human rights, which are protected by national and

international laws. The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act provides that a person with a disability shall have an unfettered right to education without discrimination or segregation. It further stipulates that all public educational establishments should be inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities. This is to ensure that people with disabilities live a complete, dignified, and self-sufficient existence and facilitate their active involvement in community development. In Nigeria, however, the education of PWDs is regarded as a purely philanthropic gesture. Ojo (2017) argued that children with disabilities are excluded from school and subjected to various sorts of maltreatment and prejudice due to their disabilities. Nigeria's educational system is founded on separating regular pupils in traditional classrooms from PWDs who are educated in special schools. Segregation, undoubtedly, adds to the mistreatment and prejudice of children with disabilities. According to Aransiola (2019), the segregation system deprives children with disabilities of adequate socialisation and prevents them from engaging in active, appropriate and moral interactions with other members of society. Segregation can also expose these special children to various human rights violations. Unfortunately, when PWDs are enrolled in schools with other non-disabled students, teachers in Nigeria regard them as a burden. According to Aransiola (2019), the issue is mainly caused by insufficient assistive devices and a shortage of instructional materials for impaired and non-impaired students in many schools. The school curriculum was created with all students in mind, with little regard for those who require special care. Furthermore, teachers who have not received any training on dealing with disabilities lack the necessary approach to meet the objectives of the courses they teach successfully. According to the Agency Report (2019), educational settings for PWDs in Nigeria are not favourable, and there are no systems to safeguard children from various forms of abuse in schools. Both academic and non-academic employees sexually assault PWDs in schools. Aransiola (2019) mentioned a rape involving a female student at Ilorin's Kwara State School for Special Needs. Accordingly, the event resulted in the suspension of two teachers and the victim's

access to quality education. The National Bullying Prevention Centre (2020) observed that students with disabilities are bullied more in schools than students without disabilities. Of course, this influences their learning, schooling and education. Gradually, academic grades slip, class attention becomes complicated, and enthusiasm for education wanes, decreasing school enrolment. Ojo (2017) expressed that the rights of PWDs are violated regularly, not just in schools but also outside of them, by the government, the private sector, and other individuals. The persistent violation of these victims' rights is inextricably linked to a lack of information and understanding of their rights. Importantly, disability makes it difficult for the victims to obtain education independently, obstructing the Sustainable Development Goal of universal education.

### *Conclusion*

This article highlights the difficulties that many victims of disabilities face in their daily lives, whether at home or in the classroom. The family has not been a safe refuge for PWDs because their guardians, parents, siblings and acquaintances prey on them intentionally or unconsciously. It is crucial to mention that couples with disabilities are also subjected to abuse due to gender-based violence, primarily directed at women and girls. Lack of assistive resources, physical and psychological inaccessibility to regular schools, harsh attitudes and prejudices from instructors and peers, and the high cost associated with supporting the particular needs of these exceptional victims have all made their schooling difficult. The inaccessible physical environment, inadequate relevant assistive technology or rehabilitative devices, and poor services, systems, and policies hinder the full participation of PWDs in all aspects of life. It is also possible for these challenges to create other disabilities. Because of reliance on family members at home and classmates at school for care and support, PWDs become more vulnerable to poverty, starvation, illiteracy, unemployment, and social isolation in their communities. However, the number of challenges PWDs face depends on the type and nature of their impairment, family and governments. Even though there is ongoing abuse

of PWDs, it is seldom seen and reported because of the nature of the condition. Intentional or unintentional reluctance to inform constituted authorities about family or friend maltreatment by the victims of disabilities puts them in deplorable living situations. This research concludes that PWDs continually face challenges due to difficulty communicating their concerns, fear of being dismissed by constituted authorities, unwillingness to relieve their abusers for inevitable needs, and strong emotional connections.

### *Recommendation*

In light of the findings and gaps found in this paper, it is recommended that:

- i. Necessary measures should be taken to ensure that a child perceived to have any disability receives a thorough evaluation from a certified medical professional. Therefore, early diagnosis of any disability and access to quality healthcare services should be provided for correctable disabilities.
- ii. Any action or activity that infringes on the personality, dignity, or lives of PWDs should be condemned and stopped. The government should develop policies to combat abuse and discrimination against people with disabilities by taking practical and suitable measures to raise awareness across the country.
- iii. Family members should build a strong love for persons with one or more disabilities, assuming that no one is immune to health problems that force them to rely on others for survival. As a result, the victims should be shown affection and made to feel like they belong by responding to their needs promptly and appropriately.
- iv. Governments and Non-Governmental Organisations should collaborate to provide assistive devices, skills, and training to PWDs in schools to engage actively and equally with other students.
- v. Tested, trusted and reliable people should be legally allowed to manage, monitor, and

protect the resources of cognitively impaired persons. Sometimes, a special trust fund should be created to manage their affairs. Where acting otherwise, an investigation should be taken to remove and prosecute exploiters if found guilty instantly.

- vi. Policies that prioritise the education of PWDs should be developed and executed to enable the victims to learn, play, and engage equitably in a diverse setting.
- vii. Security personnel and other key stakeholders should be well-trained to spot undetected exploitation and abuse of people with disabilities at schools and at home.
- viii. Individuals in their communities should take it upon themselves to report PWD rights violations to the proper authorities to take immediate action.

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