

## CHAPTER 3

### EMPIRICAL FINDINGS ON THE FEELINGS OF PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES REGARDING DISCRIMINATION

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research study sought to answer the research question: what are the feelings of people with physical disabilities regarding discrimination in Tembisa? The findings are presented according to the respective themes i.e. section A to F of the interview schedule and some graphic presentations.

#### 3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The type of research used is applied research. According to Fouché (2002:108) applied research is the scientific planning of induced change in a troublesome situation. Fouché & Delport (2002:79) view qualitative research approach as aiming to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life. The researcher conducted this study in order to obtain more information and knowledge regarding the feelings of people with physical disabilities towards discrimination. The research designs used are both the exploratory and descriptive designs. The researcher explored and gave an in-depth description of the feelings that people with physical disabilities experience regarding discrimination in Tembisa.

A sample of ten people with paraplegia and quadriplegia, both males and females, were selected following purposive sampling. This sampling method means that the researcher used a disability register available at the organisation, Association for Physical Disabled (APD), for selecting respondents. An interview schedule was formulated and the researcher asked the respondents questions individually and recorded their responses. The responses are recorded in themes and sub-themes.

### 3.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### ***Demographic details:***

##### 3.3.1 ***Gender***

The respondents consist of both males and females. Although there are more males than females, it can be deduced that physical disability affects both sexes.

##### 3.3.2 ***Distribution of age***

The age groups of respondents are categorised as early mid and late adulthood. Paraplegia and quadriplegia are not confined to a specific age group but affects various age groups. Although the sample is small, it would seem that the particular condition affects mostly people in the category of early and late adulthood.

##### 3.3.3 ***Marital status***

From the research findings, the respondents are categorised as married, single and divorced. Though the majority of respondents are single, a theme of difficulties in relationships may be deduced from the fact that only few respondents are married.

##### 3.3.4 ***Nationality***

All respondents are categorised as South African citizens.

##### 3.3.5 ***Language***

The following African languages are spoken by the respondents:

- North Sotho
- Zulu
- Xhosa
- South Sotho

Although not all ethnic groups are included, it can be interpreted that physical disability is evident in almost all ethnic groups and not confined to a specific group.

### 3.3.6 *Disability*

Some of the respondents are diagnosed with paraplegia while others are individuals with quadriplegia. The previous description of disability is an indication that all respondents are knowledgeable about their conditions because they clearly explained their diagnosis.

### 3.3.7 *Level of education and employment condition*

Generally, the respondents are literate. If they have attended high school, then they are literate, except one respondent who never attended school. Some respondents acquired certificates of skills training such as electrician, upholstery, computer literacy, wheelchair repairs, bookkeeping and office administration. Most of the respondents are unemployed and one is employed as a bookkeeper. The remaining respondents are involved in a self-help project of wheelchair repairs. The findings reveal that generally, there is a high level of unemployment and lack of skills development. Themes relating to unemployment, lack of formal education and skills training can be linked to the sub-themes exclusion and stigmatisation. It can be interpreted that people with physical disabilities were mainly excluded from the mainstream institutions and sent to specialised schools due to their disabilities.

## 3.4 **PERSONAL VIEWS**

### 3.4.1 *Discrimination*

Many of the respondents stated that discrimination against people with physical disabilities still exists in Tembisa. They share the same views with Heller, et al. (1992:247) that there remains enormous discrimination against people with disabilities in this society, the community of Tembisa not being an exception.

#### 3.4.2 ***Equal opportunities***

In the main, respondents indicated that people with disabilities do not enjoy equal opportunities as able-bodied counterparts. Views were expressed that people with disabilities enjoy equal opportunities, while an individual stated that some people with disabilities do enjoy equal opportunities as able-bodied people in their community. Some respondents were unable to respond to this question. Generally, the views concur with the White Paper on an Integrated Disability Strategy (1997:30), which emphasised that there are a number of barriers in the environment, which prevented people with disabilities from enjoying equal opportunities with non-disabled.

#### 3.4.3 ***Respondents' feelings towards being pitied***

Many respondents expressed unpleasant feelings when other people feel pity for them. From the findings, themes identified were unpleasantness, hatred and irritation. Sub-themes related to this could reflect a degree of uncomfortable feelings towards being pitied.

#### 3.4.4 ***Preference for marriage partners***

Preferences expressed for marriage partners are a partner with a physical disability, in addition to respondents preferring the ones without a disability. However, the remaining respondents prefer any partner that is with or without a disability. Of those who prefer non-disabled partners, they indicated that their partners would be able to assist them in day-to-day activities such as reaching out for objects that are difficult to access. The reason provided by those preferring a partner with a disability was that the particular person would be understanding and accept their condition. The other respondents do not discriminate, therefore will choose any marriage partner as long as they love each other and can relate well. Some respondents never responded to a question on preference for

marriage partners because they are already married. As mentioned in the literature review, Oliver and Sapey (1999:99) indicated that sex may or may not be a problem in long-term relationships where one or both of the partners are disabled. From the findings, a theme of uncertainty in discussion for choosing a marriage partner may reflect lack of self-confidence in developing heterosexual relationships with able-bodied partners and fear of rejection. One can conclude that in general, some people with physical disabilities have difficulty in forming heterosexual relationships with able-bodied counterparts, suggesting stigmatisation as the main reason.

#### 3.4.5 ***Meeting Ministers of Health and Social Development***

From the question on what would respondents say to both Ministers of Health and Social Development about the problem of discrimination against people with disabilities if they are allocated a minute to talk to them, two major problems were raised. Most respondents stated that they would complain to both Ministers about inaccessibility of public transport especially the taxis in their area. They mentioned that taxi drivers are reluctant to carry them, more especially when seeing a wheelchair and having to wait for a long time before one (taxi) can stop. The above complaint is supported by Silver and Koopman (2000:156) who indicated that the existing South African public transport system (taxis) is not easily accessible to people who use wheelchairs. Furthermore, the authors stated that taxi operators normally charge double the usual fare to load a wheelchair.

Respondents stated that they would complain about lack of housing for people with physical disabilities, while one respondent did not know what to say to both Ministers. Theme of non-responsiveness from other respondents can be linked to ignorance and lack of involvement about the general problems affecting people with physical disabilities. The finding shows that people with physical

disabilities are dissatisfied with public transportation and housing facilities, which are inaccessible.

#### 3.4.6 ***Respondents' attitude towards able-bodied people***

Generally, respondents possess a positive attitude towards able-bodied people. There was a mixed response in terms of attitude, they mentioned that they had nothing against able-bodied people, while others possess a negative attitude towards able-bodied people. Their negative attitude was that they (able-bodied) have a tendency of feeling pity for them and undermining them. However, some respondents did not respond to this question. The researcher observed a non-verbal theme that indicated reluctance from the particular respondents to talk about this attitude towards able-bodied people.

### 3.5 **SOCIETAL ATTITUDE**

#### 3.5.1 ***Attitude of able-bodied towards people with disabilities***

All the respondents stated that able-bodied people have negative attitudes towards them. Some of the reasons given were that able-bodied people treat them poorly and have a tendency for feeling pity towards them. From the literature review, Kilbury, et al. (1996:59) supported the notion that negative attitudes and perceptions about people with physical disabilities are held tenaciously and are therefore extremely difficult to change. Gething et al. (1994:66) share the same opinion that the community have negative attitudes towards people with physical disabilities and effect their quality of life and opportunities. The findings clearly prove that able-bodied people have a negative attitude towards people with physical disabilities.

#### 3.5.2 ***Perceptions from other people***

Various perceptions were raised. These include that people in the community perceive people with disabilities as those in need of help

at all times and who cannot do things for themselves. Furthermore, there is an indication that some community members even go to the extent of offering help (to push a wheelchair) voluntarily was raised.

Other perceptions were:

- some community members perceive them as normal people
- they perceive him/her as a normal person to the extent of forgetting about his/her disability
- people with mental retardation
- perceived as being friendly and educated
- respected person

From the literature review, Heller, et al. (1992:250) stated that the social perceptions of disabilities are viewed as dependence, mental incapacity, evoking embarrassing compassion and being strikingly different. The identified themes of mental incapacity, helplessness and dependence may suggest a sub-theme of labelling.

### 3.5.3 ***Special treatment for people with physical disabilities***

From the question on whether people with physical disabilities should receive special treatment in the community, there was a mixed response of agreement and disagreement.

Of those who agreed with the idea that people with physical disabilities be given special treatment, the respondents gave the following reasons:

- They have special needs, which are different from able-bodied people, as a result, they need special treatment and should be given first preference.
- They are different from able-bodied people and have different needs, and therefore need to be assisted at all times.

A respondent failed to motivate for agreeing to special treatment for people with physical disabilities.

The theme relating to special treatment indicates a degree of dependency. Respondents who disagreed with special treatment for people with physical disabilities, gave the following reasons:

- Special treatment would make them dependent.
- They are the same as able-bodied people, as a result they both deserve the same treatment.
- People with physical disabilities should only be assisted when necessary, rather than being treated specially.

From the findings, the theme relating to same treatment for everyone reflect a degree of independence and self-reliance.

#### 3.5.4 ***Acceptance from community members***

Many of the participants gain acceptance from the community members, while others are being partly accepted by some community members. However, only one respondent thinks that the community members do not accept them. Those who indicated that the community members accept them, stated the following reasons:

- They receive invitations for social outings such as going to the stadium to watch soccer and to the parties.
- Since the onset of disability no funny remarks were ever passed.
- They socialise with able-bodied friends.
- One respondent never experienced any negative responses from able-bodied people.
- Able-bodied people usually offer assistance whenever on the road.

A minority of respondents who stated that some community members accept them mentioned the following reasons:

- Taxi commuters once hesitated to sit next to him/her while travelling to Kempton Park.



- Some community members, who accepted him, knew him from prior to his disability.
- Only neighbours and church members usually pay a visit, as an indication of acceptance.

A respondent who thinks that community members do not accept them, motivated that they (community members) usually do not involve them in community activities such as participation in funerals in the neighbourhood.

The findings generally confirm that respondents feel that community members in Tembisa are accepting people with physical disabilities.

### 3.6 EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

#### 3.6.1 *Experience of discriminatory remarks*

Respondents have experienced discriminatory remarks against their physical disabilities from able-bodied counterparts. These remarks included that they were told not to have relationships with able-bodied partners, some able-bodied people hesitated to sit next to one of them in a taxi, while other taxi commuters alight from the taxi immediately when seeing a wheelchair. Few respondents have never experienced any discriminatory remarks against their physical disabilities.

It is the researcher's opinion that passing of discriminatory remarks to people with physical disabilities negatively affects their self-confidence. The identified themes of reluctance to sit next to a disabled person, not to have relationships with able-bodied partners, alighting when seeing a person on an wheelchair also reflect a degree of isolation, exclusion and stigmatisation by able-bodied people.

### 3.6.2 ***Respondents' feelings of being physically disabled***

Respondents stated that they feel unhappy about the change in their lives by being physically disabled. The view was that the sad feeling is experienced more when seeing his/her able-bodied friends and when there is a need for transport to run errands. The researcher observed a non-verbal theme of sorrow from one respondent who stated that lack of sufficient income and marital disputes started after the onset of disability. One respondent indicated that her disability is congenital, as a result she accepted and adapted well to her disability.

From the researcher's observation during the interviews, most of the respondents expressed deep feelings of sorrow and depression when exploring their feelings of being physically disabled.

### 3.6.3 ***Equal rights as stated by the Constitution***

According to the respondents, people with disabilities do not enjoy equal rights as stated by the Constitution of the RSA, while some respondents agreed that there are equal rights for all. Of those who said that there are no equal rights for both able-bodied and people with disabilities, the following reasons were provided:

- The government does not keep its promises, an example given was that of housing subsidy, which was not given to people with disabilities.
- Human rights are just stated in the statutes but not being practised.
- People with disabilities are not employed in the open labour market due to their disability. The above concurs with what Quinn, et al. (1993:10) who pointed out that the principle of equality and non-discrimination in the open labour market must be implemented by the state in that the state should set itself up as a model employer by setting a target quota for the employment of individuals with disabilities in the public sector.

The Employment Equity Act (1998:18) requires employers to make reasonable accommodation for people from designated groups (black people, women, people with disabilities) in order to ensure that they enjoy equal opportunities and is equitably represented in the workshop of a designated employer. The minority of respondents who stated that there are equal rights for all, motivated that the government does not discriminate.

From the findings, it can be concluded that people with disabilities do not enjoy equal rights as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

#### 3.6.4 ***Dependency and helplessness***

Few respondents agreed with the notion that people with disabilities are dependent and helpless, while the majority disagreed with the same notion. Of those who agreed that people with disabilities are dependent and helpless, the following reasons were given:

- They (people with disabilities) need help on day-to-day basis for home-based care and other activities.
- They are excluded in most social activities.

Of those who disagreed that people with disabilities are dependent and helpless, they stated the following reasons:

- They can work and earn some income as able-bodied people.
- Most of them are involved in self-help projects and gave examples of car washing and wheelchair repairs' projects.
- Some of them can do their laundry, bathing, ironing and do other things without guidance from others.

From the literature review, it is clearly noted that disability is associated with dependencies (Heller, et al. 1992:247). The White Paper on Integrated Disability Strategy (1997:2) asserts that social attitudes have perpetuated stereotypes of disabled people as

dependent and in need of care is one factor which promotes exclusion of people with disabilities from the mainstream of society.

### 3.6.5 ***Respondents' reactions after experiencing disability***

From the question on the respondents' reactions after learning that they are no longer going to walk independently, the following reactions were provided:

- Some reacted badly with sadness to the extent that one respondent did not want to use a wheelchair.
- A wish for death rather than being disabled. This concurs with Rogers (1986:27) that most patients will initially wish they were dead and out of it when told that they will no longer be able to walk or use their hands again.
- Shock and disbelief.

Only one respondent was not affected by this question because of congenital disability. Feelings that are identified as bad, sadness, wish for death than disability, shock and disbelief – themes could relate to feelings of denial and lack of acceptance of physical disability. Respondents were generally shocked after learning about their disability, except for a respondent with congenital disability.

### 3.6.6 ***Respondents' views on government's responses to their basic needs***

Many respondents view the South African government as generally not responding positively towards the basic needs of people with disabilities. A further mixed response was obtained. These are:

- a respondent was not sure about the government's responses towards the basic needs of people with disabilities
- another respondent viewed the government as responding positively towards their basic needs
- a respondent sees the government as partly responding positively towards their basic needs

Of those who view government as not responding to their basic needs, some indicated that the government neglect people with disabilities' needs for employment and accessible public transportation. This concurs with Lonsdale (1992:98) that people with disabilities are seriously disadvantaged in the labour market because they are less likely to have paid work and tend to work in lower status and lower paid jobs. Research findings (CASE, 1998:29) supports this further by noting that the largest concentrations of people with disabilities are in the lowest income-earning households with the lowest educational levels. Some respondents indicated that there are no sports facilities available for people with disabilities such as tennis courts in their community, the streets are not tarred, as a result are not wheelchair friendly. Some other respondents stated that the government did not keep its promise for housing subsidy for people with disabilities. A respondent who views government as partly responding to their basic needs mentioned that their disability grants are always reviewed and increased. The respondents who gave an uncertain answer stated that she was not sure whether a memorandum was sent to the government stating their basic needs. The one respondent mentioned that the government is responding positively towards their needs, although the process is slow.

The findings confirm that majority of the respondents view the South African government as not responding positively to meet people with disabilities' basic needs. In spite of the Constitution and legislation such as the Employment Equity Act (1998), which affirms the rights of people with disabilities, those rights have not been implemented in various sections of society.

### 3.7 REHABILITATION AND ADAPTATION

#### 3.7.1 *Adaptation to physical disability*

Respondents in the main have fully adapted to their physical disabilities, while one respondent has partly adapted. The fact that most of the respondents have fully adapted to their condition indicates the effectiveness of health care service delivery with regard to rehabilitation. The findings reveal that the rehabilitation process was effectively implemented.

#### 3.7.2 *Assistance in the adaptation process*

Most respondents including the one who is partly adapted have been assisted by professional intervention to adapt successfully to their disabilities. They identified social workers and nurses as professionals who assisted them throughout the adaptation process. Some respondents have been assisted by persons with similar disabilities to adapt to their conditions, while others obtained assistance through the help and support of family and friends. According to Hlongwane (2002:289) many rehabilitation professionals use former patients with great success to discuss and share their experiences with new patients.

From the findings, it can be deduced that teamwork between social workers and nurses in the rehabilitation process proved highly beneficial to newly disabled people for adapting to their disabilities. Furthermore, other categories also played a significant role such as family, friends and people with similar disabilities.

#### 3.7.3 *Time-frame for adaptation process*

Respondents in the main estimated that they took about a year to adapt to their physical disabilities, while one of the respondents is still in the process of full adaptation. One of the respondents was not sure how long the adaptation process lasted, and another

respondent was not affected by the adaptation process because of a congenital condition.

The fact that most respondents took about a year to adapt to their disabilities indicates some degree of denial to accept their diagnosis. However, the time frame indicated above can be categorised as falling within the reasonable limit of adaptation process.

### **3.8 COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND PARTICIPATION**

#### **3.8.1 *Disability forum, social or interest groups***

Most of the respondents do not belong to any disability forum, social or interest groups, while few respondents belong to forums from the community. Of the few respondents who belong to a local forum, some belong to Tembisa District Rehabilitation forum and others to Ithuseng Protective Workshop. The theme relating to participation indicates the sub-theme of passiveness and lack involvement as far as disability issues are concerned. The fact that the majority of respondents do not participate in community forums confirms the degree of dependency, lack of motivation as well as lack of knowledge about issues affecting people with disabilities.

#### **3.8.2 *Accessible health services***

From the question on whether health services in the community are accessible, all the respondents indicated that health services are accessible in their community. In view of the above information, health care services in Tembisa can be categorised as efficient and effectively meeting the necessary needs of community members. The findings also indicate that people with physical disabilities do not experience difficulty in accessing health services in the community.

### 3.8.3 *Transport used*

Respondents often use public transport (taxis), or private transport. Of those using private transport, the following sub-categories were identified – transport from Association for Physically Disabled, family car, friends' cars as well as own car.

Recently in Gauteng the Metro busses have been introduced to transport people with disabilities, though on a small scale because they are only operating in the city of Johannesburg, not in the townships.

It is the researcher's opinion that avoidance of using transport can be linked to the fact that public transport in that community is inaccessible for people with physical disabilities.

### 3.8.4 *Attitudes of other commuters*

Respondents who use taxis as a means of transport described the following attitudes of other commuters towards people with physical disabilities:

- Negative attitudes from other commuters because wheelchairs will make them dirty.
- Reluctance to sit next to them and stare at them as if they have never seen a person with physical disability before.

Interestingly a respondent using a taxi experienced a positive attitude from other commuters because they usually offer help to fold and load a wheelchair. Some of the respondents were not affected by this question because they utilise different private transport. The theme of negative attitude of commuters is linked to the sub-themes of isolation, exclusion and stigmatisation of people with physical disabilities.



### 3.8.5 ***Attitudes of drivers***

The respondents were asked to describe the attitude of taxi drivers towards them. The following attitudes of taxi drivers were mentioned:

- Impatient attitude accompanied by poor service, especially having to load a wheelchair
- Negative attitude
- Charging double fare for wheelchairs
- Positive attitude

From the findings it is evident that taxi drivers provide poor service for people with physical disabilities, although very few respondents are being properly served. The above information is supported by Silver and Koopman (2000:156) who stated that taxi operators normally charge double the usual fare to load a wheelchair and often become impatient with the time it takes to assist the person with a disability to board a taxi.

### 3.8.6 ***Participation in awareness campaign***

All the respondents indicated that they would participate actively if a disability awareness campaign could be organised in the community. However, some respondents clarified that they will participate actively but will not prefer to be at the forefront. The findings shows that people with disabilities see a dire need for participating in activities that concern disability issues. The theme relating to participation clearly reflects the degree of responsibility and community involvement.

### 3.8.7 ***Accessibility of public buildings***

From the question on whether public buildings in Tembisa are accessible, a mixed response was obtained of some public buildings are accessible while a minority viewed them as inaccessible. The findings reveal that not all public buildings in Tembisa are accessible for people with disabilities.

### 3.8.8 ***Accessible and inaccessible public buildings***

Respondents were asked to identify public buildings that are accessible as well as those inaccessible. Different respondents identified many different public buildings, as there was no indication of a number required. As a consequence, the following were identified as accessible:

- Civic Centre
- Rabasotho Hall
- Multipurpose Centre
- Standard Bank
- Lethabong Hall
- Tembi Shopping Centre
- Tembisa Hospital
- Roman Catholic Church in Kopanong Section
- ZCC Church

Furthermore, there was no agreement among respondents as some consider Rabasotho and Lathabong Halls as inaccessible because the areas around the premises are not tarred or paved, hence not wheelchair friendly. The following buildings were viewed as inaccessible:

- Jan Lubbe and Mehlareng Stadiums
- Ekhayalothando Hall
- Shops
- Churches
- Tembisa police station
- Some doctors' consulting rooms

The findings show that some of the respondents are not well orientated to their community.

### 3.8.9 ***What to do if the venue for the meeting is inaccessible?***

To respond to this question, a range of responses were obtained such as they would

- ask assistance from other people to carry them up to the meeting if the building is inaccessible for wheelchair users
- will not attend the meeting, not agree to be lifted up and will therefore communicate the problem to the organisers of the particular meeting
- will ask organisers of the meeting for assistance
- will not attend that meeting but send a representative to attend on his behalf.

The findings reveal that many of respondents would not do anything to resolve the problem of inaccessibility of public buildings. Only a few respondents would try to eliminate the problem by seeking assistance from the very organisers of the meeting. From the researcher's observation, some people with physical disabilities feel embarrassed when lifted up to access the buildings.

### 3.8.10 ***Elimination of discrimination***

Respondents were asked to formulate strategies on elimination of discrimination against people with physical disabilities. The following were formulated:

- Awareness campaigns and workshops should be organised to educate people about disability issues.
- A mediator to be appointed to advocate for people with physical disabilities' rights.
- Those discriminating against people with physical disabilities should be reported to the authorities.
- The government should intervene by abolishing discrimination.
- Strict measures and discipline to be applied to those discriminating against people with physical disabilities.

- A march should be organised by all people with disabilities and send a memorandum to the government stating problems of discrimination against people with disabilities.

The findings reveal that all the respondents will take part in trying to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities. From the perspective of the researcher, there appears to be a strong partnership among the respondents in the fight against discrimination.

### 3.9 SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with research methodology and research findings, which were analysed and interpreted according to themes and categories in the interview schedule.

Data was collected from ten respondents who are paraplegias and quadriplegias, both whom are males and females residing in Tembisa. Analyses and interpretation of data was done by integrating it with relevant literature.

The findings reveal that people with physical disabilities are still being discriminated against, particularly by their able-bodied counterparts in their community. The feelings of people with physical disabilities were explored and the findings highlighted that they feel unpleasant, irritated and hate to be pitied by other people because of their disabled conditions. A strong wish for “being dead” rather than live with disability were also expressed during interviews. However, negative attitudes, stigma and lack of acceptance by able-bodied people are still marked in the particular community. People with physical disabilities are being perceived as mentally retarded, helpless, though a minority of disabled people are being perceived as normal people.

The findings further revealed that inaccessibility of some public buildings in Tembisa is a problem faced by people with physical disabilities. Attitudes

of taxi drivers and some taxi commuters are unbearable to people with physical disabilities, to the extent that some respondents resorted to utilising various private transport. As a result, public transport (taxis) is not wheelchair friendly. However, it can be concluded that people with physical disabilities feel isolated, rejected, marginalized and stigmatised in the particular community.