

Listening to the Voices on Disability Issues in Namibia: Evidence for Entrenching Occupational Justice in Disability Policy Formulation

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Introduction: There is an emerging need for occupational therapists and occupational scientists to recognise and work to support social policies that allow people to participate in occupations of their need and choice. The Namibian government intends to review the Disability Policy of 1997 which has not been reviewed for 20 years.

Objectives: The study aimed to gather evidence for disability policy formulation based on the occupational participation needs of persons with disabilities in Namibia and the desired outcomes. Furthermore, to determine the political culture of disability policy makers and to understand the potential for occupational justice applications in disability policy formulation from the perspectives of occupational therapists practicing in Namibia.

Methods: In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 persons with disabilities and eight disability policy decision makers. Two focus groups were conducted with occupational therapists practising in Namibia. NVivo 11 Pro version was used for data analysis and content coding was applied to generate themes with critical theory being the underpinning theoretical framework.

Results: Occupational participation barriers identified in the study were attitudinal, access, physical, expertise and systemic. The results show a discrepancy of perceptions between decision makers and persons with disabilities on occupational participation barriers experienced by persons with disabilities in Namibia. The discourse among persons with disabilities reveal life of struggle and disadvantage, the occupational therapists echoed similar views.

Conclusion: There is significant potential for applying the occupational justice framework in disability policy formulation particularly in policy aspects involving occupational rights and access.