

## **Negative Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities<sup>1</sup>**

The desire to avoid whatever is associated with evil has affected people's attitudes towards people with disabilities, simply because disability is erroneously associated with evil. These mere misconceptions have produced negative attitudes that stem from lack of proper understanding of disability and how they affect functioning.

For instance, some religious leaders indicate that persons with disabilities, especially those with mental disabilities, are possessed by evil spirits. These religious leaders subject people with disabilities to mental and physical pain as a means of exorcising the spirits.

Regrettably, the inaccurate presentation of disability negatively affects some persons with disabilities. In most cases, they tend to see themselves and accept their fate as inferior and a burden to society.

Thus, the inaccurate cultural values on disability as presented by the culture to which they belong, dominate their understanding of disability; whether cognitive visual physical speech, sensory or a combination of these.

For instance, the message that a child with disability receives about himself or herself from his environment determines to a large extent his feelings about who he is, what he can do and how he should behave. In the same way, the inaccurate presentation of disability negatively influences how the people in that cultural set up interact with persons with disabilities. The resultant attitudes include pity, fear, uneasiness, guilt, sympathy and respect. These negative perceptions of disability relegate persons with disabilities to the background, thereby making them the largest oppressed minority in society.

### **Altitudinal Barriers: Stigma and Stereotypes**

The inaccurate presentation of disability critically affect the relationship between persons with disabilities and the non-disabled people. They form some of the sources of attitudes which can stigmatise persons with disabilities, impose artificial limitations upon them, deny

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<sup>1</sup> GhanaWeb, *Negative Attitudes towards Persons with Disabilities*  
<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/columnist.php?S=Esther%20Akua%20Gyamfi>

them equal opportunities for development and living, and inequitably demote them to the background to be pitied.

The inaccurate presentation of the causes of impairments under some traditions and past belief demonstrate a history that shows that ignorance, neglect, superstition and fear are the social factors that have exacerbated the isolation of persons with disabilities. In this context, societal attitudes are significant since they largely determine the extent to which the personal, social, educational and psychological needs of persons with disabilities will be realised.

Persons with disabilities are a people with rights

Research shows that the variations in the treatment of persons with disabilities are manifest in Ghana as in other parts of the world. However, the difference between Ghana and the other countries lies in how much Ghana has embraced the fact that disability is an evolving concept and that it is part of human diversity.

The new awakening condemns beliefs and practices that encourage discriminatory practices which are acts of injustice towards persons with disabilities. The awakening has thrown light on the rights of persons with disabilities as subjects with rights; who are able to claim those rights.

In this regard, persons with disabilities' right to choice have been recognised and they require support systems in the society to exercise this and other rights. Moreover, persons with disabilities have the right to live independently in their communities. For this reason, communities are obliged to ensure that the essential amenities of life including toilets and bathrooms, residential accommodations, market places, community centres, schools and job infrastructures are made accessible to them.

In addition, persons with disabilities have the right to equally participate and to be included in the society. In a nutshell, persons with disabilities have the right to be in control of directing the affairs of their lives. Contrary to the traditional practice whereby persons with disabilities were relegated to the background and handled by the community in a way that seems best to them; the new awakening projects the centrality of the person with disability.

## Concluding observation

Ghana has recognised the rights of people with disabilities, thus guaranteeing their rightful place in society. But if we want to turn these legal rights in a revolution in which the diversity is fully accepted and lived, then negative attitudes must be turned to constructive attitudes. Positive attitudes will ensure that social resources are invested in our communities for the attainment of institutions that are more inclusive, more democratic so that our society will be prosperous.