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“Implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities In Barbados” is a qualitative research study using virtual focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders (i.e. advocacy organizations and Barbadians with disabilities) in Barbados, on the subject of disability law and policy supporting employment, education, and community inclusion. Through exploratory research, we have investigated the lived experiences of people with disabilities in seeking and obtaining employment and training opportunities (e.g., education, job training, vocational rehabilitation) and independent living outcomes. The goal of this project is to inform areas where law and policy in Barbados can meet the employment needs of people with disabilities, and address employer attitudes, to further implementation efforts of the UN Convention. By doing so, we will aid in improving the living conditions of people with disabilities in Barbados, increasing enforcement of non-discrimination, enhancing accommodations in schools and workplaces, and overcoming the stigma associated with living and working with a disability.

In our paper, we have synthesized and analyzed key research articles and projects that give insight into the current status of protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in Barbados. Following the literature review, we have included key insights from the interviews with legislators, policymakers, and people with disabilities in Barbados and the Caribbean region.

Even though Barbados is regarded as a high-income economy by the World Bank, there are significant socioeconomic inequities when it comes to protecting the rights of people with disabilities in the workplace, schools, and other aspects of society. The Barbadian government has a minimal legal framework for the protection of people with disabilities and no system of data collection to represent people with disabilities in employment, education, and public facilities (United Nations UPR: Barbados Submission from the Barbados Council for the Disabled (BCD), 2017).

Although the government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2013, enacted the 2017 Employment (Prevention of Discrimination) Act that prohibits discrimination on grounds of race, sex, gender, or sexual orientation, and included Article 23 ( Protection from discrimination on grounds of race, etc.) in their Constitution, there is no direct mention of protecting people with disabilities and there is little enforcement of such policies. According to the 2018 Barbados Human Rights report, “The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, but it does not extend to education or the provision of other state services” (8), there was minimal enforcement for the provision to improve transportation for people with disabilities, and many areas had no accommodations (ramps, etc) for people with disabilities.

Additionally, in the 2018 research paper “An Inclusive, Equitable and Prosperous Caribbean: The Case of Persons with Disabilities”, Dr. Floyd Morris assesses the progress that Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago have made towards implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and provides policy and institutional recommendations for further

improvements in these Caribbean countries. Of particular interest is Morris's citing of the World Bank's 2016 report, "The inaccessible educational environment is also a contributory factor to the high levels of unemployment among persons with disabilities", which indicates the cyclical nature of how improper and ineffective educational instruction for individuals with disabilities feeds into the decreased likelihood of these individuals obtaining employment which further causes inability to achieve economic independence and difficulty entering the workforce.

In regards to the expectations of people with physical disabilities in seeking employment and education, there are minimal expectations due to societal perceptions and stigma. In her article "Social integration of the physically disabled in Barbados" (2002), Ann Goerdts discusses the results of a study done by surveying thirty adults with disabilities in Barbados. There was a 47% unemployment rate for those surveyed, and those who were unemployed had "a severe physical dysfunction, an intellectual impairment, or a mother who believes that her disabled offspring is not capable of working" (Goerdts, 463). The social stigmatization of physical disabilities is paralleled by the stigmatization and discrimination of employees with mental illnesses as found in the qualitative, exploratory study "Managers' perceptions of mental illness in Barbadian workplaces" conducted by Dr. Dwayne Devonish. The study builds off of the World Health Organization Assessment Instrument for Mental Health report for Barbados (2009) that suggests the country improve its services available to people with mental health needs and establish public educational programs, among other reforms.

In interviews with Barbadians with disabilities and legislators, they have all echoed that the social stigmatization of disabilities has played a significant role in the lack of accommodations for people with disabilities and the lack of enforcement of laws. We asked questions such as "What does disability mean to you?", "What is your perspective on how employment experiences have changed for people with disabilities over the past few years? Has there been significant progress and enforcement of laws?", "What do governments and employers still need to do?", "Do you think there is a difference in how people with physical disabilities and people with "invisible disabilities" are treated when they are seeking employment in Barbados?".

The interviewees including Professor Dwayne Devonish, Senator Floyd Morris, and former Senator Kerryann Ifill all agreed that for tangible change and enforcement of the UNCRPD and the Employment Act to occur, there needs to be a fundamental shift in the mindset that society holds towards people with disabilities. Many people, including employers, underestimate the abilities of people with disabilities and pity them. They view their employees with disabilities as dispensable. Although government use of public procurement services to incentivize private sectors to employ people with disabilities could aid in the improvement of employment of people with disabilities in the short run, programs that educate and increase positive contact between people with and without disabilities would ultimately be more effective in eliminating the stigma and changing the mindset -- thus, this would be a more sustainable, long-term solution to improve the employment prospects and independence for persons with disabilities.