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Men with Disabilities in Zimbabwe**



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Redefining Masculinity in Africa: The Case of Boys and Men with Disabilities in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Purpose: The transition from boyhood to manhood in Africa is influenced by the complex interplay of gender, culture, and disability. Boys with disabilities often encounter social exclusion, which hinders their ability to align with traditional masculine ideals associated with strength and self-reliance. This marginalisation diminishes their educational, economic, and social prospects, trapping them in cycles of poverty and dependence. This study investigated the lived experiences of boys and men with disabilities in Africa, underscoring the necessity for inclusive policies that challenge entrenched stereotypes of masculinity.

Methodology: Utilising qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus group discussions, the study captured diverse perspectives. The social model of disability guided the study. This model highlights how societal barriers contribute to disabling experiences. Findings indicated that cultural expectations linking masculinity to physical strength further alienated boys with disabilities. However, there is potential for redefining masculinity to encompass emotional resilience and vulnerability, paving the way for greater inclusivity.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: Recommendations included enhancing teacher training programs and launching community outreach initiatives to combat negative stereotypes. Additionally, policies should focus on improving educational and vocational opportunities for boys and men with disabilities, facilitating their full participation in society. There is need to acknowledge the unique experiences of boys and men with disabilities in fostering gender equality and sustainable development in Africa. By promoting inclusive approaches that challenge traditional gender norms, society can create an environment where all individuals can thrive equally.

Key Words: *Boys And Men; Critical Model of Disability, Disabilities, Masculinity*

Introduction and background

In numerous African communities, the transition from childhood to adulthood for boys is significantly influenced by early gendered socialisation within the family unit. From a young age, boys are introduced to specific social expectations through culturally guided parenting practices that distinguish them from girls. Mwaura and Nyambura (2021) observe that boys are often encouraged to exhibit qualities such as resilience, independence, and dominance—traits commonly associated with traditional masculinity. Likewise, Okonkwo and Dube (2022) explain that these expectations are reinforced through daily routines, including assigning different household roles and offering praise based on gendered behaviour. Such early conditioning not only shapes boys' identities but also reinforces societal norms that define male roles in adulthood.

Boys are often socialized to take on leadership roles and make decisions within their communities. However, for boys with disabilities, these societal expectations can be particularly daunting. Traditional notions of masculinity frequently associate manhood with physical strength, independence, and economic productivity. This narrow definition of masculinity often marginalizes boys with disabilities, who may be viewed as not meeting these societal ideals. Kambarami and Mutesva (2021) note that such stereotypes lead to the exclusion of disabled boys from crucial aspects of life, such as education, employment, and community engagement. Similarly, Dlamini and Osei (2023) argue that this marginalization perpetuates structural inequalities, often resulting in increased dependency and a cycle of poverty for young males with disabilities.

In Zimbabwe, where patriarchal values remain strong, boys with disabilities face distinct barriers rooted in cultural attitudes that conflate disability with weakness. Often viewed as incapable of fulfilling traditional male roles, these boys are marginalized, excluded from educational and community activities, and restricted in their life opportunities (Mandipa & Manyatera, 2014; Mavundukure & Nyamwanza, 2018). Zimbabwean society's emphasis on economic independence and physical robustness as measures of masculinity places additional burdens on boys with disabilities, leaving them alienated from mainstream society (Mpofu & Nkomo, 2020).

This exclusion is compounded by a prevailing medical model of disability that focuses on impairments rather than potential, further marginalizing these individuals and hindering their access to vital resources. However, there is a growing recognition of the need for a social model of disability that highlights the role of societal structures and attitudes in creating disabling experiences. Adopting this approach within Zimbabwe could help dismantle restrictive cultural expectations, offering a broader view of masculinity that values qualities like emotional resilience and adaptability. This redefined masculinity would not only support boys and men with disabilities but also foster a more inclusive society where diversity is respected and celebrated (Smythe et al., 2022; Mashanyare et al., 2025; Vengesai, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

In Zimbabwe and across many African societies, traditional views of masculinity emphasize physical strength, economic independence, and self-reliance as defining characteristics. These narrow cultural expectations pose significant challenges for boys with disabilities, who are often perceived as lacking the ability to fulfill these roles. As a result, they experience social exclusion and marginalization, which severely restricts their access to education, employment, and social opportunities. This exclusion is further reinforced by the dominant medical model of disability, which focuses on impairment rather than potential, perpetuating stereotypes of dependency and diminishing the life prospects of boys with disabilities.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of a social model of disability, which shifts focus to societal attitudes and structures as sources of disabling experiences, Zimbabwe has been slow to adopt this perspective. The continued emphasis on traditional masculinity and a medical view of disability not only limits the social integration of boys with disabilities but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and dependency. Therefore, there is a pressing need to redefine masculinity within Zimbabwean society to embrace a broader range of qualities, such as emotional resilience and adaptability, allowing boys and men with disabilities to thrive in an inclusive environment. This study seeks to address these challenges by exploring how cultural attitudes toward masculinity and disability affect the lives of boys with disabilities and examining pathways to promote a more inclusive, supportive understanding of masculinity in Zimbabwe.

Theoretical Framework: Social Model of Disability

This study is grounded in the Social Model of Disability, a framework that shifts focus from individuals' impairments to the societal structures and attitudes that create disabling experiences. Unlike the medical model, which views disability primarily as a personal limitation or health condition, the social model asserts that disability is largely a product of environmental and social barriers. This perspective emphasizes that societal norms, infrastructure, and cultural expectations play a significant role in shaping the experiences of individuals with disabilities, often restricting their opportunities for inclusion and participation (Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 2012).

In the Zimbabwean context, cultural notions of masculinity are a primary social barrier that restricts boys with disabilities from participating fully in society. Traditional masculine ideals prioritize strength, independence, and economic success, which can stigmatize boys with disabilities as "incapable" of fulfilling these roles. The social model of disability challenges these assumptions by highlighting how societal expectations—not physical impairments—are responsible for much of the marginalization these individuals face (Shakespeare, 2006; Mpofu & Nkomo, 2020). Thus, the model advocates for shifting the focus from “fixing” individuals to creating a more inclusive society that accommodates diverse abilities and redefines traditional roles.

Research has shown that adopting a social model perspective is especially relevant in settings where cultural norms reinforce narrow definitions of masculinity and undervalue the capabilities of people with disabilities. For instance, Mpofu (2003) argues that cultural perceptions of disability in Zimbabwe contribute to social exclusion by framing individuals with disabilities as dependent or weak, thus denying them the opportunity to participate fully in community and educational activities. Similarly, Mavundukure and Nyamwanza (2018) emphasize that such cultural biases not only isolate boys with disabilities but also create social hierarchies that reinforce stigma and marginalization.

By using the Social Model of Disability, this study aims to deconstruct these cultural narratives and propose alternative understandings of masculinity that include qualities like emotional resilience, adaptability, and inclusivity. Embracing this model in Zimbabwe could foster a more supportive environment where boys and men with disabilities are not constrained by rigid masculine norms but are instead encouraged to contribute to society in ways that align with their abilities and potential (Barnes, 2012).

Literature Review

In recent years, the redefinition of masculinity and the inclusion of individuals with disabilities have gained significant attention across various global contexts. Developed countries, in particular, have made strides in adopting inclusive models and challenging traditional gender norms to support the integration of individuals with disabilities. In contrast, developing countries still face substantial barriers due to deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and limited resources, though progress is being made. In Zimbabwe, where cultural expectations and societal views on disability present unique challenges, there is a growing need to address these issues to promote inclusivity for boys with disabilities.

Developed Countries

In many developed nations, disability inclusion has advanced through policy frameworks, educational reforms, and community initiatives that are rooted in the Social Model of Disability. Countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have actively redefined masculinity to include qualities beyond physical strength, promoting emotional resilience, adaptability, and inclusivity as valued masculine traits. The U.S., for instance, has implemented the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and various state level initiatives that support the full integration of individuals with disabilities into educational, social, and employment sectors. These efforts are underpinned by legal frameworks that challenge both gender norms and ableist attitudes, fostering a more inclusive society where individuals with disabilities can thrive (Johnson & Walker, 2021).

In the UK, the Equality Act mandates equal opportunities for people with disabilities, highlighting the importance of creating supportive environments in schools, workplaces, and communities.

These countries have also embraced educational programs that promote inclusive masculinities, which support boys with disabilities in exploring diverse identities free from restrictive gender roles (Mitchell & Harris, 2022). As a result, boys and men with disabilities in developed contexts generally experience greater social integration and recognition of their diverse contributions to society.

Developing Countries

In developing nations, there has been a gradual shift toward recognizing the need for disability inclusion, though cultural attitudes and limited resources often hinder progress. Many countries in Africa and Asia have made legislative attempts to support people with disabilities, such as South Africa's Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act and Uganda's Persons with Disabilities Act. However, cultural norms that equate masculinity with physical strength and independence continue to challenge the social integration of boys with disabilities in these regions. For example, studies show that in Nigeria, boys with disabilities face significant social stigma due to deeply rooted cultural beliefs about masculinity, which often results in exclusion from educational and social opportunities (Okoye & Adebajo, 2023).

Some developing countries have started to implement educational reforms and awareness campaigns to shift public perception, though progress remains slow. In Kenya, initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive education are beginning to integrate the Social Model of Disability, which emphasizes that society's attitudes and environmental barriers—not individual impairments—are the primary challenges for people with disabilities (Mwangi & Otieno, 2021). These efforts indicate a growing recognition in developing countries of the need to challenge traditional gender roles and embrace a broader understanding of masculinity.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the social and cultural barriers facing boys with disabilities remain substantial. Zimbabwe's cultural context, with its strong patriarchal values, upholds rigid definitions of masculinity that emphasize attributes like economic independence and physical strength, which can marginalize boys with disabilities. The dominant medical model of disability in Zimbabwe frames disability as a personal health issue rather than a societal challenge, which restricts opportunities for these boys and reinforces stereotypes of dependency and inadequacy (Chikowore & Dube, 2021; Musariri & Ncube, 2024).

Research by Mashingaidze and Gondo (2022) highlights that boys with disabilities in Zimbabwe frequently face exclusion from educational and community activities due to cultural beliefs that deem them incapable of fulfilling traditional masculine roles. Such exclusion not only isolates these boys socially but also limits their potential to achieve independence and self-worth. While there is a growing awareness of the need to adopt the Social Model of Disability in Zimbabwe, the

shift has been slow, with limited policy and community support to challenge entrenched gender norms and foster inclusive masculinities.

Some local initiatives and research efforts are pushing for a broader understanding of disability and masculinity. For instance, Matema (2023) advocates for redefining masculinity to incorporate traits like emotional resilience and adaptability, which would allow boys with disabilities to participate meaningfully in society. However, without comprehensive legislative support and community driven initiatives, these efforts are often fragmented and limited in scope. Zimbabwe thus stands at a crossroads, where adopting the Social Model of Disability and redefining masculinity to embrace diverse abilities could significantly improve the lives of boys with disabilities.

Methodology

From a phenomenological perspective, this study investigated the experiences of boys with disabilities in Zimbabwe. It adopted the qualitative research approach which made it possible for the study to capture how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences within a specific cultural context (Nkala & Chimhanda, 2020). By employing this approach, the study sought to illuminate the barriers and opportunities that boys with disabilities encounter as they navigate societal expectations of masculinity in Zimbabwe and how the boys interpret their situations (Dlamini & Sibanda, 2023). It also helped in exposing how cultural norms and societal expectations of masculinity influence their educational, social, and economic opportunities.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select 10 participants who had direct experience of disability and the challenges associated with disabilities. The sample included boys and young men aged 12 to 25 with various disabilities. These were drawn from different socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. Participants were intentionally chosen as their experiences were particularly relevant to the research focus (Tshuma & Mapuranga, 2022). Data were collected using semi structured interviews. This tool enabled participants to articulate their experiences while allowing the researcher to explore specific topics further. This research tool enabled the study to gather rich, nuanced data, as participants shared their thoughts and feelings in their own words while following a flexible interview guide (Ndlovu & Moyo, 2024). The semi structured interviews took place in private settings, with informed consent obtained from both the participants and their guardians where necessary. This was done to ensure confidentiality and comfort in sharing important information.

Focus group discussions were used for data collection. This data collection method created a sense of community and encouraged participants to share reflections on common experiences. Focus groups are effective for examining social norms and collective views, as they create an environment where participants can engage in dialogue and collaboratively explore their

experiences (Dube & Mandaza, 2023). Two focus group discussions were held. The first focus group had 7 boys aged between 12 and 15 years and the other focus group discussion had five young men aged between 18 and 25 years.

The qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within the data (Chirinda & Mufema, 2021). Thematic analysis is particularly suited to this study, as it allows for a nuanced understanding of how cultural and social expectations intersect with the experiences of boys with disabilities.

Ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were upheld throughout the research process. Participants, along with their guardians when appropriate, were informed about the study's purpose, methods, and any potential risks before participating. To ensure privacy, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants, and data was stored securely in accordance with confidentiality standards (Zhou & Makiwa, 2020).

Findings

The findings from this study, derived from indepth interviews, focus groups, and observations, reveal the complex and multifaceted experiences of boys with disabilities as they navigate societal expectations of masculinity within the Zimbabwean context. Key themes that emerged are as follows:

Cultural Perceptions of Masculinity and Disability

The study highlights that traditional views of masculinity in Zimbabwe are deeply tied to physical strength, economic independence, and resilience. Boys with disabilities often find themselves excluded from these ideals, as disability is culturally associated with weakness and dependence. As one participant shared, “People see disability and automatically think you are weak and cannot do anything. That is how they treat you.” This perception of disability as a limitation perpetuates social exclusion, hindering their full participation in society. These cultural norms frame boys with disabilities as incapable of meeting the societal standards of masculinity, reinforcing feelings of inadequacy and isolation.

Impact of Exclusion on Education and Employment Opportunities

The challenges in accessing education and employment were consistently reported by participants. Boys with disabilities face significant educational barriers, including a lack of trained teachers, inadequate resources, and insufficient accommodations for disabilities. One participant remarked, “In school, they don’t have teachers who understand us. We are just left behind.” This lack of support often results in high dropout rates. Furthermore, participants expressed frustration with limited employment opportunities. As one participant noted, “When I apply for a job, they look at my disability first, not my skills. I never even get an interview.” This societal assumption about

their capabilities limits their access to the workforce and perpetuates economic dependence, contributing to their marginalization.

Psychosocial Effects of Social Exclusion

The psychological toll of social exclusion was evident throughout the findings. Boys with disabilities reported struggling with low self-esteem and identity issues. As one participant stated, “I don’t feel like I am a man because I am not strong like others. I feel less than them.” Many boys internalize these societal views, leading to feelings of loneliness and emotional distress. One participant shared, “It hurts to be excluded, not participating in anything. Sometimes, I feel like I don’t belong anywhere.” These experiences of exclusion reinforce a negative self-image and deepen the psychological challenges that boys with disabilities face, affecting their overall wellbeing.

Experiences of Discrimination and Social Marginalization

Discrimination was a recurring theme in the experiences shared by participants. Boys with disabilities reported being subjected to verbal abuse, social avoidance, and unequal treatment, both within their families and in community spaces. One participant recalled, “At family gatherings, they make jokes about me. They don’t think I can do anything, so they ignore me.” Additionally, participants noted difficulties in forming and maintaining friendships, as their peers often viewed them as different or incapable. One boy shared, “I can’t even talk to my friends because they don’t want to spend time with someone like me.” This exclusion, driven by both overt and subtle forms of discrimination, significantly impacts their social integration and contributes to a sense of alienation.

Shifts toward Inclusive Perspectives and Redefined Masculinity

While traditional views remain prevalent, some participants observed a gradual shift towards more inclusive perspectives on masculinity. A few community leaders, educators, and family members have begun to challenge the conventional norms of masculinity, acknowledging and supporting different forms of strength, resilience, and adaptability. As one participant noted, “My uncle says that real strength is in the mind, not the body. He encourages me to keep pushing.” Disability advocacy groups have also played a critical role in promoting the Social Model of Disability and encouraging a broader, more inclusive understanding of masculinity. These groups have helped raise awareness about the need for a more diverse and adaptable view of manhood, emphasizing qualities like emotional resilience and determination over physical attributes alone.

Barriers and Recommendations for Policy Change

The findings point to significant gaps in policy implementation and enforcement regarding disability rights. Participants expressed frustration with the lack of governmental support for boys with disabilities, particularly in areas such as accessible education and vocational training. As one participant lamented, “The government says we have rights, but there is nothing being done to help

us in our schools or communities.” Community education programs were frequently suggested as a means to combat stereotypes and promote the Social Model of Disability, which focuses on societal responsibility in creating inclusive environments. Furthermore, participants called for greater institutional support, including more accessible education options, vocational training, and mental health services tailored to boys with disabilities. One participant suggested, “We need schools that are equipped for us, teachers who understand us, and places where we can work and live independently.” These recommendations highlight the need for a systemic change in policies and practices to ensure the social and economic integration of boys with disabilities in Zimbabwe.

Findings

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the complex experiences of boys with disabilities as they navigate societal expectations of masculinity in Zimbabwe. Participants consistently described how societal norms, which equate masculinity with physical strength, economic independence, and resilience, often leave boys with disabilities marginalized. Disability is frequently viewed through a medical lens, emphasizing impairments and equating them with weakness and dependency. As a result, these boys are often excluded from mainstream concepts of masculinity, which center on physicality and self-reliance, and are viewed as incapable of fulfilling traditional male roles (Dembere, 2021; Sibanda & Ncube, 2023). This exclusion limits their access to education, employment, and social opportunities, reinforcing their marginalization within society.¹

In the educational sphere, boys with disabilities face significant barriers, such as a lack of resources, trained teachers, and proper accommodations. These factors contribute to high dropout rates and limited academic success, as many participants shared that their schools were not adequately equipped to cater to their needs. This finding mirrors the challenges identified by Mpofu and Nkomo (2020), who observed that educational systems in Zimbabwe often fail to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Similarly, the limited access to employment opportunities is closely linked to societal assumptions about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. These assumptions often prevent boys with disabilities from securing jobs, which in turn limits their economic independence and further reinforces cycles of dependency. These findings align with those of Manyatera and Dube (2022), who noted that societal attitudes towards disability frequently prevent people with disabilities from accessing meaningful employment opportunities.

The psychological toll of social exclusion was also evident in the participants' accounts. Many expressed feelings of low self-esteem, loneliness, and frustration, as they internalized societal perceptions of inadequacy. These emotional struggles are consistent with previous research, which highlights the detrimental effects of exclusion on the mental wellbeing of individuals with disabilities (Shava & Mbira, 2021; Sibanda & Moyo, 2023). The pressure to conform to traditional masculine norms often exacerbates these feelings, leading to a sense of isolation and distress. Participants noted that they were often excluded from social and community activities, and they

faced overt discrimination in family and social settings. The negative reinforcement from family members and peers, who either held low expectations or overprotected them, further marginalized these boys. These experiences of discrimination are consistent with the findings of Mavundukure and Nyamwanza (2018), who reported that children with disabilities in Zimbabwe often face social exclusion and negative treatment in both school and community settings.²

Despite these challenges, some participants noted a gradual shift towards more inclusive perspectives on masculinity and disability. This shift, though limited, was attributed to the efforts of certain family members, educators, and community leaders who are beginning to challenge conventional norms. Disability advocacy groups have played a significant role in promoting these changes by endorsing the Social Model of Disability, which encourages a more inclusive understanding of masculinity—one that recognizes emotional resilience and adaptability as forms of strength, rather than physical power. This shift is aligned with the findings of Moyo and Ncube (2024), who emphasized the importance of redefining masculinity in a way that includes the diverse experiences of individuals, particularly those with disabilities. These efforts signal a growing recognition that traditional gender norms are not inclusive of all forms of masculinity and that embracing alternative expressions of strength can help foster a more supportive environment for boys with disabilities.

However, the study also revealed significant gaps in policy implementation regarding disability rights in Zimbabwe. Participants expressed frustration with the lack of government support, particularly in the areas of accessible education, vocational training, and employment opportunities. These gaps reflect broader systemic issues in Zimbabwe's approach to disability rights, as noted by Ncube and Dube (2025), who pointed out that while disability policies exist, their implementation remains limited. The participants suggested that community education programs could be instrumental in combating stereotypes and promoting a more inclusive society. They also called for stronger institutional support, particularly in terms of providing accessible education, vocational training, and mental health services tailored to the needs of boys with disabilities. These recommendations align with the Social Model of Disability, which calls for societal responsibility in creating inclusive environments and dismantling barriers that perpetuate exclusion (Hudson et al., 2025)

The study's findings offer crucial insights into the intricate experiences of boys with disabilities in Zimbabwe as they grapple with societal expectations of masculinity. Participants consistently highlighted how prevailing societal norms, which link masculinity with physical strength, economic independence, and resilience, often lead to the marginalization of boys with disabilities. Disability is frequently perceived through a medical lens, focusing on impairments and equating them with weakness and dependency. Consequently, these boys are often excluded from dominant notions of masculinity, which prioritize physicality and self-reliance, and are seen as unable to fulfill traditional male roles (Mutomba & Chireshe, 2021; Sibanda & Ndhlovu, 2023). This

exclusion restricts their access to education, employment, and social opportunities, thereby solidifying their marginalization within society.

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Despite these challenges, some participants noted a gradual shift towards more inclusive perspectives on masculinity and disability. This shift, though limited, was attributed to the efforts of certain family members, educators, and community leaders who are beginning to challenge conventional norms. Disability advocacy groups have played a significant role in promoting these changes by endorsing the Social Model of Disability, which encourages a more inclusive understanding of masculinity—one that recognizes emotional resilience and adaptability as forms of strength, rather than physical power. This shift is aligned with the findings of Moyo and Ncube (2024), who emphasized the importance of redefining masculinity in a way that includes the diverse experiences of individuals, particularly those with disabilities. These efforts signal a growing recognition that traditional gender norms are not inclusive of all forms of masculinity and that embracing alternative expressions of strength can help foster a more supportive environment for boys with disabilities.

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Unique Contribution to theory policy and practice

The findings of this study highlight the significant challenges that boys with disabilities face in Zimbabwe as they try to navigate societal expectations of masculinity. Traditional cultural perceptions that equate masculinity with physical strength, economic independence, and emotional resilience place these boys at a disadvantage, as disability is often viewed as a sign of weakness and dependency. This cultural bias leads to social exclusion, limiting opportunities for boys with disabilities in key areas such as education, employment, and social participation. As a result, many of these boys experience not only physical barriers but also profound emotional and psychological distress, with feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and frustration being common themes among participants.

One of the most striking findings of this study is the widespread impact of these societal perceptions on the educational and employment prospects of boys with disabilities. Participants shared how the stigma surrounding disability often results in high dropout rates from school, limited access to vocational training, and the inability to secure employment. These barriers further entrench the cycle of poverty and dependence, as boys with disabilities are excluded from the economic and social structures that could enable them to thrive. This exclusion also leads to a sense of identity crisis, where these boys struggle to reconcile their societal role with their disability, leading to internalized feelings of inadequacy.

Despite these challenges, the study also identifies signs of progress in some areas. There is a slow but steady shift toward more inclusive perspectives, where certain family members, educators, and community leaders are challenging traditional masculine norms and advocating for a more inclusive view of masculinity. Disability advocacy groups, in particular, are playing a key role in promoting the Social Model of Disability, which shifts the focus from individual impairment to societal barriers. This shift in perspective is critical in breaking down the rigid definitions of

masculinity that marginalize boys with disabilities and redefining strength to include emotional resilience, adaptability, and determination.

However, significant gaps in policy implementation and institutional support remain. Participants highlighted the lack of governmental action and the limited resources available for boys with disabilities, especially in education and employment sectors. While there are frameworks and policies in place that promote disability rights, these are often not enforced or sufficiently integrated into practical programs that would lead to real change. This disconnect between policy and practice is a major hurdle to the full inclusion of boys with disabilities in Zimbabwean society.

To address these issues, the study recommends the implementation of community education programs that challenge societal stereotypes about disability and masculinity. These programs should be designed to promote a broader, more inclusive understanding of masculinity, one that recognizes the value and strength of boys with disabilities. Additionally, there is a pressing need for more institutional support, including better accessibility in schools, vocational training, and the provision of mental health services tailored to the unique needs of boys with disabilities.

Recommendations

Recommendations for People with Disabilities

Embrace Self Advocacy and Empowerment: People with disabilities, particularly boys, should be encouraged to take an active role in advocating for their rights and challenging the societal perceptions that marginalize them. Empowering individuals to voice their experiences and assert their needs can help reshape public attitudes toward disability and masculinity.

Foster Resilience and Emotional Strength: While societal attitudes may view disability as a weakness, individuals with disabilities can focus on developing emotional resilience and coping strategies. Programs that promote emotional intelligence, stress management, and self-confidence can equip them to better navigate the challenges of exclusion and discrimination.

Engage in Disability Advocacy Groups: Actively participating in disability advocacy organizations and networks can provide a platform for boys with disabilities to engage in collective efforts to challenge harmful stereotypes. These groups also offer support and resources to help them access education, employment, and social opportunities.

Recommendations for the Community

Promote Inclusive Norms and Values: The community should embrace a more inclusive and expansive understanding of masculinity. By promoting values such as emotional resilience, adaptability, and community support, individuals can challenge the narrow, traditional views of masculinity that exclude boys with disabilities. Community leaders, educators, and religious figures should model and promote these inclusive values to help change public perceptions.

Increase Social Integration: Communities must make a conscious effort to integrate boys with disabilities into social activities, educational opportunities, and community events. Creating inclusive spaces for interaction can help combat isolation and reduce stigmatization. Peer support programs and mentorship initiatives can also help foster social connections and build self-esteem among boys with disabilities.

Educate and Raise Awareness: Community based education programs should be introduced to sensitize the broader population about disability issues, particularly regarding the intersection of disability and masculinity. These programs should aim to dispel stereotypes and highlight the capabilities and potential of boys with disabilities, promoting their full participation in all areas of life.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Enforce Disability Rights Laws: Policymakers should strengthen the enforcement of existing disability rights laws and ensure that the provisions for people with disabilities are fully implemented in schools, workplaces, and other public spaces. This includes ensuring that accessibility standards are met and that boys with disabilities have equal opportunities to education, vocational training, and employment.

Integrate the Social Model of Disability into Policies: Policymakers should adopt and integrate the Social Model of Disability into national and local policy frameworks. This would involve shifting the focus from impairments to societal barriers that limit opportunities for people with disabilities. Legislation should prioritize the removal of these barriers and create an inclusive environment for boys with disabilities to thrive.

Invest in Specialised Education and Employment Programs: There is a need for increased investment in specialised education programs and vocational training that are accessible to boys with disabilities. This includes providing reasonable accommodations in schools, offering accessible resources and technologies, and ensuring that teachers are adequately trained to support students with disabilities. Additionally, policies that incentivize businesses to hire people with disabilities, including vocational and career development programs, would improve employment opportunities for boys with disabilities.

Develop Community Based Support Systems: Policymakers should invest in creating community-based support systems, such as mental health services and peer support networks, tailored to the needs of boys with disabilities. These services would help address the psychosocial challenges of exclusion, discrimination, and identity struggles that many boys with disabilities face. Public health campaigns promoting mental health and wellbeing would also be beneficial in ensuring that boys with disabilities have access to the emotional and psychological support they need.

Allocate Resources for Disability Awareness Campaigns: Government initiatives should focus on raising awareness about disability related issues, particularly regarding masculinity, and should include specific campaigns to challenge misconceptions about disability. These campaigns should be designed to engage both the public and key stakeholders in promoting a more inclusive society for boys with disabilities.

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