Portrayal of People with Disabilities in Print Media in Kenya

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Abstract: *This paper is extracted from the findings of a research on media portrayal of people with disabilities in Kenya. The paper discusses the findings of objective 1 of the study.The purpose of this study was to investigate newspaper print media portrayal of people with disabilities in Kenya and the effect it had on societal attitude towards them. The study was guided by four theories, which were: The agenda setting theory, media representation theory, information processing theory and Information integration theory. The study was conducted among people working or attached to organizations for people with disabilities based in Nairobi county, Westlands division.*
The study used mixed method approach design. Quantitative data was collected from a sample of 70 respondents using a self- administered questionnaire. Qualitative data was collected from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informants. Participants in the FGDs and key informants were selected purposively. Five FGDs each with six participants were held while 14 key informants were interviewed.
Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to interpret the quantitative data obtained on variables that were relevant to the study objectives. The data collected were triangulated to enhance validity of the findings.
The study found that issues of disability were rarely covered in the print media and when they were covered, PWDs were portrayed negatively in the print media.
The study concluded that the most effective way of ensuring that PWDs are portrayed positively, and societal attitude towards them is positive so that they are socially accepted and economically empowered is to embrace the practice of mainstreaming PWDs. Disability mainstreaming means introducing the inclusion perspective/aspect of disability into the main social streams.
Print media coverage of successful PWDs who are service providers is positive and good portrayal as it sends messages to the readers and viewers that PWDs have the potential just like any one else. PWDs need not only be portrayed in the media, but also work with the media. Working with the media would give them an opportunity to talk on their own behalf. It would also give them an opportunity to influence in their positive portrayal by using acceptable terms when referring to issues of disability.
Key words and acronyms: *People with disabilities (PWDs), mainstreaming, print media, Focus group discussions (FGDs)*

I. Introduction

People with disabilities (PWDs) have grossly been under-represented in the mainstream media yet scholars such as Sanchez (2010), Hurst (1995) and Barnes and BCODP (1992) state that they are part of the population we have in the world today. Klepper (1996) states that 'the history of the portrayal of disabled people is the history of oppressive and negative representation. This has meant that PWDs have been presented as socially flawed able bodied people, not as disabled people with their own identities'. ILO (2010); Penas (2007) and Cumberbatch and Negrine (1992) assert that the media generally depicts people with disabilities according to common stereotypes such as pity and heroism. Disability advocates often call this type of societal situation the "pity/heroism trap" or "pity/heroism dichotomy" and call instead for its supporters to 'Piss on Pity' and push forward with inclusion instead.

II. Problem Statement

Catlet (1993) states that ideally print media is supposed to create awareness about the plight of people with disabilities and help in creating positive societal attitudes towards them. The media is expected to facilitate in the process of mainstreaming of PWDs. Mainstreaming PWDs entails that they would have access to all matters concerning policies, laws and improvement in programmes and services affecting them (Sanchez,2010). The situation as it exists is that in many countries, disabled persons often lack access to information about policies, laws and improvements in programmes and services that directly affect them (National Institute of Rehabilitation Research, 2001), (Sanchez,2010), (La cheen,2000). According to Barnes & BCODP (1992), the print media has not played a major role in creating societal awareness of the plight of PWDs. It has not done

much in facilitating the process of mainstreaming and changing societal attitude towards PWDs. As a result, PWDs have been excluded in mainstream activities. Darrow (1999) asserts that PWDs have endured misrepresentation, defamation and lack of representation in the media news and entertainment. Penas (2007) states that the media have important roles to play in the society, that is, facilitating societal tolerance and inclusion of PWDs in their everyday activities. The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate how the print media portrayed PWDs in Kenya.

Objectives of the study
The general objective of the study was to analyze how newspaper print media in Kenya portrayed people with disabilities.

III. Literature Review On Media Portrayal Of People With Disabilities

Literature provides evidence on studies carried out on media portrayal of people with disabilities.

Darrow (1999) carried out a study on images from the media and their interpretations by deaf and hearing students. The researcher's purpose was: to examine how the visual media have portrayed the subject of music and the deaf; to verify the validity of these portrayals with members of the Deaf community and to compare and contrast deaf and hearing audiences' impressions of these portrayals. The study revealed that deaf students enjoy and appreciate music in their own way. It also revealed that there are some persons who are deaf, but with some residual hearing. These persons may be interested in music just as much as the persons who hear. Darrow (1999) study focused on visual media but did not attempt to attempt to look at the print contents that accompany visuals. The Darrow (1999) study did not look at the attitudes the society may have on people with disabilities as a result of watching the visuals. The present study looked at both visual and print content that occur in print media concerning PWDs.

Barnes and BCODP (1992) carried out a study in Britain to establish how the media portrayed people with disabilities in Britain. The study looked at negativity in media portrayal of PWDs. It adopted the content analysis approach. The contents analyzed were from books and television in Britain. The researchers assert that the information passed in these media form the bed-rock on which the attitudes towards, assumptions and expectations of disabled people are based. They are fundamental to the discrimination and exploitation which disabled people encounter daily, and contribute significantly to their systematic exclusion from mainstream community life. The study came up with some of the following themes concerning media portrayal of people with disabilities in Britain: The disabled person as: pitiable and pathetic, object of violence, sinister and evil, burden, super cripple, their own worst and only enemy, object of Ridicule, incapable of participating fully in Community Life and sexually abnormal. Barnes and BCODP (1992) research was important in the sense that it informed some of the categories of themes of media portrayal of PWDs which the present study made use of in coding of the data.

Inclusion London commissioned the Glasgow Media Group and the Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research in 2006 to carry out a study to analyze changes in the way the media are reporting disability in London and how it has impacted on public attitudes towards disabled people. In carrying out the study, the Glasgow Media Group and the Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research compared and contrasted media coverage of disability in five papers in 2010-11 with a similar period in 2004-5 and ran a series of focus groups. The study found that there had been a significant increase in the reporting of disability in the print media with 713 disability related articles in 2004-5 compared to 1015 in a comparable period in 2010-11. The study noted that this increase had been accompanied by a shift in the way that disability is being reported and there was increased politicization of media coverage of disability in 2010-11 compared to 2004-5.

There had been a reduction in the proportion of articles which describe disabled people in sympathetic and deserving terms, and stories that document the 'real life' experiences of living as a disabled person have also decreased. Some impairment groups are particularly less likely to receive sympathetic treatment: people with mental health conditions and other 'hidden' impairments were more likely to be presented as 'undeserving'. Articles focusing on disability benefit and fraud increased from 2.8% in 2005/5 to 6.1% in 2010/11. When the focus groups were asked to describe a typical story in the newspapers on disability, benefit and fraud were the most popular themes mentioned.

These articles were impacting on people's views and perceptions of disability related benefits. The focus groups all claimed that levels of fraud were much higher than they are in reality, with some suggesting that up to 70% of claimants were fraudulent. Participants justified these claims by reference to articles they had read in newspapers.

There had been an increase in the number of articles documenting the claimed 'burden' that disabled people alleged to place on the economy – with some articles even blaming the recession itself on incapacity benefit claimants. Articles that explore the political and socioeconomic context of disability were rare as are articles that explore the impact that the proposed cuts will have on disabled people. There was a decrease in

references to discrimination against disabled people or other contextualizing issues. There had been a significantly increased use of pejorative language to describe disabled people, including suggestions that life of incapacity benefit had become a 'Lifestyle Choice'. The use of terms such as 'scrounger', 'cheat' and 'skiver' was found in 18% of tabloid articles in 2010/11 compared to 12% in 2004/5. There were 54 occurrences of these words in 2004/5 compared to 142 in 2010/11. These changes reinforced the idea of disabled claimants as 'undeserving'. Disabled people were feeling threatened by the changes in the way disability was being reported and by the proposed changes to their benefits and their benefit entitlements. These two were combining and reinforcing each other.

This review was important for the present study because it informed what other researchers outside Africa had done in the area of media and disability. The present study differed from the Glasgow study in that it was carried out in Nairobi, Kenya. The focus of this study was PWDs in Kenya.

Conceptual framework

A frame work consists of both dependent and independent variables. The independent variable causes changes in the dependent variable. The researcher seeks to explain the dependent variable also referred to as the criterion or predictor variable (Kothari, 2009). In the study, the independent variables were: Newspaper print media content (words, pictures and stories). The dependent variables were: Portrayal of PWDs. A relationship was thus drawn diagrammatically as illustrated in figure1 below.
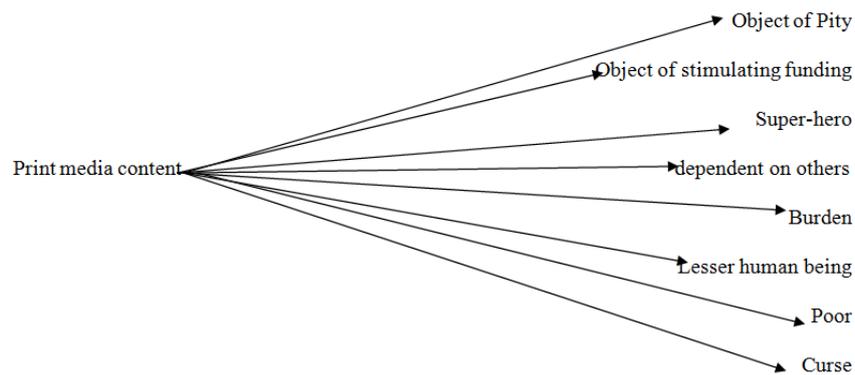

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

As it is depicted in the conceptual frame work, the print media content, which was the independent variable informed how the dependent variable, that was, PWDs were portrayed. The way PWDs were covered in pictures stories and words informed whether they were portrayed as object of pity, object of stimulating funding, super-hero, dependent on others, burden, lesser human being or a curse.

Sample size and Sampling Techniques
Sample size

The size of the population that was used in organizations of people with disabilities was 114 in total. The number was obtained from the following seven organizations of PWDs located in Nairobi county: Association of the Physically Disabled in Kenya (15), Jaipur Foot Project (10), United Disabled People of Kenya (15), Women Challenged to challenge (30) and National Council for Persons with Disabilities (15) Action Network for the Disabled (15). Two key informants from Albinism Empowerment Network Trust (AEN) and from each of the organizations mentioned in this section were also used in the study. This made a total of 14 key informants.

Sampling Techniques

This study employed both probability and non- probability sampling techniques in getting the entire population for the study. The study used purposive sampling technique to select organizations with PWDs. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) state that purposive sampling technique allowed a researcher to use cases that required information with respect to the objectives of his or her study. The study used organizations of PWDs that were located in Westlands, Nairobi County. The rationale of choosing Westlands as a location of the study was that it had the highest number of organizations of PWDs. To get the actual sample size for the filled out questionnaires, the researcher used all the available population of PWDs working or attached to these organizations., that is, APDK(15), UPDK(15), NCPWD(15), and JFP(10) ANDY (15). That made a total of 70 respondents for the questionnaire.

To get the subjects for the focus group discussion, the stratified sampling technique was used to get 30 members from the group that had the highest population. WCC had a higher population of PWDs than the other organizations. It had a total of about 100. The population was divided into three strata, that was, the hearing impaired, physically impaired and the visually impaired. A random sample of 10 was drawn from each stratum to make a total of 30. The researcher wrote on a chit of paper 'yes' for those the study used and 'no' for those who were not to be used. The chit of papers were equivalent to the total population in each stratum, but the researcher was cautious to see that 10 chits in a stratum had 'yes' and the rest 'no'. The chits of paper were folded and shuffled in a small can/tin. The subjects in each stratum picked the chits and those who picked 'yes' were used in the study. This sample was organized into five focus groups of six members each to make a total of 30.

To get subjects for the interview schedule, 2 key informants from each of these organizations and also from Albinism Empowerment Network Trust and Women Challenged to challenge (WCC) were used hence making a total of 14 key informants. The key informants were directors and/or Human resource managers /administrators/coordinators of the organizations. Therefore, the actual total of all the subjects that the study used was 114 from the seven organizations.

Data collection method
The study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches in collecting data.

Qualitative Approach
For qualitative approach, this study used two methods of data collection. These were, Focus Group Discussions and Key informants interviews. Participants in the FGDs and key informants were selected purposively. From the WCC organization, five FGDs were formed and each consisted of six participants that made a total of thirty. From all organizations that were used in the study, two key informants, that is, directors and/or Human resource managers /administrators/coordinators of the organizations were interviewed. This made a total of 14 participants.

Quantitative Approach
For quantitative data, this study used the survey method. Questionnaires were developed as a tool of collecting the data needed for the study. The questionnaires consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The rationale of giving questionnaires was that they permit a greater depth of response. Cooper and Schindler (2001) state that questionnaires allow researchers to get views from a broad perspective rather than a narrow perspective. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) support this view by stating that questionnaires permit a greater depth of response. The questionnaires were used in four organizations of PWDs. These were: APDK (15), JFP (10), UDPK(15) and NCPWD (15) ANDY (15). This made a total of 70 participants. The questionnaires helped in gathering evidence from the subjects. The respondents filled the questionnaires in one of the empty offices on their premise.

IV. Results And Discussion
Questionnaire Responses On Media Portrayal Of Pwds In Kenya
The table below shows responses from PWDs on how media portray people with disabilities.
Table 1: News paper print media portrayal of People with disabilities (pictures)

MEDIA CONTENT		N	PERCENTAGE
Pictures	Objects of pity	20	28.5
	Dim witted	10	14.2
	Super heroes	10	14.2
	Burden	15	21.4
	No answer	5	7.1
	Other	5	7.1
	Don't know	5	7.1
		70	**100**

Source: author 2014

Concerning print media portrayal of PWDs through pictures,28.5% said that pictures portrayed PWDs as objects of pity. 14.2% said that PWDs were portrayed as dimwitted, 14.2 said that PWDs were portrayed as super heroes, 21.4% said that they were portrayed as a burden.7.1 gave no answer, another 7.1% said they did not know. A further 7.1% said other. The ones who filled out other stated that newspaper print media portrayed PWDs positively or negatively depending on the coverage.

Table 2: News paper print media portrayal of People with disabilities (words)

MEDIA CONTENT		N	PERCENTAGE
Words	Objects of pity	25	35.7
	Dim witted	5	7.1
	Super heroes	10	14.2
	Burden	20	28.5
	No answer	10	14.2
	Other	-	-
	Don't know	-	-
		70	**100**

Source: author 2014

From the table above, 35.7% of the respondents of the questionnaire stated that the news paper print media words depicted PWDs as objects of pity. This was the opinion of the majority. 7.1% stated that the newspaper print media words portrayed PWDs as dimwitted, 14.2% stated that PWDs are portrayed as super heroes, 28.5% stated that PWDs are portrayed as a burden and 14.2% did not answer.

Table 3: News paper print media portrayal of People with disabilities (stories)

MEDIA CONTENT		N	PERCENTAGE
Stories	Objects of pity	30	42.8
	Dim witted	5	7.1
	Super heroes	5	7.1
	Burden	25	35.71
	No answer	5	7.1
	Other	-	-
	Don't know	-	-
		70	**100**

Source: author 2014

From the above table, most of the respondents, 42.8% filled out that PWDs were portrayed in the newspaper print media stories as objects of pity. The theme of pity had the highest respondents followed by the theme of burden which had 35.7%. 7.1% stated that PWDs are portrayed as super heroes, 7.1% stated that PWDs are portrayed as dimwitted and a further 7.1% did not answer. The themes of object of pity and burden which explicitly show negativity were cumulatively coming to 78.5%.

Focus group discussions' results on media portrayal of PWDs in Kenya

Concerning media portrayal of PWDs, all the groups felt that the print media portrayed PWDs as needy. The members also felt that the print media portrayed PWDs as being poor. Some of the responses from the groups were:

Q: How are people with disabilities portrayed in the newspaper print media?

When the above question was asked to the FGDs participants, no group came out distinctly to state that media portrayal of disability was positive. From the FGDs, the themes that emerged were those that depicted PWDs negatively. The emerging themes from the groups were: dependency, needing help, exceptional/heroic, objects of pity and beggars. The table below is a summary of the FGDs responses on media portrayal of PWDs.

Table 4:   Portrayal of PWDs in the newspaper print media

Portrayal of people with disabilities in the print media	N	%
Needing help	**7**	**23**
Dependent on others	**5**	**16.6**
Exceptional/heroes	**2**	**6.6**
Objects of pity	**10**	**33.3**
Beggars	**6**	**20**
Totals	**30**	**100**

Source: author 2014

As it is depicted in the table above, 23% of the members felt that PWDs were portrayed as needing help. They felt that PWDs and their organizations were featured in the print media so that they may be helped by the wider society.16.6% felt that the media portrayed PWDs as people who depended on others. They were not able to do anything on their own and they relied on their organizations /their care takers for everything.6.6% felt that PWDs were portrayed as super-heroes in situations when they were able to accomplish a usual act. 33.3% felt that PWDs were portrayed as objects of pity. They felt that the media content used to portray people with disability most of the time evoked pity and sympathy. 20% of the respondents felt that the print media content

portrayed PWDs as people who begged on the streets and unable to do anything positive. The FGDs participant generally agreed that PWDs were portrayed negatively in the print media. The FGDs participants expressed the view that issues of PWDs were rarely covered in the print media. Some of the participants said,

'It is not easy to come across issues of disability in the print media. One can even read the newspaper for two or three weeks and fail to get any issue of PWDs covered. This is not fair representation because it sends the message that issues of PWDs are not of great concern. The society may end up not knowing much about PWDs. The society may also not take issues of PWDs as important because they are rarely covered by the media'.

This view of the FGDs participants is explained by the agenda setting theory. According to this theory, the priorities of the press to some degree become the priorities of the public. If the press gives wide coverage to PWDs, the public will take issues of PWDs as important, but if the press covers PWDs issues rarely, then the public will not take PWDs issues as important.

According to McCombs and Shaw, the agenda setting theory assumes that the priorities of the press to some degree become the priorities of the public. What the press emphasizes is in turn emphasized privately and publicly by the audience of the press. Consequently, the more focus on the issues by the media, the more the audiences of the media learn and attach importance to those issues. When the print media portray PWDs as objects of pity, needing help and dependent on others, that is how the public will view PWDs. Implication of this theory is that when the print media covers PWDs issues rarely, the public is likely to take their issues less seriously.

The following are some of the responses from the FGDs participants:

P4: The print media portray PWDs as people who are needy. Most of the newspaper
      articles show PWDs asking for help, begging or even being given handouts.
P7: Even organizations of PWDs that were featured in the print media were portrayed as being in dire 'want' of financial support.
P9: Most of the PWDs articles in the print media focus on PWDs who are from poor backgrounds. This focus is not right because PWDs are depicted as people who can not flourish.
 P12: The print media portray PWDs as dependent on others. Most of the time either the organizations,
      guardians or other people talk on their behalf. A good number of PWDs who are captured in the print media are those who rely on the relatives or donor support.

The responses from this focus group seem to corroborate with Klepper (1966) who states that 'the history of the portrayal of disabled people is the history of oppressive and negative representation…PWDs have been presented as socially flawed able bodied people, not as disabled people with their own identities'.

Key informant results on media portrayal of PWDs in Kenya
      These are some of the responses that the study obtained:
      P1: The print media goes for negative stories rather than positive stories. For instance a person with disability was covered in the print media as having raped a minor and the story was all over. PWDs are just like any other human being and are bound to get into wrongs like any other person. The media should not therefore exaggerate the wrongs that PWDs do. The media should not blow the wrongs out of proportion so that disability becomes the centre of attraction.
      P2: The print media portray PWDs as weaklings, organs of pity, lesser minority and people in need of charity. Issues of pity and stigma are highlighted more than other stories. When reporting on talent, the media focuses more on disability than talent , hence encouraging stigmatization that PWDs are incapable and those of them who are talented are a wonder to everyone else.
      P5: The print media is still ignorant about issues of disability. The media is still using derogatory terms when referring to PWDs. For instance, the print media refer to them as 'disabled'- how are they disabled, this needs elaboration. The media refer to them as 'kiwete', 'walemavu' 'crippled'. These are terms that are not acceptable. Such media statements portray PWDs negatively. Rather than use such terms, they may call them physically challenged persons or people with disabilities.
      P8: In terms of perception, the print media portray PWDs negatively. The portrayal is not good.
      P10: Most media stories on PWDs evoke the theme of pity. Some stories captured show families that need sympathy as a result of having a family member who is challenged. For instance when a story is captured with a statement 'man abandons wife for giving birth to a disabled baby'. A statement like this is sending a message that there is something wrong in having a disability.
      P7: Some print media pictures show PWDs on wheel chairs and a statement indicating donations should be sent to certain organizations. Such pictures and statement portray the theme of pity. PWDs are depicted in such conditions as being incapable of doing anything on their own, hence evoking the theme of pity and only able to live on 'handouts'.

P12: PWDs are portrayed as people who are not independent. They are not involved in major issues, instead they are ignored. Stories on disability are not covered frequently unless there is something negative, for example, The Standard Newspaper did a lot of coverage on disability. Most of the coverage done is paid for by non-governmental organizations as they seek for donor funding.

V.   Conclusion

To establish how the print media in   Kenya   portrays people with disabilities.

The findings of this study show that PWDs have been portrayed by the print media negatively. The study found that PWDs were portrayed as objects of pity, dimwitted, super-heroes and a burden. All these forms of portrayal are negative. Cumulatively the study found from the survey respondents that these forms of portrayal were as follows:

For pictures, themes of pity 28.5%,dim witted 14.2%, super-heroes 14.2% and burden 21.4% hence, made a total of 78%. For words, the themes of pity 35.7%,dim witted 7.1%, super-heroes 14.2% and burden 28.5% hence, made a total of 86%.For stories, the themes of pity 42.8%,dim witted 7.1%, super-heroes 7.1% and burden 35.7% hence, made a total of 93%.

These findings agreed with FGDs results. The participants felt that the print media portrayed PWDs negatively. During the FGDs the themes that emerged were PWDs were portrayed as needing help, dependent on others, exceptional heroes, objects of pity and beggars.

From the specific responses of the key informants who were interviewed, majority of them felt that PWDs were portrayed as objects of pity, needing help, dependent on others and unable to do anything on their own.

The study also found that when PWDs were portrayed in the media, they did not speak on their own. Their voice was carried by others. Out of the survey respondents who filled out the questionnaire, 42.8% felt their organizations spoke on their behalf, 28.5% felt their guardians spoke on their behalf, 7.1% felt that the government spoke for them and 14.2% felt that the media spoke for them. All these were others   speaking on behalf of PWDs and they made a total of 93%.

In conclusion, the print media in Kenya needs to be enlightened on how to portray PWDs. The words, pictures and stories that touch on PWDs need to be carefully selected   in order to give them positive coverage. Positive coverage of PWDs is necessary for mainstreaming.

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