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# Demand Factors and The Employment of Persons with Disability in 3-5 Star Hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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## Abstract

The study sought to explore the demand factors influencing the employment of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in 3-5-star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya, amid the observed lower employment rates of PWDs compared to able-bodied individuals. Employing a descriptive survey research design, the study gathered both qualitative and quantitative data from 32 organizations, including 31 hotels and the National Council for Persons with Disability, using a census sampling technique. Data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires for HR personnel and an interview schedule for the manager of the National Council for Persons with Disability. a relatively minor role, accounting for 8.8% of the employment of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Nairobi's 3-5-star hotel sector. Despite existing legislation setting a 5% employment quota for PWDs, none of the hotels in the study met this requirement, indicating a significant gap in the demand for PWD employment within this industry. The study recommends that the Kenyan government review and ensure the effective implementation of policies and legislation related to the employment quotas for PWDs. This includes providing better support and information to employers on making accommodations for PWDs and the advantages of utilizing financial incentives. These measures aim to encourage and increase the employment of PWDs in the hotel sector.

**Key words:** *Demand Factors, Employment, Disability, 3-5 star hotels*

## 1.0 Introduction

Over a billion (15%) of the global population, have some type of disability (World Health Organization (WHO), 2011) with 785 million being of working age (International Labour Organization, 2015). However, persons with disability (PWDs) are normally unemployed and generally earn less than their able bodied counterparts when employed (WHO, 2011). Studies have

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shown that PWDs can be successfully employed in the hotel industry (Groschl, 2007; Gottlieb, Myhill and Blanck, 2010) however, they continue to have low employment rates (Balta and Bengisu, 2012; Smit, 2012; Paez and Arendt, 2014). The tourism industry in Kenya has continued to experience expressive growth yearly despite the travel bans and terrorism attacks (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). The entrance of international hotel chains and a forecasted 16 new hotels will increase bed capacity to 2,956 in the coming years (Wainaina, 2016) and necessitate the provision of a large and diverse workforce. In Kenya, approximately 1.75 million people live with a disability (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), 2010). The Kenya National Survey of Persons with Disability Report (KNBS, 2010) showed that 24% of PWDs were unemployed. The Kenyan government enacted the Persons with Disabilities Act 2003 on December 2003 to prohibit the discrimination of PWDs and provide for their rights and rehabilitation in society (Kenya Law Reports Online, 2008). With the growing need for employees in hotels, PWDs represent an available workforce which the hotel industry can exploit. Demand factors represent the employer side and are meant to create a need for PWDs in hotels. These factors include anti-discrimination policies, quotas, accommodations, financial incentives and penalties

### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Despite the Persons with Disability Act 2003 being in effect for over 16 years, the employment rates for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) remain significantly lower than those of their able-bodied counterparts. The fundamental principle of employment, which relies on the equilibrium between labor demand and supply, seems to falter when it comes to the inclusion of PWDs in the workforce. A notable gap persists in the understanding of the employment dynamics of PWDs within Kenya, particularly in how Human Resources (HR) personnel in the hotel sector perceive the qualifications of PWDs as potential contributions to their labor pool. Furthermore, the effectiveness of anti-discrimination policies, employment quotas, workplace accommodations, financial incentives, and penalties in enhancing the employment rates of PWDs in the Kenyan hotel industry remains unclear. PWDs continue to face discrimination and exclusion in the labor market, suggesting these measures may not be fully realized or impactful. In light of these challenges, this research aimed to delve into the demand factors influencing the employment of PWDs in 3-5 star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya, to better understand and address these disparities.

### **1.2 Objective of the study**

To investigate the demand factors that relate to employment of persons with disability in 3-5-star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

### **1.3 Hypothesis**

Ho: Demand factors have no relationship to the employment of PWDs in 3-5-star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya

### **1.4 Justification of the study**

The findings of the study will offer valuable insights into the employment of persons with disabilities (PWDs) within the 3-5 star hotel sector in Nairobi City County, Kenya. This research aims to contribute new knowledge regarding the presence and roles of PWDs within this industry,

thereby shedding light on their employment opportunities and challenges. Furthermore, the study outcomes will serve as a valuable resource for human resources personnel, empowering them to actively seek and promote the recruitment of qualified PWDs, thus fostering greater inclusivity and diversity within hotel workforce.

### **1.5 Scope of the study**

The study concentrated on demand factors and the employment of PWDs. This study was narrowed to human resource personnel in 3-5-star hotels in Nairobi City County as it is the capital of Kenya and has a large star rating of hotels thus provided an abundant population for the study.

## **2.1 Empirical Literature Review**

This section discusses the empirical literature that forms the background for the study.

### **2.1.1 Quotas**

A quota mandates the recruitment and employment of a specific number or percentage of individuals from a designated group. Disability quotas represent a strategic method to enhance awareness and promote the employment of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) by directly influencing labor demand (Sargeant, Radevich-Katsaroumpa & Innesti, 2016). It's presupposed that, in the absence of such quotas, employers might refrain from hiring PWDs due to discriminatory attitudes, negative assumptions about their productivity, and the anticipated high costs of accommodations necessary to ensure PWDs can perform as effectively as their non-disabled counterparts (Mont, 2004). Research conducted in Japan has demonstrated an uptick in the employment rates of PWDs attributed to the implementation of the quota system (Tamako, 2007; Kudo, 2010). However, Nagae (2015) contends that quotas have not effectively fostered the broader employment of PWDs. Some critics argue that such legislative measures inadvertently segregate PWDs, insinuating that they cannot secure employment based on merit alone and necessitating special accommodations in the workplace (Naidoo, Maja, Mann, Sing & Steyn, 2011; Aldersey, 2012). In Kenya, the Persons with Disability Act 2003 includes a stipulation that aims to reserve 5% of all positions within public and private organizations for PWDs.

### **2.1.2 Anti-discrimination**

It is illegal to base employment decisions on a candidate's disability as this constitutes discrimination. Discrimination, bigotry, stereotypes and misunderstanding of capability often makes employers unwilling to hire PWDs (Gottlieb et al., 2010). Lindsay (2011) identified disability as one of the reason teens and youth were discriminated against in employment opportunities. Some employers still express that PWDs are not equipped to function adequately in the organization as their personal and professional attributes are not believed to conform to organizational norms and priorities (Beaton, Kabano and Léger, 2012). Other studies cite that the nature of the work in the hotel industry is such that it cannot be effectively performed by PWDs (Groschl, 2007; Houtenville and Kalargyrou, 2012). However, the purpose of legislation is to facilitate better access to formal economic opportunities for PWDs, equalize wages and salaries and improve working conditions for them (WHO, 2011). The Persons with Disability Act 2003 prohibits discrimination based on advertisement of opportunities, recruitment, wages, salaries,



pensions, accommodation, leave, creation or abolition of posts, apprenticeships, training, transfer, promotion and retrenchment.

### **2.1.3 Accommodations**

Failure to make reasonable accommodations for PWDs at work is one of the challenges they face in accessing employment (Marumoagae, 2012). Persons with disabilities may require workplace accommodations to carry out their duties effectively. Legislation outlines employer responsibility to provide accommodations to employees with disabilities. Gustafsson, Peralta and Danermark (2014) highlight the necessity of accommodations in the successful implementation of hiring decisions for PWDs. Accommodations can either alter the work environment and make it more accessible for PWDs (Simonsen, Luecking and Fabian, 2015) or can include a re-design of job characteristics to meet their labour needs (Mont, 2004). However, a research by Yelin, Sonneborn and Trupin (2000) as cited in Dong, Fabian and Xu (2016) on individuals with musculoskeletal disabilities reported receiving workplace accommodations and these were not generally associated with an improvement of their employment rates. Gottlieb et al., (2010) also state that human resource personnel may be hesitant to hire PWDs because of misconceptions of accommodation and healthcare costs.

### **2.1.4 Financial Incentives and penalties**

Incentives help to alleviate employers' fears of hiring or accommodating PWDs in terms of premises modifications, costs, supplemental training or greater human resource requirements. Few employers utilize these incentives thus it becomes difficult to determine their impact on hiring PWDs (Mont, 2004; Mose, 2018). High rates of employment are unlikely where positive incentives and/or negative sanctions are not sufficient or certain enough (Weaver, 2009). A study of the Persons with Disability Act of 2010 in Tanzania recommended the need for the Tanzanian government to provide special budgetary allocations and provide incentives to employers to comply with legislation (Kweka, 2010). However, Opini, (2010) cautions that employer's focus should not be on realizing the incentives but should be to advance the rights of PWDs. Alternatively, Lalive, Wuellrich and Zweimüller (2013) revealed that an increase in penalties considerably increased organizations' demand for disabled workers.

## **3.0 Research Methodology**

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods as outlined by Orodho (2003). The participant pool consisted of 39 individuals from 32 organizations, predominantly 3-5 star hotels as cataloged in the Tourism Regulatory Authority's Register of Classified Establishments for the years 2015-2018 (Tourism Regulatory Organization, 2018). The selection process for these organizations and the respondents, which included 31 human resource personnel and representatives from the Disability Service Office of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWDs), was guided by purposive sampling to draw upon their specialized knowledge (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). To gather data, the study utilized semi-structured questionnaires for the HR personnel and structured interviews for the managers at NCPWDs, focusing on demographic information and legislation-related topics. The analysis of quantitative data was conducted using descriptive statistics and linear regression techniques, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis.

#### 4.0 Results and Discussion

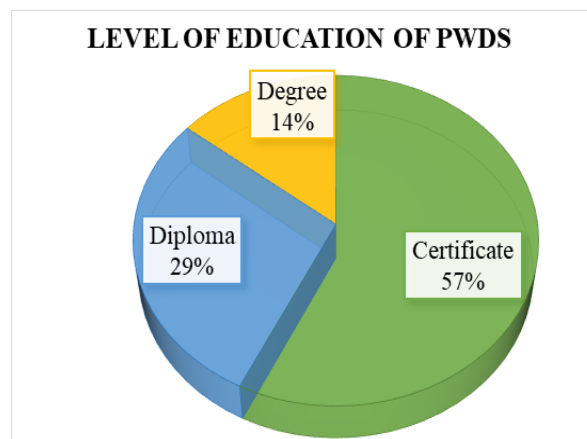
The findings indicate that majority of HR personnel are female (57%) as compared to male (43%). Female PWDs were the majority (57%) as compared to male (43%). HR personnel in the age group of 31-35 years were at 43% while (71%) PWDs were in the age group of 26-30 years and 29% were under 25. These results infer PWDs who have been and are currently employed in hotels are youth. Majority of the PWDs (64%) had worked between 1-3 years while those who had worked for less than 1 year and 4-6 years cumulatively accounted for 36% of work experience.

At the NCPWDs, the Disability Service Officer (DSO) is responsible for handling matters on employment of PWDs. Job titles of PWDs have included (14%) each chef, accountant and telephone operator while two each (25%) housekeeping / laundry attendants and interns (Table 1). These findings concur with PWDs employed in developed countries who work in different sections of the hotel (Marriot Hotel, 2015; Accor Hotels, 2018).

**Table 1 Positions which have been held by persons with disability hotels**

Job positions of PWDs	Hotel star rating			Total	Percentage
	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star		
Chef	1	-	-	1	14%
Housekeeping/ Laundry attendant	1	1	-	2	29%
Accountant	1	-	-	1	14%
Telephone operator	-	1	-	1	14%
Intern	1	-	1	2	29%
Total	4	2	2	8	100%

The education level of PWDs was 57% of certificate, 29% diploma and 14% degree qualification (Figure 4.1). The survey further revealed that the educational background of PWDs included 57% hospitality, 29% business and 14% other courses like human resource, marketing and procurement. Post-secondary or vocational education has been seen to facilitate the employment of PWDs and this can be assumed to be the case above (Mizunoya and Mitra, 2013).



**Figure 1: Level of education of PWDs employed in hotels**

Over the last 14 years 62% of hotels have not employed PWDs, while only 38% (8) hotels have employed at most one (Table 2)

**Table 2 Persons with disability employed in hotels**

PWDS employed in hotels	Hotel star rating			Total	Percentage
	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star		
1-5 PWDs	4	2	2	8	38%
None	4	5	4	13	62%
Total	8	7	6	21	100%

Most PWDs were employed in three-star hotels (50%), followed by four-star and five-star hotels at 25% each. The DSO further stated;

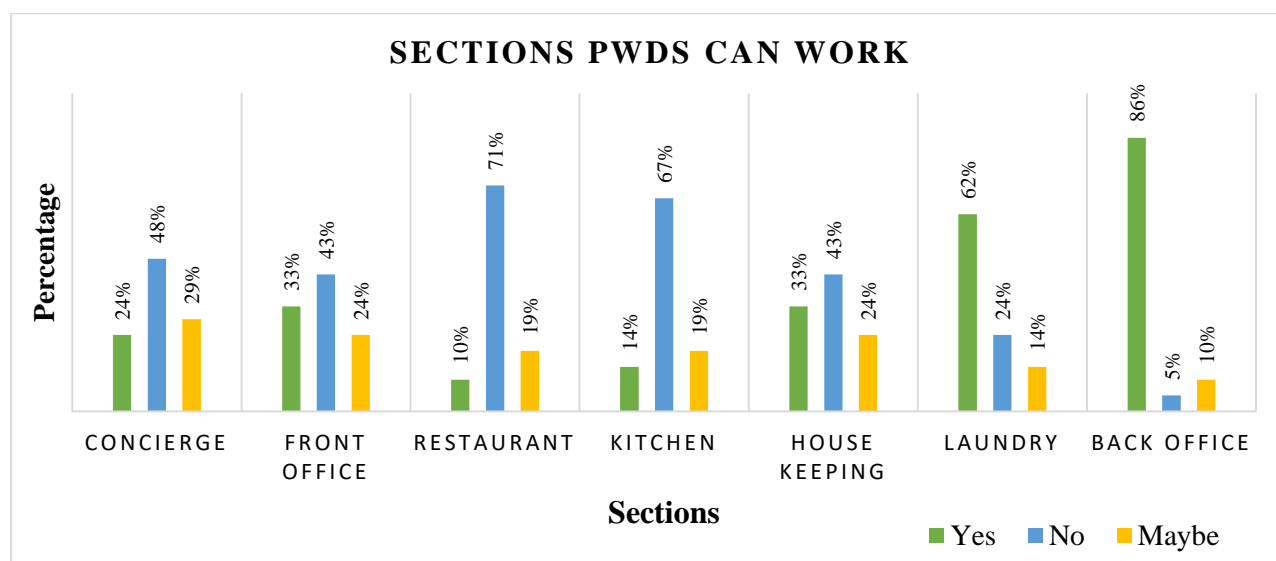
*“There is insufficient data on PWDs employed in hotels as most hotels are private”*

Legislation advocating for the employment rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) was passed over 14 years ago, and the findings suggest that hotels have made strides in hiring PWDs since the Act's enactment, albeit achieving a low overall percentage to date. Notably, none of the hotels have reached the 5% employment quota set forth by the legislation. Human Resources (HR) personnel also highlighted additional challenges, such as a shortage of adequately qualified candidates and insufficient support from both the government and disability organizations, as key reasons behind their inability to meet the 5% quota. The DSO expressed similar views indicating that hotels have not achieved the 5% quota requirement adding that,

*“Negative employer perception towards advertisements, employment and promotion of PWDs at work has further contributed to lack of achievement of the 5% quota.”*

These findings concur with Nagae, (2015) study on disability employment where quotas did not facilitate the employment of PWDs. From the above results it can be concluded that the quota has not been effective in creating demand for employment of PWDs in hotels.

HR personnel views on whether PWDs can work in the hotel industry indicate 100% agreement to the statement. Respondents further explanations on the response included: disability is not inability; PWDs can work in specific departments depending on the disability; PWDs can hold or work in specific position within the hotel; PWDs have the same rights as other workers and PWDs have skills to provide necessary services in the hotel. The DSO also agrees that PWDs can work in hotels. Baum (2013), Houtenville and Kalargyrou (2015) and Wills (2015) support these views by indicating a higher likelihood of the hotel industry employing PWDs and further showing success on employment of PWDs in hotels. These results indicate positive employer views on PWDs working in the industry imply employers would not discriminate against the employment of PWDs. However further inquiry on sections where PWDs can work revealed HR personnel opinions as the back office (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Sections where PWDs can work in the hotel**

The majority of respondents (86%) indicated that Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) could be employed in back-office roles and laundry services (62%). There was a reluctance to hire PWDs in the restaurant (71%) and kitchen areas (67%), with some respondents undecided about their suitability for concierge (29%), front office (24%), and housekeeping (24%) positions. These findings are consistent with a study by Smit (2012), which observed a preference among South African hotel employers for placing PWDs in 'back of the house' roles, where there is minimal direct contact with guests. This trend may also be linked to the hotels' preference for employees who meet certain criteria related to physical appearance, attractiveness, and social skills in



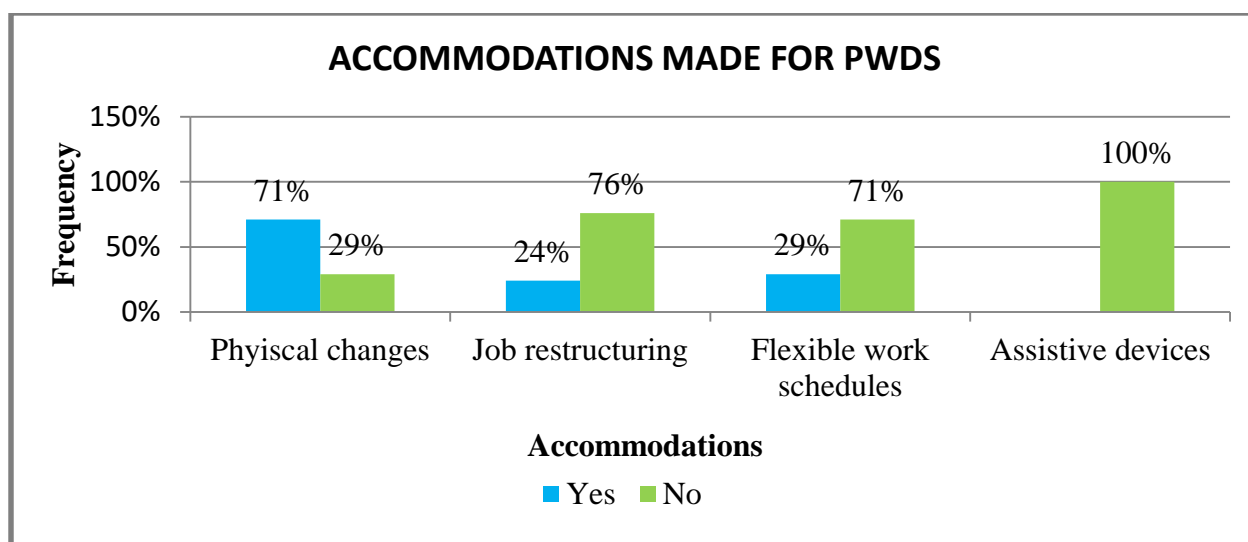
customer-facing roles, as noted by Groschol (2007), Warhust and Nickson (2007), and De Sa et al. (2017).

In contrast, hotel chains like Marriott, Park Inn Radisson, and Accor have demonstrated that PWDs can be successfully employed in a variety of positions, challenging the negative perceptions and discriminatory attitudes towards the capabilities of PWDs (Marriott Hotel, 2015; Wills, 2015; Accor Hotels, 2018).

Furthermore, the study sought to determine whether PWDs had experienced discrimination at work due to their disability. Among the HR personnel who reported having employed PWDs, 48% indicated there were no reports of discrimination, suggesting a potential positive work environment for PWDs within these settings.

Sixty seven percent (67%) of HR personnel indicated that employed PWDs had requested accommodations compared to 33% who had not. Accommodations enable PWDs to carry out their duties effectively and may positively influence the hiring decisions for PWDs (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark, 2014). Figure 4.3 indicates physical changes (71%) such as ramps, disabled changing rooms and disabled parking were made for PWDs. Minimal changes were made in terms of job restructuring and reassignment (76%) and flexible work schedules (71%). No changes were made on assistive devices like Braille machines and sign language interpreters. The DSO confirmed the above by stating,

*“Most hotels have made the physical accommodations to premises. However, sometimes physical accommodations like wheelchair ramps may not meet the acceptable standards for slope or gradient and may end up being a hazard to PWDs.”*



**Figure 3: Accommodations made for PWDs**

The above results imply employers are willing to make accommodations for PWDs. However, more effort needs to be made in terms of assistive devices like braille machines, sign language interpreters, flexible work schedules and job restructuring.

Seventy six percent (76%) of HR personnel noted they do not utilize the financial incentives in employment of PWDs compared to 24% who do. These results concur with findings of a study by Mont (2004) which showed that few employers used financial incentives. The above results infer that employers do not know the benefits of using financial incentives when employing PWDs. When HR personnel were further asked whether the hotel had faced any offences and penalties for failure to implement the Act, they indicated no. The DSO also stated that;

*“Disability employment cases are rare or few in courts.”*

The above results indicate that failure to implement the Act will not result in any penalties or prosecution indicating a laxity in prosecution of organizations for not implementing the Act.

#### 4.1 Hypothesis Test Using Linear Regression: Demand Factors and Employment of Persons with Disability

The regression of the independent variables quotas, anti-discrimination, accommodations, and financial incentives against the dependent variable employment of PWDs were computed to determine the strength of the associations between variables (Table 4.3). At a significance value of 0.05, the results indicated employment quota and financial incentives as major contributors to employment of PWDs with a regression of 0.000 each followed by accommodations at 0.145 and Discrimination at 0.171.

**Table 3: Quotas, anti-discrimination, accommodations, financial incentives against employment of PWDs**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-13.533	2.855		-4.741	.000
	Employment Quota	3.902	.768	.579	5.082	.000
	Discrimination	.196	.137	.274	1.432	.171
	Accommodations	.207	.136	.326	1.531	.145
	Financial incentives	3.015	.333	.895	9.044	.000

a. Dependent Variable: How many persons with disabilities have been employed within the hotel in the past 14 years?

b. Predictors: (Constant), quotas, anti-discrimination, accommodations, financial incentives

The study established that  $R^2=0.088$ , which implies that 8.8% change in employment of PWDs are explained by demand (Table 4.4).

**Table 4: Model summary for demand factors against employment of PWDs**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.297a	.088	.035	.469
a. Predictors: (Constant), demand factors				

The table below shows that the relationship between demand factors and employment of PWDs was statistically significant as indicated by the sig 0.000 (Table 5). This means that demand had a positive relationship to employment of PWDs.

**Table 5: Coefficients for demand factors against employment of PWDs**

Model	Coefficients			T	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.525	1.440	2.449	.025	
DEMAND	.022	.017	-.297	-.1282	.217

a. Dependent Variable: How many persons with disabilities have been employed within the hotel in the past 14 years?

$H_0$  Demand factors have no relationship to the employment of PWDs in 3-5-star hotels in Nairobi City County, Kenya at a significance level of 0.05, showed a significance level of 0.217 which is more than 0.05 meaning the null hypothesis was accepted. Thus it was concluded that demand factors did not have a relationship to the employment of PWDs.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that significant deficiencies exist in the demand for the employment of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) within hotels, evidenced by none of the surveyed hotels meeting the 5% employment quota mandated by the Act. This highlights the need for a review of existing policies. Furthermore, although the majority of HR personnel reported no instances of discrimination, their preference for assigning PWDs to back-office roles suggests underlying discriminatory practices. Overall, the findings point to a clear need for proactive measures to enhance inclusivity and address discrimination in hotel employment practices regarding PWDs.

## 6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that the government reviews policies and legislation to enforce the employment quota for persons with disabilities (PWDs) effectively. Furthermore, the government should consider providing support and financial incentives to employers to encourage the employment of PWDs, particularly within sectors such as the hospitality industry. By revisiting

and potentially revising existing regulations, policymakers can create a more inclusive environment that promotes equal opportunities for PWDs in the workforce.

The study suggests that the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWDs) conducts regular inspections to ensure that accommodations provided for PWDs in hotel settings meet acceptable standards. By maintaining diligent oversight and enforcement efforts, the NCPWDs can help ensure that PWDs have access to the necessary accommodations to thrive in their workplaces. Through systematic assessments and collaborative partnerships with stakeholders, the council can address any deficiencies in accommodation provisions promptly and effectively.

Furthermore, the study recommends that the NCPWDs initiates disability sensitization and awareness campaigns aimed at both employers and the general public. These campaigns should highlight best practices for the employment of PWDs and underscore the importance of providing assistive devices and reasonable accommodations. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and acceptance, such initiatives can help break down barriers and promote greater diversity within the hotel industry and other sectors.

Lastly, the study emphasizes the need for further research into the challenges faced by employers in accommodating PWDs in the workplace. By conducting comprehensive investigations, researchers can identify common obstacles, best practices, and areas for improvement in accommodation provisions. Armed with this knowledge, policymakers, employers, and advocacy groups can develop targeted strategies and interventions aimed at promoting greater inclusivity and accessibility in hiring practices. Through evidence-based approaches, we can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive labor market for individuals with disabilities.

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