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## **Community Attitude toward People with Disability: A Case Study at Jamasi in the Sekyere South District of Ashanti Region-Ghana**

**Dr. Francess Dufie Azumah**

Lecturer, Department of Sociology and Social Work,  
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Knust-Ghana

**Nachinaab John Onzaberigu**

Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Sociology and Social Work,  
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Knust-Ghana

### **Abstract:**

*People with disability are among the poorest and most vulnerable in developing countries. The study sought to examine society's attitude towards people with disability, challenges faced by people with disability (access to social facilities), extent of involvement of disabled people in decision making and community participation and employment opportunities for person with disability. The study adopted a mixt method approach when data was collected mainly through questionnaire administered to one hundred (100) respondents (community members) and interview with 15 persons with disability in the Jamasi community vocational school for disability in Ghana. The study found that persons with disability in the community faced a lot of challenges ranging from poor basic facilities lack of participation in community decision making, and lack of employment. PWDs face discriminations throughout the community. From their own social environment, transportation services, access to medical care, nature of their buildings etc all were very un-supportive to their condition as revealed by the research. It was recommended that public facilities should be disability friendly. The study further concluded that persons living with disability in the Jamasi community often go through a lot of difficulty in accessing the social facilities and lack employment opportunities; hence policy makers should come to their aid.*

**Keywords:** *Decision making, access to social amenities, employment, community attitude.*

### **1. Introduction and Background of the Study**

In our community today, person with disability are been marginalised on many grounds (Avoke, 2012). It is almost becoming a norm for people to judge others by their physical structure and makeup rather than the individual's ability and competence (Obeng, 2009). Old traditional motion and belief have made most people in the Africa continent to perceive disability as abnormal and that disability is punishment from the gods and evil spirits (Nukunya, 1992). It is often assumed that any physical deformity in body parts that leads to disability is as a result of individual disobedience and evil act that the person committed or the disable person's relatives might have committed in the past (Eskay et al. 2012).

Bearing healthy and "normal" children is expected of most parents (Gerber, Ginsberg and Reiff, 2012). Many times when children are born with one or some form of disability, it is attributed to supernatural force (Covey, 2008). After child birth, when disability person is unable to perform a task after many attempts due to the disability; the parents and the individual in question get frustrated and standards for the disable person subsequently become lower (Cannell et al. 2010). People with disabilities are automatically given lower standards than those without disabilities in many communities around the world and more especially in developing countries (Yazbeck, Parmenter and McVilly, 2014). It is a commonly held attitude that people with disability are less able to contribute to society, engage in paid employment, or participate in community decision making process (Yazbeck et al. 2014).

In Africa, the situation is of no different, the concept of disability has been examined from various cultural perspectives across the continent of Africa and found that in every culture, disability was perceived differently and such perception shaped the kind of services rendered to disable person and how other relate to them (Eskay et al., 2012). Physical disability from birth is often perceived as a curse or punishment for sins committed by parents of the people with disability (Nukunya, 1992). ILO, UNESCO and WHO (2014) asserts that there are currently over 80 million persons with disabilities in Africa.

In Ghanaian society, the World Health Organisation (WHO) however estimates the disability rate of Ghana to be between 7 and 10 per cent, which equates approximately 1.70 – 2.4 million persons with disability in Ghana. In most communities in Ghana, disabled persons constitute an impoverished marginalized group, characterized by lack of access to public health, education, and other social services that would ideally support and protect persons with disabilities (Obeng, 2009). Political, economically as well as in social terms, disabled persons in Ghana are classified among the poorest of the poor in many communities (Ghana National Disability Policy

Document, 2010). Disable women and children are the most neglected and discriminated among all disable persons in Ghanaian community (Avoke, 2012). They are the hardest hit victims of negative labelling when it comes to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) according to the Ghana Demographic Health Survey (2014). This study sought to examine community attitude toward people with disability especially women and children within the Jamasi in the Sekyere South District of Ashanti Region-Ghana.

The study sought to provide policy makers, social welfare institution, non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups and community members on the needs to provide person with disability especially women and children with the opportunity for them to contribute their quota for nation development.

The article outline include the introduction, statement of problem, objectives, brief literature review and theoretical perspective adopted in the study and a conceptual framework, research methods employed, study finding, discussion of results, conclusion and recommendations.

### *1.1. Statement of Problem*

Community attitude toward person with disability greatly affect their inclusion in their communities and their capacity to achieve basic goals in life (AbouZahr, 2013). Priestley (2013) noted that person with disability experiences derogatory stereotypes. Most families in Ghana exclude women and children with disability from major family decisions with the beliefs that people with disability have a lesser position in society or that they have a diminished capacity to contribute due to their impairment (Oliver-Commey, 2011). The attitude people develop toward person with disability; especially disabled women and children leads people to maintain social distance from people with disability and exclude them from their social networks (Thompson 2011).

In rural areas in Ghana, disabled girls, women and children are more disadvantaged, with higher rates of illiteracy, and a greater lack of access to information and services. Stigmatized and rejected from earliest childhood and denied opportunities for development, children with disabilities grow up lacking a sense of self-worth and self-esteem and are denied access to the roles of women in their communities (Tunali and Power, 2012). This therefore has necessitated the need for empirical investigation into community attitude towards person with disability especially women and children within the Jamasi Community.

### *1.2. Objectives of the Study*

The core objective of this study is to bring to light community attitude towards persons with disability at Jamasi in the Ashanti region.

The specific objectives of the study were to;

1. Examine community attitude towards women and children with disability.
2. Find out the challenges faced by women and children with disability in accessing social facilities.
3. Examine the extent of involvement of disabled women and children in decision making and community participation
4. Find out the employment opportunities for person with disability.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Persons with disability tend to be perceived by the non-disabled as lacking in clear social role functions. This phenomenon has been described as role marginalization (Thomas & Thompson, 2008) or social liminality (Murphy, 2010). Studies in sub-Saharan African suggest that there is lot marginalization of persons with (Burch, 2009; Devlieger, 2008; and Mpofo, 2009). In other words, having a disability is considered to make an individual incapable of many roles, hence family members as well as community members tend to consider disabled person as people who cannot make any significant contribution in any field (AbouZahr, 2013).

In Ghana, as in many parts of Africa, culture, social status and religion have interacted and influenced people's perception and attitude towards disability (Obeng, 2009). Disabilities are often considered as curses or punishments for sins committed either by the PWD, parents of the PWDs, or one of his or her ancestors (Tunali & Power, 2013). In most Ghanaian communities, people believe in reincarnation of human beings and as a result there is a high tendency among people to believe that some families disregard the general principles of nature for which they should be punished by the gods of the land (Obeng, 2009).

Studies in Ghana and many Africa societies revealed most community members consider disability as a result of witchcraft, sorcery, "juju" and magic (Avoke, 2002). Due to these beliefs in some the traditional communities involving disabled women and children in social life such as employment and decision making is a challenging issue for many communities (Degener & Quinn, 2012). Many people believe that parents can spiritually exchange any part of the child's body with money such that the exchanged part of the child will become defective. Consequently, a rich family with a person with a disability is labelled as juju money (Covey, 2008). Through these belief systems, a majority of Ghanaians have labelled PWDs as social misfits and outcasts and as such do not involve disabled person in major community and family activities (Avoke 2012)

Community attitudes towards people with disability can also be influenced by particular characteristics of the person with disability, either characteristics that are unrelated to the disability such as gender, age, ethnicity, location, or the type of disability itself (Meekosha, 2014). In communities when a woman gives birth to a disabled child, there is only one explanation that is offered, that the gods are annoyed. People do not take into account sicknesses and other factors such as the woman's nutritional state and prenatal care conditions; emphasis is rather laid on the supposed guilt of the family (Eskaye et al. 2012).

Disabled are viewed as incapable of performing many roles (Marion, 2010). PWDs are tagged with offensive and dehumanizing labels. They are viewed as burden on their families and unproductive (Iezzoni, 2006). People with disabilities experience environmental obstacles that make physical access to employment difficult. Some may not be able to afford the daily travel costs to and from work (Devlieger, 2008). There may also be physical barriers to job interviews, to the actual work setting, and to attending social events with fellow employees. Access to information can be a further barrier for people with visual impairments (Cannell,

2011). Stigma presents particular challenges for women with disabilities (Meekosha, 2014). Women with disabilities often experience double discrimination on the basis of their gender and their disability. Studies show that 93% of women with disabilities do not participate in decision making (Degener & Quinn, 2012).

### 2.1. Theoretical Perspective

In this article, the medical model was adopted. It is also referred to as 'social model' According to Gleeson (1999) this social model place much emphasizes on the so called 'normal' human activities which is socially constructed to fit some group of person but failed to fit others. In other words the idea of person with disability is a social creation. To consider some people as disable and others able is all about the construction of society. This social construct goes to influence people relationship, attitude, reaction toward others and those they considered as person with disability. Individuals encounter are different and unique social realities based on what they are capable to do; therefore, we should realize that society can create different barriers to all people disabled and non-disabled alike.

The social construct of disability in itself is dehumanizing and according to Neufeldt and Albright (1998). It is therefore argued that to maintains; the term 'person with disability' is the most sensitive social construct because it gives emphasis to the person and put the disability in the second place and when society comes to accept as such, then person with disability is bound to face discrimination, stigma and social exclusion. To term some people as person with disability in itself is oppression. To this school of thought disability is a social experience which arises from the specific ways in which society organizes its fundamental activities such as work, transport, leisure, education, and domestic life (Gleeson,1999). Hence, to guide against the idea of discrimination and stigma against person with disability, there is the need for re-construction of society attitude and perception against person with disability. It is only upon renewal of social construct about disability that could make it possible for people to consider person with disability as normal person just like non-disabled person.

### 2.2. Theoretical Framework

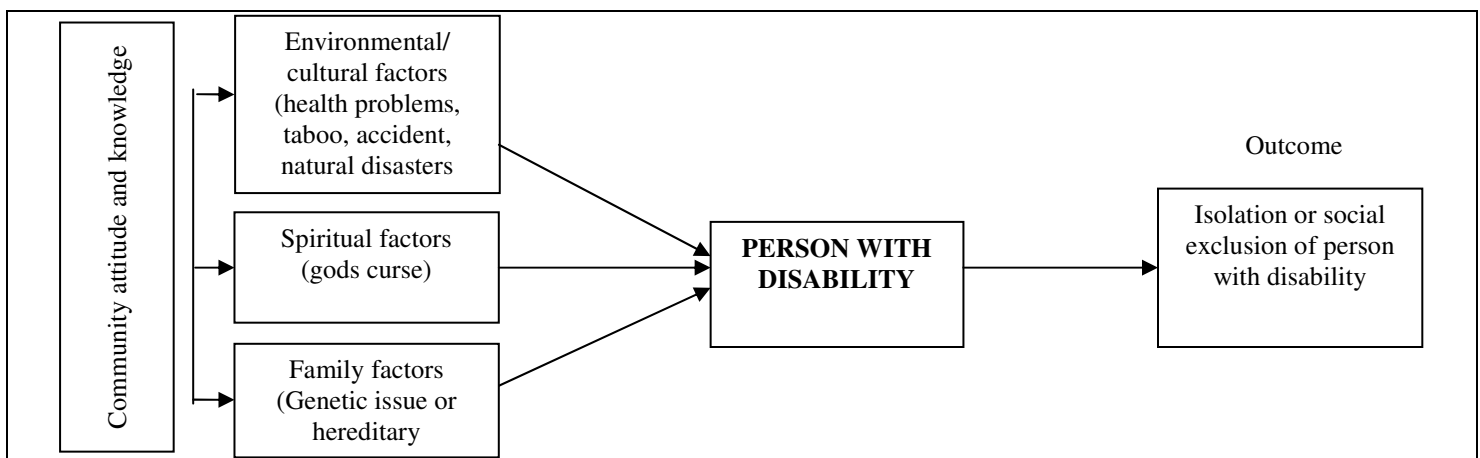


Figure 2: Theoretical Frameworks on Person with Disability  
Source: Researchers' own construct, (2017)

From the construct or framework above, there are different variables that underline the idea of person with disability. There are different factors that community perceived or believe to cause disabilities among people. Those with disability are labeled or stereotyped by the people and are isolated from the rest of the community through the large society construct. In the light of this, the factors such as (spiritual, family and cultural or environmental factors are independent variables while the dependent variable is the isolation and social exclusion of person with disability. The independent variables lead to disability among some people in the community. However, disabled people are believed to find it difficult in achieving their needs within society as a result of being isolated from the entire community. This affects them psychologically, socially and economically making their progress difficult.

### 3. Research Methodology

The research adopted the social survey method because it entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. Social survey was used to describe a method of gathering information from a sample of individuals. This method was adopted for the reason that, the research had individual people as the unit of analysis. The first target respondents consisted of the people of Jamasi who have lived there for two years or more, This is because they have been there for long and have interacted with the disabled people over a long period so can provide reliable information with their experience. Second target population were women and children in the disability centre at Jamasi who are over 12 years of age. The probability method that was used is simple random sampling. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents from the population in the community. Simple random sampling was used to select women and children respondents in the disabled home who are disabled but were over 12 years old. Questionnaires and interview were the main tools for collecting primary data. A set of questions were answered by the fraction of the population sampled. The questionnaires were largely administered by the researcher through face-to-face sessions with respondents. The researchers also conducted interviews

with some of the disabled women and children so as to provide in-depth information to the study. The quantitative data collected through the use of questionnaire was analysed alongside with the qualitative data collected through the use of interviews.

#### 4. Results of the Study

The study was conducted to examine community attitude towards people with disability, challenges faced by people with disability (access to social facilities), extent of involvement of disabled people in decision making and community participation and employment opportunities for person with disability.

##### 4.1. Community Attitude towards People with Disability

The study examined community attitude towards women and children with disability at Jamasi in the Ashanti Region. The research therefore exhibited that; majority of the community members considered disability as curse or punishment. The response from the study showed that persons with disability were not treated well at all in the community. It was found about 80% of the respondents indicated that they do not want to associated themselves with women and children with disability. The study finding showed that persons with disability are often discriminated and even looked down upon in most community members including families that disabled person belong. The discrimination and stigma against disabled person in the community was extended to most sphere of life as respondents indicated that person with disability do not get married partners. One disabled woman stated: *"I had wanted to married one young here, but because of my condition, the man family refused"*. The study found out that, people with disability do not get married as majority maintained. In the light of this, it is often a discouragement for parents for their son or daughter without a disability to marry someone with a disability. The findings of the study established that disability is not as a result of witchcraft as majority maintained. The study equally found that disabled women and children were easily been that harassed by community members. It was found that women and children with disability often experience harassment prejudice and discrimination from that large society.

##### 4.2. Challenges Faced by People with Disability

The study found that disabled women and children are the most discriminated, marginalized and stigmatized group in the community. The women stated that their male counterparts are better compared to the female. The study found that rape was common experience for some disabled women especially the blind women. Old disabled women were also not properly taken care of by family members. The study found that most old disabled women were considered witches and no one wanted to have and association with them. For the female disabled people, disability was a curse to them and the large community members mistreat women and children with disability in provision of food, clothing and even at extreme cases shelter. The study found that women and children with disability live in dirty and filthy environment. It was found that most community members as well family members of women and children with disability do not provide them with good surroundings. It was also noticed from this study that birth of child with disability within a family can lead to divorce. This is often because most families do not want to be tagged with disability.

The study results indicated that, people with disability lack access to good medical services as majority said. The disabled women interviewed argued that most medical centers in the community do not have the necessary logical needed to meet the health need of disabled persons. They also cited lack of income by disabled person to access medication as most of them do not get any support from the family due to the fact that family members considered them a curse and do not associate with them. When the disable person is ill, it was revealed that most of them do not get people to take them to the health center and some are able to afford medical bills. This study found showed that most disabled persons find it challenging in accessing good medical service.

The study also found that person with disability found it difficult in accessing public facility such as public toilet, transportation, use of public offices, access to market centre and social and recreation centres. The respondents indicated that policy makers in the past had failed to factor the needs of person with disability in many public facilities. Moreover, the study exhibited that, people with disability lack access to educational opportunities as majority of the people admitted. In this regard, persons with disabilities in community are considered dependent and viewed as frail, incapable, and unskilled due to no educational training.

The study found that most facilities in the community were unsupportive to person with disability. From their social environment, transportation services, access to public and private building, nature of their training and education centres all were very un-supportive to the condition of person with disability as revealed by the research. The study found that most public facilities were created without much consideration for persons with disabilities and how they can access these facilities with ease. Most of these facilities have been made in such a way to suit the ordinary human but to the detriment of persons with disabilities. These have affected person with disability both economically, emotionally, psychologically and socially among others. In that sometimes, women and children with have to compete with able persons when accessing these facilities.

##### 4.3. Involvement in Decision Making and Community Participation and Employment

The study that women and children were not been involved in decision making in the community. Over 95% of the community members stated that disabled women and children do not participate in family or community decision making. In cases where disabled women and children try to make contribution in decision, they views were never welcome or considered. The community members further stressed that most disabled women and children were uneducated and hence could not make any significant contribute in community and family decision making.

The study further found that disabled women and children do not participate in communal labour. The respondents stated that disabled women and children do not wash the bathroom, sweep the compound, farm or do any difficult work. It was however, emphasis that

few disabled women in the training were becoming to weave “Kate” a local cloth and some are learning dress making and other craftwork. Aside these development, disabled women and children were largely excluded from participation in community work. Also, the study indicated that, disabled women and children find it difficult getting employment as majority of them were illiterates. It is a commonly held attitude that people with disability are less able to engage in paid employment, or participate in the community activities. This means that, people with disability are less productive due to their nature and this prevents them from getting employment. The study found out that, women with disability are more likely to have unmet needs as a result of disability. The study found that working age women with disability experience significant low income because of their condition.

### 5. Discussion of Results

The study finding showed that most community members have negative attitude women and children with disability. From the study results, it could be realized that disabled women and children were the most discriminated group. In a study by Thompson (2011) revealed that disability is often perceived as a curse or punishment for sins committed by parents of the people with disability. This views and perception influence community members’ attitude toward women with disability. According to Murphy (2010) most studies in sub-Saharan African suggest that there is lot marginalization of persons with disability (Burch, 2009; Devlieger, 2008; and Mpofu, 2009). Disabled women and children are not left out of the equation. From the study finding, it was clear that the most community members do not want to have anything to do with women and children with disability. The study equally found that community members’ attitude toward women and children with disability was generally dependent on their perception that disability was curse and punishment as such families of women and children with disability do not treat disabled women and children well. Cannell (2011) noted that disabled person suffer in the hand of their families members as well as the community members when the community members have negative attitude toward person with disability. The findings of the study established that women and children with disability are considered witches as majority of the community maintained. In this regard, the findings of the study are in concurrence with the observation of Iezzoni (2006) which states that, most disabled persons are considered witches and they also use they witchcraft on others to become disabled.

The study found that disabled women and children face many challenges in the community. Disabled women and children suffer socially in terms of their relationship with family and community members and their access to community facilities in terms of access to health services, market place, building, toilet, recreation center and transportation. According to Marion (2010) the toilet, bath, library, and all other social facilities are a crucial facility within every society and all people use it, because of the routine activities such as toileting, washing, cleaning teeth, bathing, showering etc. it is necessary to ensure this facility is user friendly to all; able-bodied and the disabled alike. It is probable that those who use wheel chairs and those who use other mobility aids may find it very difficult if not impossible to maneuver in the bathroom (Richler, 2004). Studies on disability also considered transportation service. The study found that major public and private facilities and transportation services do not consider the existence of disabled women and children. Women and children with lack accessibility to good educational opportunities as majority admitted. This is consistent with the research done by Degener & Quinn (2012) stating that, persons with disabilities in some societies are considered dependent and viewed as frail, incapable, and unskilled due to no educational training.

The study found that disabled women and children are mostly excluded from community and family decision making and lack employment opportunities. The study women and children with disability find it difficult participating in decision making and getting employment as majority of the respondents said. This is attested to by the research done by Yazbeck (2014) that it is a commonly held attitude that people with disability are less able to engage in paid employment, or participate in the community activities and decision making. This is an indication that, treatment from people keeps disabled women and children away from public activities as majority admitted. This is in line with the research done by Meekosha (2009) that people with disability suffer lots of unjust treatment; belittling labels and unkind treatment are meted out on people with disabilities with the world of work. In cases with women and children with disability are employed, they earn low wages and income. Tunali & Power (2013) stated similar views that when people with disabilities are employed, they commonly earn less than their counterparts without disabilities; women with disabilities commonly earn less than men with disabilities making them unable to cater for their needs. The study found that community attitude toward women and children with disability makes them less productive.

### 6. Conclusions

The research concluded that community attitude toward women and children with disabilities have great effect on people with disability. Discrimination, stigma, harassment from community members have negative effects on disabled women and children participation in decision making and employment opportunities. In this regard, people with disability often experience social, cultural and economic prejudice and discrimination which consequently affect their community roles and prevents them from obtaining a better quality of life. From the research findings, it was concluded that, disabled women and children face lots of challenges as a result of their condition. Treatment from community members keeps disabled women and children away from public activities. In addition, people with disability suffer lots of unjust treatment; belittling labels and unkind treatment are meted out on people with disabilities. Women and children with disability are discriminated and stereotyped by community members which prevent them from engaging in public activities. Succinctly, it is therefore important to apprehend and recognize that, community attitude towards women and children with disability contributes to the neglect of disabled women and children in decision making and employment.

## 7. Recommendations

The researchers suggested the following ideas which it is believed if well followed would help reduce the attitude and wrong perception people hold towards women and children disability within the community.

The community and family members should change their attitude toward women and children with disability. Disabled person should be seen as normal human being who can function as any other person who is not disabled. There should be conscious effort from community members to avoid viewing disability as a result of curse and witchcraft as some disability can result from accident and biological factors. This orientation will help community members to change their attitude toward women with disability.

On part of the state, the government of Ghana should be more proactive to disability issues throughout the various levels of access to basic public facilities in the country. Thus there should be in an existence some form of central polices for all the disabled so far as having access to social facilities are concerned so that disabled women and children would be able to contribute their quota to the development of the nation.

As the study indicated, people with disability lack access to good medical services as majority said. The government through the ministry of health should ensure, good medical services are established specifically for people with disability. This will help them obtain good health assistance always to keep them healthy. Besides that, the few health centres responsible for attending to people with disability should be extended to accommodate the needs of disable people in terms of their health.

The study found that lack access to educational opportunities thus, the government should ensure that special schools for people with disability are strengthened and well equipped with requisite facilities to enable disabled people to attain education and other skills. With regard to the study, people with disability lack access to educational opportunities. In the light of this, authorities should ensure that more special schools are put up to accommodate disabled people to attain knowledge and vocational and other skills for their upkeep.

Also, treatment from community members keep disabled people away from public activities as the study revealed. Authorities should put measures in place to make people refrain from treating people with disability badly by discriminating, stereotyping as well as dehumanizing them. In the light of this, it should be seen that, we all equal and also the same people, so any one who discriminates should be punished. This will serve as a deterrent to others and it will promote peace and stability among all the people.

As the study indicated, people with disability find it difficult getting employment. There should be more opportunities created in respect to employment for people with disability by the government and non-governmental organization so that disabled women and children will get the chance to be employed to earn some income for their upkeep. This will help reduce the unemployment among people with disability.

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**Appendix A: Statistical presentation of community attitude toward women and children with disability**

Statement	N	Mean Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Deviation Statistic
Most community members consider disability as curse.	115	4.14	.082	.621
Disabled is considered by many as a result of punishment by the gods and witches	115	4.32	.044	.630
Community members do treat disabled women and children badly	115	4.99	.074	.562
There is discrimination against women and children with disability	115	4.33	.065	.722
Community members have negative attitude toward women and children with disability	115	4.22	.061	.447

*Field Survey Results, 2017***Appendix B: Statistical presentation of challenges face by women and children with disability**

Statement	N	Mean Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Deviation Statistic
Lack of care (Provision of food, clothes and shelter) for women and children with disability	115	4.64	.552	.528
Mistreat women and children with disability	115	4.32	.232	.650
Dirty and filthy environment	115	4.15	.076	.757
Lack access to good medical services.	115	3.79	.062	.816
Supportive public facilities (toilet, transportation, use of public offices)	115	4.16	.057	.875
Access to market centre and recreation centres	115	3.14	.064	.784
Access to public and private building	115	4.17	.016	.634
Nature of their training and education centres	115	3.91	.034	.843

*Field Survey Results, 2017***Appendix C: Statistical presentation of disabled women and children participation in decision making and community participation and employment**

Statement	N	Mean Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Deviation Statistic
Disabled women and children' views are always welcome in family decision making.	115	4.45	.062	.545
Disabled women and children are given the opportunity to express their views on decision affecting their livelihood.	115	4.34	.053	.552
Opinion of disabled women and children are accepted in community decision making.	115	3.86	.045	.625
Disabled women and children can represent the large community in decision making.	115	4.75	.061	.648
Disabled women and children have equal employment opportunities just like able persons.	115	3.69	.076	.765
Disabled women and children participate in community communal activities.	115	4.17	.035	.632

*Field Survey Results, 2017*