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## Self-Perception of Young Women with Physical Disabilities in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the self-perception of young women with physical disabilities in Nigeria, focusing on their struggles and strategies for improving their self-image. In Nigerian culture, where gender injustice and disability stigmas are prevalent, this research highlights the unique challenges faced by young women who are physically disabled. The study recognizes the intersectionality of gender and disability, emphasizing how these women navigate a complex socio-cultural landscape that often marginalizes them. The primary goal of this research is to illuminate the socio-cultural factors affecting the empowerment of these young women by evaluating their lived experiences. By doing so, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of their self-perception. To gather data, qualitative research methods, including interviews and participant observations, were employed. These techniques provided rich, detailed insights into the participants' lives and perceptions. The findings of this study have significant implications for policymakers, activists, and organizations in Nigeria dedicated to promoting equity and empowerment for young women with disabilities. By understanding the specific challenges and barriers these women face, stakeholders can develop more effective strategies and interventions to support their empowerment and improve their self-perception. The research underscores the importance of addressing both gender and disability issues in tandem to create a more inclusive and just society for all.*

**Keywords:** disability, empowerment, self-perception, identity formation, Nigeria

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### INTRODUCTION

Young women with physical disabilities in Nigeria face numerous challenges that affect their self-perception and identity formation. Despite the existing literature on disability and gender issues, there is a significant gap in understanding the specific factors that influence the self-perception of these women. Hence, it is crucial to launders this gap as their self-perception not only impacts their well-being but also affects their ability to participate fully in society, have access to opportunities and advocate for their rights. By examining the unique experiences and perspectives of some young women with physical disabilities in Nigeria, this study sheds light on the factors

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development -UK that shape their self-perception, ultimately contributing to developing interventions and policies that promote their empowerment and inclusion.

The research questions direct the study, pinpointing the study's primary concerns and giving context for the investigation. They must be quantifiable, measurable, and aligned with the problem statement (Agee, 2009). The following questions were considered in the context of the self-perceptions of young women with disabilities in Nigeria.

1. What factors impact young women's self-perception and identity formation in Nigeria regarding physical disabilities?
2. In what ways is the self-perception of young women with physical disabilities formed?
3. Regarding self-perception and identity, what difficulties do young women with physical disabilities face?
4. How can young women with physical disabilities improve their sense of empowerment and self-perception?
5. How can we better advocate for the rights of women with disabilities in Nigeria so they may live in a society that welcomes and empowers them?

These research questions aim to uncover and unpack more about what influences young women with disabilities' self-perception, difficulties, coping mechanisms, and broader social repercussions. In addition, they outline the tool for gathering and making sense of information, all of which help researchers better understand the self-perception of young women with physical impairments in Nigeria.

The relevance of this research on the self-perception of young Nigerian women who are physically disabled cannot be overstated. It enlarges the pool of available information by delving into a neglected area and shedding light on the difficulties these young women face and their strategies to overcome them. Studies like this provide young women agency because they validate their experiences, raise their self-esteem, and encourage them to embrace who they are (Akan et al., 2024). To further promote social inclusion and equitable opportunities for young women with disabilities, the results also influence policy development, advocacy initiatives, and the formation of inclusive practices. The project's ultimate goal is to bridge the gap between research and practice to positively affect the lives of young women with physical impairments and increase their overall well-being and social integration.

Understanding the factors affecting young women with physical impairments in Nigeria's self-perception and identity formation is vital to the study's scope. Women of varying ages, with a range of impairments, and from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds are included in the study. Nevertheless, some constraints must be taken into account. Results may not apply to all women with disabilities in Nigeria due to sample size and geographic limitations (Adeleye & Oadola, 2022). Self-reported data, which may be prone to bias, are also used in the study. However,

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these caveats do not detract from the study's overall usefulness in shedding light on the lives of Nigerian women who are physically disabled.

This study relied on qualitative research techniques on the self-perception of youngwomen with physical impairments in Nigeria. This research's fundamental data collection techniques are semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Young women who fit the criterion for being physically disabled are selected using a purposive sample method. Thematic analysis, described by (Kiger &Varpio, 2020), is used in data analysis to extract meaningful themes and patterns from the accounts of study participants. Ethical issues, including informed consent and privacy, are maintained throughout the study. The lived experiences and self-perception of youngwomen with physical impairments in Nigeria may be thoroughly understood thanks to this qualitative approach.

## CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

### Disability and Self-Perception

Disability is often associated with stigma (Grinker, 2020); however, this 'sigma' might be heightened if it involves a woman. The available literature does not adequately explain the differences in the self-perception of men with disabilities as against youngwomen with disabilities or the links between them.

There are approximately 25 million people with disabilities in Nigeria, and more than half are women, according to the 2011 World Disability Report (Durojaye, 2020). Women with disabilities confront various obstacles influenced by the intersections between their disability and gender (Pettinicchio & Maroto, 2017). They are frequently subjected to multiple forms of marginalisation and discrimination as the intersectionality of their identities magnify the obstacle they encounter in various spheres of life. Their access to education, employment, healthcare and social services is frequently restricted by the compounding effects of their disabilities and perpetuating inequalities. For women with disabilities, healthcare disparity is especially pronounced. They have difficulty accessing appropriate medical care rehabilitation services and assistive devices (Drainoni et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2004).

However, (Slater et al., 2022) discovered that women with disabilities encountered the same challenges in the workplace as other women, such as reduced salary and gender-based discrimination. But women with physical disabilities may be more susceptible to stress than men due to social isolation, poverty, violence, multiple forms of victimisation, and persistent health problems (Sasseville et al., 2022). These factors contribute to their low self-perceptions.

Kolovelonis & Goudas (2018) define *Self-perception* as a person's sense of worth, competence, and respect. Individual perceptions of how others see them can also affect how they perceive themselves. For example, some negative social perceptions about women with disabilities are that

they are sick, ignorant, pitiful, and incapable of employment. Internalising these comments can diminish a woman with disabilities' self-perception (Crocker & Major, 1989). Social isolation has been identified as a common issue associated with any physical disability. However, relationships frequently provide positive social support, which serves as an essential function in the lives of people with disabilities. (Lee et al., 2020) suggest that affirming others through intimate relationships and social support can benefit individuals with disabilities. These relationships would assist them in overcoming other factors that affect their self-perceptions.

### **Factors affecting self-perception of young women living with disabilities in Nigeria**

The public's perceptions of disabled individuals significantly contribute to how young women with physical disabilities view themselves. Being subjected to unfavourable stereotypes and stigmatisation may lead to a low and negative self-perception (Chien et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the lack of representation or discussion of these disabled young women in the media and everyday life exacerbates this issue. Some of these factors are discussed.

**Cultural factor:** Culture plays a significant role in individuals' self-perception, and the effect is most pronounced for young women with physical disabilities. In Nigeria, disability is mainly viewed as a punishment from the gods; for a couple to have a disabled child, the gods must be angry. Alternatively, the ancestors are at war. This mentality can lead to shameful feelings, guilt and low self-esteem in women living with physical disabilities in Nigeria. It could also mean that witches, wizards, and dark forces have taken over completely (Omoniyi, 2014). Nigerian society mostly sees disability through a cultural perception embedded in superstitions, misconceptions, and stigmatisation. Hanass-Hancock and colleagues (2018) examined the attitudes towards disabilities among young adults in Nigeria, considering the influence of cultural factors such as religion and education on their perceptions of individuals with disabilities, including young women.

**Gender roles and expectations** are significant factors affecting the perception of young women living with disability in Nigeria. Powers and colleagues (2021) explore the perceptions and experiences of women with disabilities in Nigeria, focusing on how their self-perception may be influenced by cultural factors such as gender roles and societal attitudes towards disability. For example, a woman is expected to be beautiful, straight, and curvaceous in Nigeria. In addition, Nigerian culture prioritises traditional gender roles, expecting women to conform to societal norms of femininity, beauty, and marriage. Young women with physical disabilities may face additional challenges in meeting these cultural expectations due to their disabilities, which can impact their self-perception (Retznik et al., 2017). For instance, they may feel inadequate or unattractive, leading to a negative self-perception and social exclusion.

**Marriage and family dynamics:** Nigeria's belief about marriage and family expectations can also impact the self-perception of young women with physical disabilities in the country. Marriage is

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development -UK mainly known as a significant achievement in Nigeria. Young women are expected to give birth after marriage; in fact, if after two years the woman has not, the families will start rituals and prayers. However, young women with physical disabilities will find it challenging to find suitable partners because of the heavy stigmatisation and bias associated with disability (Kalpakjian et al., 2020). Some may never get married at all, while most end up with unwanted pregnancies because whoever got them pregnant does not want to be associated with them because of stigmatisation. These societal expectations and barriers can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth among young women with physical disabilities, impacting their self-perception and overall well-being.

**Societal factors:** The self-perception and access to resources and support for young women living with physical disabilities in Nigeria are also influenced by cultural factors. According to research by Ekoh and colleagues (2023), society has an impact on the experiences of women with disabilities in Nigeria, and this factor can limit their access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and social inclusion, reducing their sense of self-worth. Furthermore, societal attitudes can hinder the availability of assistive devices, accessibility accommodations, and support services, which are crucial for the empowerment and well-being of young women with physical disabilities (Ekoh et al., 2023; Powers et al., 2021).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The study included five young women aged 18 to 35, all of whom had some physical limitations. Different types of mobility impairments (like deafness), visual impairments (blindness), and hearing impairments (deafness) were represented among the participants. Their impairments were the result of things like accidents, congenital conditions, and illnesses. Urban and rural residents alike are described in this sample of Nigerians. This gave us insight into youngwomen's experiences with physical disabilities across various social contexts. The participants came from several educational and occupational backgrounds. They ranged from college students to working professionals to stay-at-home mothers (Table 1). The richness of the collected data is mainly due to the diversity of the youngwomen with physical disabilities in Nigeria who participated in the interviews.

*Table 1: Overview of participant*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Location</b>
1	Osteomyelitis leading to rickets	Single	Employed	Urban
2	Blindness	Single	Employed	Urban
3	Deafness	Married	Stay-at-home mum	Rural
4	Mute	Single	Student	Rural
5	Leg paralysis due to Poliomyelitis	Single	Employed	Urban

All individuals in this research gave informed consent to participate, and their names have been concealed for safety. Their contributions to the conclusions of this study are invaluable, and they should be thanked for their candour.

### **Self-Perception and Identity**

The experiences and struggles of youngwomen with physical impairments can only be understood by examining how these youngwomen see and define themselves. Here, we report insights on the participants' sense of self and how their impairments and social settings have influenced their identities. There was a wide variety of individual perspectives and characteristics among the participants. These people showed high levels of self-respect and acceptance, highlighting their talents and accomplishments rather than dwelling on their impairments. Some even seemed proud to identify as disabled, demonstrating a strong sense of self. They saw their impairments as strengths that allowed them to shine in new ways.

*Because of all the hurdles I have scaled and survived, I perceive myself as a survivor, a living testimony and someone to reckon with. Nevertheless, when you look at it, deep down, I am not secure; I panic; I am afraid to meet people because they will likely judge me or reject me. I am primarily insecure and lack confidence in myself; however, I say some things to motivate myself, and when I do, I have the confidence to face another day (Participant 5).*

However, some individuals had difficulty forming a sense of self and identity owing to the social stigma and unfavourable stereotypes they encountered because of their condition. Many complained that they were seen only for their limitations rather than as complete people with unique passions and skills. They spoke about how society often undervalues their abilities and how they feel they must constantly prove themselves.

*I grew up feeling insecure despite my family's protection and all the love I felt around me. Deep down, I always feel like I do not belong. I am not a desirable woman. I know there are times I pump myself up, hype myself and encourage myself, but when I examine my reflection after a few days, I see that I am still here. Shorter than the whole world. I may look beautiful despite it, but deep down, I still feel incomplete (Participant 1)*

Participant 1 said she feels insecure and unworthy; all the participants also supported this feeling.

*And then when it comes with a disability, when he it is now, you know, layered with a disability, so more or less like you are doubly marginalised or; you know, doubly vulnerable. (Participant 2)*

The norms and standards of society heavily influenced participants' sense of self and purpose of identity. Disabled people often felt excluded and marginalised due to widespread negative attitudes and false beliefs about those with disabilities.

For instance, participant 5 said;

*Hmmmm, to them, I am Kukute, rare, and round (lol). My social class or my degrees does not make sense to me. Some hungry men see me as a means to an end. They do not want to marry me; they want to cash out. I know this, and I doubt their perception of me can change. There are days that I claim it is their problem, not mine, but there are days I go to bed knowing it is my problem. (Participant 5).*

Similarly, participant 3 had this to say;

*Because you are disabled, some people assume maybe your mother was promiscuous. Perhaps you were sent as a punishment to your family or your curse (participant 3).*

Some participants took these damaging myths about themselves and their communities to heart, leaving them with a soft feeling of worth and little opportunity. Others fought back against these assumptions, calling for more inclusion and visibility.

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*Because I am a woman and a disabled person, I face double discrimination. Traditional gender norms restrict my potential and are what society expects of me. I must speak out against these assumptions and demand my due respect (participant 5).*

It is vital to remember that cultural and gender conventions also shaped participants' sense of self and identity. For example, many respondents emphasised the pressure they felt to adhere to conventional ideals of femininity and how it felt to be put in that position where you had to choose your needs above those of your loved ones.

*My disability has presented me with many obstacles but has also strengthened me and given me a sense of purpose. As for me, I refuse to quit goals no matter what obstacles I face (participant 2).*

Due to pre-existing gender inequities in Nigerian culture, the intersectionality of being a woman with a handicap brought extra problems.

*Because of my disability, I worry that others will judge me as unable or unimportant. It is exhausting to continuously disprove and overcome those preconceived notions (participant 1).*

Similarly, participant 2 also shares the same sentiments with other participants.

*Sometimes I have difficulty accepting myself, and I doubt my value. This is because society's view of disability is often negative, and that view seeps into my sense of self-worth (participant 2).*

Overall, the participants' sense of self and identity was complicated and diverse, reflecting the influence of individual experiences and prevailing cultural mores.

*Though my impairment affects my daily life, it does not define me. I am proud of the person I am becoming and how far I have gone in life (participant 1).*

The results highlight the significance of promoting positive self-perception and empowered identities for youngwomen with physical impairments and the need to challenge cultural stereotypes and promote inclusiveness and acceptance on both individual and societal levels.

### **Challenges Faced by Women with Disabilities**

In this piece, young Nigerianwomen with physical disabilities face daily difficulties. The results highlight their challenges, often influenced by the intersections of gender and disability.

*I was a very anxious child because we did not know what my growth would look like or were my internal organs would be as functional as my mates. When will I see my period? We were unsure of what was affected or what would be affected. There was also the*

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*challenge of boys not wanting to approach me because of my size; I was too small, and watching them ask my other friends out was challenging. An excruciating challenge is when people try to base their intelligence on their size; they naturally assume their brain is disabled too. Therefore, they constantly undermine me, which is painful, mainly when it originates from those closest to you. Regarding employment, I have not faced any challenges because I was fortunate to work with international organisations that treat you and everyone equally. Moreover, today, I run my firm (participant 3).*

Participant 3 faced many challenges, from health to social and relationship problems. Although she was fortunate to get a job, all other areas of her life were challenging.

Another participant has this to say;

*"I have a terrible time navigating the city." Attending a class or obtaining a job is tough when there is a dearth of accessible infrastructure and transportation (participant 2).*

All the participants spoke candidly about the physical obstacles they face daily. They need more infrastructure for their freedom of movement, such as inaccessible buildings and a lack of ramps. They already have difficulty getting about because of the lack of accessible public transit.

*"Because of my disability, I have experienced prejudice and negative stereotypes." Many others fail to see my true potential and believe I have nothing of value to offer the world (participant 3).*

Participants reported facing social stigma and prejudice as a result of their impairments. Negative attitudes, misunderstandings, and preconceptions from the general public worked against their ability to integrate into society fully. This bias disproportionately affected youngwomen because they were subjected to higher scrutiny and were imposed with more parenting and nurturing responsibilities.

*"Getting the education I desire has been challenging for me. Unfortunately, due to a lack of accessible facilities, I have been turned away from or restricted from attending several schools (participant 4).*

Similarly,

*"It is very challenge these days; it takes much effort to be hired" I feel that my potential is not being fully realised since my disability is being prioritised above my credentials by many employers (participant 1).*

Another participant faced a similar experience.

*I was offering to volunteer for free, not to be paid though for free, and the person I met the moment he discovered I was blind just became suddenly so hostile and started to ask me questions. Like, what can you do around here? Even if I give you the opportunity, how will you come to work? You know, it just wrote me off without allowing me even to prove, you know, what I had? I left that open office in tears and was like, wow, this is me coming to you to offer my services, and all you see are my disabilities. He thinks I cannot do the job effectively (Participant 4).*

*Transportation has been quite challenging for me as a PWD in Nigeria. They charge me twice per trip because I will not board on time, so if everyone boards for 50 naira, I am paying 100 naira (Participant 5).*

Participants discussed their challenges while trying to further their education or find gainful work. Discrimination and a lack of accommodations in schools and the workplace stymied personal development, professional success, and economic autonomy. Many people complained that they could not find work or had few choices due to their disability.

*It is discouraging that getting the care we need is so difficult to achieve. Due to insufficient infrastructure, we often face undesirable alternatives of extensive travel or subpar care. In addition, our healthcare requirements must be considered, making it harder for us to recover. We are struggling to meet our healthcare demands because of limited resources and inaccessible medical facilities (Participant 5).*

Limited accessibility and infrastructure hinder these youngwomen from fully participating in society. It is discouraging that they still have trouble getting into schools, getting jobs, and going places where other people congregate.

One member of the group said,

*"It is a challenge for us to get t for us to get the medical care we need." There are obstacles to getting adequate treatment due to a need for more available facilities. Disappointingly, financial constraints and a dearth of readily available healthcare facilities hinder us from receiving the medical treatment and rehabilitation aid we need. As a result, our safety and health are being jeopardised. We have a right to affordable, high-quality medical care and the resources we need to maintain our health, safety, and autonomy (Participant 3).*

Participants reported difficulties obtaining necessary medical treatment due to a dearth of available facilities. Disabled persons may go without essential medical care and rehabilitation services if they cannot get them quickly and affordably.

*Many of us can identify with and understand the experience of loneliness. Without a strong support structure, handling the responsibilities of everyday life may be difficult when you have a handicap. However, the value of a solid social support system comprised of peers must be balanced. Connecting with others who understand us and have been through similar things is empowering. To learn from one another and grow as people, we must have opportunities to interact with others in similar situations. The fight against social isolation and for a more inclusive society may be significantly aided by welcoming communities promoting acceptance and mutual respect (Participant 4).*

Another respondent said;

*"I feel socially isolated since there are few possibilities to engage with other persons with impairments. We need more welcoming places to find mutual aid and friendship (Participant 1).*

Participants' discussions of social isolation and inadequate support networks often centred on these two themes. The value of peer support and opportunities to interact with people going through similar experiences was emphasised. In addition, participants emphasised the importance of welcoming communities that foster acceptance and mutual respect.

*While I may not have been brutally forced into sexual activities, taking advantage of a disabled child with low self-esteem should count as rape. I could not have the nerve to approach anybody because of how humiliated and embarrassed I felt. I have been financially taken advantage of before, although I did not know the term for it then. Having almost to pay before we go out or before I see you are exploitation. Cajoling me to give you money I do not have because I love you. So yes, I have been abused (Participant 4).*

Another respondent shared a similar sentiment.

*Unfortunately, sexual harassment or assault has affected some of us deeply. We are more susceptible to gender-based abuse because we are youngwomen with disabilities. The dangers we confront are amplified by how ableism and sexism overlap. Recognising and addressing these difficulties is critical, as is creating safe havens and networks of support for those who have survived them. The time*

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*has come to end the quiet and fight towards a society that respects and defends the rights of all women, regardless of disability; we deserve to live free from fear and abuse (Participant 5).*

Sexual harassment and abuse were two forms of gender-based violence mentioned by a few individuals. However, they brought attention to the plight of disabled youngwomen and the critical need for education, prevention, and assistance programmes to help them.

When asked the question- As a young woman living with a physical disability in Nigeria, would you say your disability affects your being married? These were their responses.

*Sadly, the correct response to this perceptive inquiry is "NO; they do not see me the same way. To them, I will always be a means to an end, the presenter girl with money but needs a husband, so they come and tell me all sorts of lies, and after taking enough, they bail on me (Participant 5).*

Similarly,

*To that, yes, and yes, I have had people who are afraid to introduce me to their friends and not to talk about their families. I have had guys asking if I can conceive and give birth to a child. I never thought anyone would think of these questions, let alone ask me. However, my parents have always told me I knew the one person ready to take a risk on me would show up (Participant 1).*

These difficulties highlight the structural impediments that physically disabled youngwomen in Nigeria confront. Inclusion, equality of opportunity, and empowering youngwomen with disabilities all hinge on resolving these concerns. These difficulties must be lessened, and a more welcoming society must be produced by implementing new policies, widespread education, and focused initiatives.

### **Societal Factors Affecting Empowerment and Identity Formation**

This section looks at how youngwomen in Nigeria who are physically disabled are affected by society and how people discover who they are as individuals. The results illuminate the more significant social setting where these youngwomen negotiate their lives, claim their rights, and realise their full potential.

A woman with a disability said,

*"Gender inequity and patriarchal standards strongly impact our experiences. We live in a world that consistently undervalues our skills, upholds rigid gender norms, and limits our room for personal development and autonomy. As if ableism were not enough, we now*

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*have to fight persistent disparities based on gender. Therefore, it is crucial to fight for gender equality, including women with disabilities, which means challenging these standards. By tearing down obstacles and shifting public ideas of it means to be what it means to be a disabled woman in modern society, we may achieve equality in rights, opportunities, and recognition (Participant 5).*

Participants emphasised the pervasiveness of gender inequality and patriarchal norms as factors that impact their experiences. For example, they are typically less free to make decisions and have fewer career advancement prospects because of traditional gender norms. In addition, these cultural standards perpetuate the perception that disabled youngwomen should put their caring responsibilities ahead of their goals and dreams.

"As one participant put it,

*'Disability prejudice and we confront daily are unpleasant realities that we face daily. Many people disregard our talents and treat us differently because we are disabled. Exclusion, a lack of chances, and subtle ableism in daily encounters are all aspects of this discrimination. This is discouraging and irritating since we value diversity and tolerance so highly. Society must work to change these discriminatory norms and attitudes to create a world that recognises and appreciates the many gifts that people with disabilities bring to society (Participant 1).*

### **Disability Discrimination and Stigma**

Participants shared their experiences of being treated differently because of their disability. Discriminatory practices negatively impact their sense of self-worth, access to resources, and the likelihood of integrating into mainstream society. Unfavourable social attitudes, prejudices, and misunderstandings about disability create barriers to inclusion and engagement in numerous sectors of life.

According to a respondent:

*"The stigma associated with our condition is a further barrier for us. Taking a stance for oneself is more complex than being acknowledged for one's talents and achievements in a society full of negative attitudes and prejudices (Participant 3).*

The gender gap exacerbates the prejudice we face," said Participant 2. Double prejudice as a woman with a disability makes it more challenging to stand up for our rights and gain independence.

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Participants noted their enormous difficulties in accessing excellent education and gainful work. As a result, they cannot break the cycle of inequity and attain their full potential. Insufficient schooling facilities, curriculum, and discriminatory employment practices must improve their potential for growth and autonomy.

One contributor stressed the importance of the problem by saying,

*"The lack of accessibility in public spaces, transportation, and infrastructure is a significant daily challenge." It may be depressing when we encounter roadblocks preventing us from being free and independent. However, every day, we face new obstacles that make it difficult to fully participate in society, such as inaccessible buildings and public transit systems and a lack of ramps, elevators, and accessible bathrooms. Therefore, policymakers, urban planners, and stakeholders must prioritise inclusive design to ensure that public places and transportation networks are accessible to people of all abilities (Participant 1).*

**Inadequate Public Spaces, Transportation, and Infrastructure:** Participants raised concerns about the lack of accessibility in several areas. The lack of ramps, lifts, and other handicapped-accessible infrastructure makes it difficult for them to go on independently. This inaccessibility further isolates disabled youngwomen by limiting their ability to go where they like and interact with other people and economic resources.

According to one participant, concerns have been raised about the absence of legislation and policies that adequately protect the rights of youngwomen with disabilities.

*Within the judicial system, we often feel unheard and underrepresented. Comprehensive and inclusive legislation addressing the issues we confront as disabled women is crucial. We want legislative safeguards against prejudice, equal access to training and work opportunities, and individualised medical treatment. Building a society where women with disabilities have equal rights and opportunities requires a solid legislative framework and efficient execution (Participant 4).*

Participants raised concerns about the lack of laws and policies that fully safeguard the rights of youngwomen with impairments. Inadequate implementation and enforcement mechanisms mean current laws and regulations frequently fail to protect their rights. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive disability-inclusive laws significantly affects their marginalisation and inability to fight for their rights successfully.

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Action must be taken to combat these cultural forces, not just words. Challenge preconceptions, promote gender equality, increase accessibility, and advocate for regulations and laws that protect people from discrimination. If these structural problems are addressed, Nigeria's disabled youngwomen would have a better chance of gaining independence and finding their place in society.

### **Strategies for Empowerment**

This section delves into the tactics of physically disabled youngwomen in Nigeria on their quest for autonomy and triumphs over adversity. The results highlight the strength and ingenuity of these youngwomen as they face social challenges and work towards greater independence.

*'Lobbying and activism are vital instruments in our quest for change and confronting existing conventions,' one participant said with conviction. We refuse to accept the existing quo and work tirelessly to advance disability rights. We work towards breaking down barriers and promoting more open and inclusive laws via education, campaigning, and public awareness. Through advocacy and activity, we can catalyse positive change that will lead to a more accessible and equitable future for everyone (Participant 2)*

*. We are dedicated to making this a welcoming place for everybody in which individuality is celebrated and uniqueness, appreciate our contributions and provide equitable opportunity for all members (Participant 3).*

Participants highlighted the importance of lobbying and activism to effect change and question established norms. They were heavily involved in disability rights activities, educating the public and pushing for more accessible and inclusive regulations. They wanted to break down obstacles and increase access to opportunity, so they used their voices and organised their communities.

One respondent put it this way:

*"We recognise the importance of continuous self-improvement through education and acquiring new skills." We work hard to dispel stigmas and show that our impairments do not define us. Despite our obstacles, we believe in the strength of education and growth. Education may provide us with new opportunities, broader perspectives, and the means to overcome challenges. Investing in one's education and developing one's abilities equips one to face the world with self-assurance and competence. We could do amazing things together and significantly contribute to society via learning (Participant 5).*

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Participants acknowledged that bettering oneself via education and acquiring new skills was crucial. Therefore, they invested in themselves intellectually by attending college, receiving technical education, or taking classes online to pursue their chosen vocations better and establish themselves in various spheres.

As one participant put it,

*... peer support networks have been a tremendous source of empowerment for me. Finding others who can relate to my struggles has helped me feel less alone. We encourage and motivate one another via these networks, providing a platform to vent about struggles, cheer on triumphs, and trade wisdom. The strength of peer support comes from the mutual exchange of insights, compassion, and inspiration among individuals on a similar road. These communities have been essential in our empowerment because they have shown us that we are not alone and bolstered our will to succeed in adversity (Participant 4).*

Participants repeatedly cited the value of peer support networks throughout their empowerment processes. A feeling of community, acceptance, and shared experiences was gained from interacting with other women who have a disability. With these groups' aid, they overcame bias in their communities and strengthened their resolve to make a difference.

A member of the group said,

"We are actively striving to boost our self-worth and become better advocates for ourselves. Self-discovery and empowerment are the main goals. We are recovering who we are beyond our impairments by focusing on and celebrating our strengths. We are improving at speaking out for what we want and think is fair. We are changing from being passive receivers to becoming active agents of change as a result of self-empowerment. In pursuing a society that recognises and appreciates the worth of every person, we want to be vocal champions for not just our causes but also those of the broader disability community (Participant 2).

Participants discussed their efforts to increase their sense of self-worth and become better advocates for themselves. Public speaking, joining support groups, and attending seminars and training centred on assertiveness and self-expression were activities made by some of these individuals. They stood up for their rights and fought for what they needed by developing confidence in themselves and learning to advocate for themselves effectively.

The employment of assistive technology has been a “game-changer in my life and the lives of many others”, one participant said.

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*We are now freer and have access to more options because of it. Assistive technology has helped people from many walks of life become independent by eliminating physical, mental, or environmental limitations. This has empowered us to seek out and achieve our educational, occupational, and personal objectives. One cannot overstate the importance of assistive technology. It has helped us realise our potential and pursue happiness on our terms, challenging conventional wisdom about the capabilities of people with impairments (Participant 5).*

Participants shared stories of how they have significantly benefited from using various assistive technology in their everyday lives. They overcame physical obstacles, improved communication, and gained access to information and opportunities thanks to accessible gadgets, mobility aids, and assistance software. These advancements allowed people to go places and do things without anybody else's help.

*The path to self-empowerment and meaningful lives begins with acceptance of oneself and cultivating optimism (Participant 3).*

Having a more positive approach and embracing oneself for who one is has been a life-changing "experience," according to what one of the contributors called it.

*Self-acceptance and accepting one's individuality are powerful tools we have mastered. Acknowledging our disabilities and realising that they are not the total of who we are is part of this process. By taking this view, we have stopped worrying about things outside our control and begun appreciating those within it. As a result, we embrace the future with optimism, resilience, and resolve, drawing strength and encouragement from our experiences (Participant 2).*

Participants stressed the need to develop an optimistic outlook and accept oneself for who one is. They discussed how they learned to accept their impairments, appreciate their advantages, and look forward rather than backward. As a result, they overcame social obstacles by cultivating self-compassion and resilience.

In Nigeria, women who are physically disabled have much agency and drive, and these initiatives for empowerment show that. These youngwomen challenge norms, shift public attitudes, and pave the way for more equality and empowerment by fighting for their rights, pursuing education and skill development, establishing support networks, and adopting assistive technology.

## CONCLUSION

The study of self-perception, empowerment, and identity formation among youngwomen with physical impairments in Nigeria is an important one that needs to be pursued with continued focus. To further our knowledge of this understudied group and work towards greater inclusion for them, this chapter offers research ideas. Researchers can see the big picture and pinpoint widespread issues by performing massive quantitative investigations. Understanding the unique perspectives and requirements of youngwomen with disabilities requires a strategy recognising the interaction of several social identities, and understanding how self-perception, identity formation, and mental health interact is critical to creating therapies that successfully boost each. To further advance youngwomen with disabilities rights, social inclusion, and economic empowerment in Nigeria, it is essential to examine current policies and advocacy initiatives so that evidence-based suggestions may be made.

Lastly, implementing the suggestions in this chapter would help us gain a more profound knowledge of the self-perception, identity formation, and empowerment of youngwomen in Nigeria with physical impairments. More study, activism, and policy change are needed to create a society where everyone's rights and well-being are respected and supported, regardless of physical capabilities. A more just and fair society is possible if we all work together to support and elevate young women who experience disability.

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