Women with disabilities

fac ing double the challenge

This data packet explores questions around disability in Tanzania, particularly among women. As the figures show, women with disabilities face double the challenge, coping both with their disability and with social attitudes to gender. Women are more likely than men to have a disability, and women with a disability are more likely than those without a disability to suffer gender-based and sexual violence.

The data comes from a variety of sources, including Twaweza’s Sauti za Wananchi surveys of public experiences and opinions and Uwezo surveys of basic learning among children, as well as data from a variety of global research reports on disability.

Fact 1. 1 out of 5 women in low income countries have some form of a disability

One out of five women (22%) in low income countries have some form of a disability, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank. This is higher than for men (14%).

Disability is strongly linked to age, with over half (54%) of women aged 60 years and above in Africa having some form of disability. This compares to 7% among children and 22% of women aged between 15 and 59 years.

Fact 2. The most widespread forms of disability among women in Tanzania are visual and walking disabilities

The most widespread forms of disability among women in Tanzania are seeing (2.9%) and walking (2.7%). These are following by remembering (1.8%) and hearing (1.5%).

Fact 3. Women and children with disabilities are more likely to suffer violence and sexual abuse

Women with disabilities are:

>2x more than twice as likely
to experience domestic violence and other forms of gender-based and sexual violence as non-disabled women,

likely to experience abuse over a longer period of time,

and suffer more severe injuries as a result of the violence.

Children with disabilities are:

4-5x 4 to 5 times more likely
to experience violence and sexual abuse than non-disabled children.

Fact 4. Children with disabilities in Tanzania are less likely to ever enrol in school, and those who do enrol are more likely to drop out

Children in Tanzania with a disability are more likely than those without a disability to never be enrolled in school (8%, compared to 6%).

They are also more likely to have dropped out of school having initially enrolled (7%, compared to 5%)


Source: Forgotten sisters: A report on violence against women with disabilities, Ortoleva and Lewis, Northwestern University, 2012; and Human rights for women and children with disabilities, Human Rights Watch, 2012

Source: Uwezo learning assessment, Tanzania, 2017
Fact 5. Children with a disability in Tanzania who attend school do not perform as well as those with no disability

Four out of ten children (41%) aged 6-16 with a disability can read a simple story in Swahili, compared to six out of ten (60%) among those with no disability. This considers only those attending school, not those who have dropped out or never enrolled.

Similarly, children with a disability (11%) are less likely than those with no disability (24%) to be able to read a story in English. And those with a disability (36%) are also less likely than others (53%) to be able to perform simple numerical calculations.

Fact 6. 4 out of 10 citizens in Tanzania believe disability is “God’s plan”

Four out of ten citizens (41%) believe disability is the result of “God’s plan” (mpango wa Mungu). Three out of ten (31%) point to accidents as the cause and one out of ten (11%) points to issues during pregnancy.

In fact, as the earlier figures showing the link between age and disability demonstrate, most disabilities are the result of illnesses, injuries and other stresses accumulated as people grow older.

Fact 7. Citizens’ perceptions of people with disabilities vary considerably

One out of three citizens (32%) report sometimes feeling awkward or uncomfortable in the presence of people with disabilities. A similar number (33%) sometimes feel that people with disabilities get in the way. Some see people with disabilities as less productive (39%) or a financial burden (46%).

Most citizens (90%) say they sometime feel that people with disabilities need to be cared for, and six out of ten (62%) that they are the same as everyone else.

Fact 8. Close to half of citizens are aware of discrimination in employment towards people with disabilities

Close to half of citizens (46%) say they are aware of discrimination in employment towards people with disabilities.

One out of five (17%) knows of an organisation that gives preferential opportunities for employment to people with disabilities.

Fact 9. Citizens strongly support special seats in the National Assembly reserved for people with a disability

Almost all citizens (97%) support the idea of special seats in the National Assembly reserved for people with a disability.

This includes three out of ten (29%) who say five percent of seats would be appropriate, and seven out of ten (68%) who say this number should be higher.