

Communication - related experiences of employees with cerebral palsy at work places in Sri Lanka.

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Access beyond education to employment is arguably a challenge for adults with cerebral palsy in Sri Lanka. Among the varied skills presumed to be pre-requisite abilities for employment are an expected education level and communication skills. However, inclusive and equitable opportunities for individuals with disabilities in education and employment that value diversity within the school context and in the workforce, in translating existing policies to practice have not been forthcoming. This study was undertaken to explore the lived experiences of adults with cerebral palsy in employment in Sri Lanka, with particular reference to communication.

A qualitative study using a phenomenological approach was undertaken to determine the communication experiences of employees with cerebral palsy. Six employees with cerebral palsy who have been employed in their current job for at least six months and who are above 18 years old were included. The data was gathered through individual semi-structured tele-interviews using an interview guide, which consisted of 10 open-ended questions. The qualitative data were analysed using a simple thematic analysis.

Negative and stereotypical perceptions towards persons with disabilities affected recruitment, even when the adults with cerebral palsy had much more qualifications than others. Intelligibility of speech and self – confidence were the major concerns that the participants identified as communication-related challenges they faced at the work place. They also reported using strategies to adapt to the communication challenges directly. The communication – related opportunities depended on the education level and type of employment; both of which depends on access to education and beyond. The suggestions given by employees with cerebral palsy were to increase technical support, provide inclusive education opportunities, offer training and increase awareness of speech and language therapy services.

Increased access to employment opportunities for adults with cerebral palsy could be facilitated by better access to education and therapy services as well as employer openness to diversity and inclusion.

Keywords: cerebral palsy, communication, experiences, employment, education, speech and language therapist.