

European Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religious Studies (EJPCR)






Disability Care and Employment Prospects for Persons with Disabilities: A Nigerian Contextual Analysis through the Lens of Old Testament Scholarship

Theophilus, B.O. Olajiga, Oluwaseyi, N. Shogunle, Kehinde, E. Obasola



Disability Care and Employment Prospects for Persons with Disabilities: A Nigerian Contextual Analysis through the Lens of Old Testament Scholarship

 Theophilus, B.O. Olajiga^{1*},  Oluwaseyi, N. Shogunle²,  Kehinde, E. Obasola³
^{1,2,3}Department of Religious Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State,
Nigeria



Article history

Submitted 18.04.2026 Revised Version Received 15.05.2026 Accepted 26.06.2026

Abstract

Purpose: The intersection of disability care and employment prospects for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria constitutes a domain of urgent scholarly and policy concern, particularly given the nation's complex socio-cultural, legislative, and economic landscape. This article examines the persistent gap between Nigeria's disability employment legislation and the lived occupational realities of PWDs, and asks whether Old Testament hermeneutics can supply a normative ethical foundation capable of reshaping both religious attitudes and policy practice toward disability inclusion.

Methodology: The article adopts an exegetical and contextual-theological methodology, undertaking close readings of the Holiness Code of Leviticus 19:14 and 21:17–23, the narrative of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9, the wisdom literature of Job, and the prophetic traditions of Second Isaiah. These texts are read in sustained “critical dialogue” with the empirical and policy literature on Nigerian disability employment, including the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act of 2018 (DAPPA), national survey data, and the sociological literature on disability stigma, rather than treated as a separate, self-contained theological excursus.

Findings: The analysis demonstrates that, whilst the DAPPA represents a watershed legislative development, its implementation has been demonstrably inadequate, with less than one per cent of PWDs employed in the formal sector. Traditional religious-cultural beliefs that attribute disability to

divine punishment, ancestral violation, or spiritual transgression continue to perpetuate stigmatisation and exclusion, although these beliefs are not monolithic and vary considerably across Nigeria's regions and ethnic groups. The article finds that the Old Testament's normative ethical centre, properly distinguished from its cultic and time-bound legislative provisions, supplies a coherent covenantal warrant, grounded in justice (*mishpat*) and loving-kindness (*hesed*) rather than charity, for transformative disability inclusion.

Recommendations: The article argues that a critically informed re-reading of Old Testament texts offers African Christian communities, policymakers, and scholars a compelling ethical basis for transformative care and occupational inclusion. Recommendations are advanced for legislative enforcement, the development of publicly funded (rather than privatised, family-based) care infrastructure, gender-sensitive disability employment policy, and community-based re-evangelisation of disability theology in the Nigerian context.

Keywords: *Disability Care, Employment Prospects, Nigeria, Old Testament, Social Exclusion, Covenantal Ethics*

JEL Classification: *I14 (Health and Inequality), J14 (Economics of the Elderly, Economics of the Handicapped, Non-labor Market Discrimination), J78 (Labor Discrimination: Public Policy), K38 (Human Rights Law: Other), Z12 (Religion).*

INTRODUCTION

The condition of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Nigeria presents a profound and persistently unresolved challenge to social justice, public policy, and theological reflection alike. In a nation of approximately 220 million citizens, one recent national survey-based analysis estimates that nearly 12 per cent of Nigerians aged 15 and older experience some level of disability, with approximately 2 per cent enduring severe disabilities (BMC Public Health, 2025). This single data source, while the most recent of its kind, cannot by itself capture the full demographic and cultural complexity of a nation comprising over 250 ethnic groups, and its figures should be read as indicative rather than exhaustive of regional variation; it is nonetheless corroborated in broad terms by the Global Disability Fund's (2024) situational analysis and is treated here as one data point among several rather than as a singular authority. The population in question, whatever its precise magnitude, is one whose daily realities are shaped not only by the particularities of impairment but, more decisively, by the social, cultural, economic, and religious structures within which its members live, structures that have historically excluded, marginalised, and diminished them.

Employment, as both a material necessity and a dimension of human dignity and social participation, remains acutely inaccessible to the overwhelming majority of Nigerian PWDs. Despite the enactment of the DAPPA in 2018, which mandates a five per cent employment quota for PWDs in public institutions and enshrines the right to work on an equal basis with others, less than one per cent of PWDs are employed in Nigeria's formal sector (MacArthur Foundation, 2024). The persistence of this disparity, between legislative aspiration and lived reality, demands interdisciplinary scholarly scrutiny that draws upon empirical, legal, cultural, and theological resources.

This article responds to that demand from the perspective of Old Testament biblical scholarship. The Hebrew Bible, as a foundational text for the majority of Nigerians who identify as Christians, possesses considerable hermeneutical authority in shaping cultural attitudes toward disability, care, and inclusion. The article undertakes an exegetical analysis of key Old Testament texts, Leviticus 19:14, 21:17–23, 2 Samuel 9, the book of Job, and Isaiah 35, and, in each case, deliberately returns these texts to the Nigerian disability landscape rather than allowing the exegesis to stand as an independent theological exercise. Each subsequent section therefore pairs its biblical analysis with an explicit statement of contemporary application, so that the promised “critical dialogue” between text and context is sustained throughout rather than confined to the introduction and conclusion.

Disability in the Old Testament

The Holiness Code contained within Leviticus 17–26 constitutes one of the most important legislative collections in the Hebrew Bible and has been the subject of sustained scholarly attention in recent decades, not least from disability studies perspectives (Olyan, 2008; Belser, 2019). The pivotal verse for disability hermeneutics is Leviticus 19:14: “You shall not revile the deaf, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.” The divine self-identification at the verse's close invests the prohibition with the full weight of covenantal obligation. Disability protection is here constituted not as charitable sentiment but as an expression of the fear of God (Hebrew: *yir'at 'Elohim*), a moral seriousness toward the divine will that, as argued throughout this article, is qualitatively distinct from charity.

Exegetes have debated whether the “stumbling block” (Hebrew: *mikhshol*) before the blind functions purely as a literal physical prohibition or carries broader figurative resonances of social, economic, and structural disadvantage. Stewart (2017) argues that the verse gestures toward a comprehensive obligation of non-exploitation and non-exclusion extending to all social practices that disadvantage persons with sensory or physical impairments. Read against the Nigerian evidence reviewed later in this article, this interpretive move is not merely academic: the “stumbling block” of unenforced employment quotas, inaccessible school infrastructure, and privatised care obligations are, on this reading, precisely the kinds of structural *mikhshol* that Leviticus 19:14 prohibits.

The complementary prohibition against reviling or insulting the deaf (Hebrew: *cheresh*) is equally significant. Olyan (2008) observes that the act of reviling the deaf in ancient Israelite culture may have encompassed not only verbal abuse but the broader practice of treating PWDs as socially diminished or morally defective. In the Nigerian context, where disability stigma is routinely expressed through verbal insult, social exclusion, and the attribution of disability to moral or spiritual failure (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016), this Levitical prohibition retains considerable contemporary force and supplies a direct biblical counter-text to the stigmatising idioms documented in the Nigerian sociological literature discussed below.

Leviticus 21:17–23 and the Tension of Cultic Exclusion

The hermeneutical task is complicated by the Priestly legislation in Leviticus 21:17–23, which restricts from altar service any priest with a physical “blemish” or “defect” (Hebrew: *mum*), listing conditions that would today be recognised as various forms of physical disability. This text has been widely employed in African religious contexts to justify the exclusion or diminishment of PWDs, and its exegesis demands careful scholarly engagement. Belser (2019) argues that the Priestly text must be read within its specific cultic and typological context: the physical “wholeness” required of priests at the altar served a symbolic function within Israel's sacrificial system, representing the unblemished perfection of the divine, and does not constitute a generalised judgement upon the humanity or dignity of persons with disabilities.

It must be acknowledged, however, that this symbolic association of physical wholeness with ritual fitness is itself historically consequential: it is precisely this kind of typological linkage between bodily “integrity” and access to the sacred that has, across the history of religious interpretation, supplied the conceptual root of the broader “disability-as-defect” trope, in which physical difference is read as a sign of diminished worth or fitness for participation. Acknowledging this is necessary for academic integrity: the text's symbolic logic, however circumscribed its original cultic purpose, has historically proven exploitable by interpreters seeking theological warrant for exclusion, and Nigerian ecclesial contexts that read Leviticus 21 without this caveat risk reproducing precisely that trope.

The hermeneutical move adopted in this article to reconcile Leviticus 21 with the inclusive ethic of Leviticus 19 and the Mephibosheth narrative is therefore made explicit rather than left implicit. Leviticus 21:17–23 is read as a time-bound, function-specific cultic regulation belonging to the Priestly source's typological symbolism of sacrificial “wholeness,” a regulation that is itself superseded, in terms of its capacity to ground general social ethics, by the normative centre of the Holiness Code's own broader legislation (chs. 19, 23–25) and by the covenantal *hesed* enacted in the Mephibosheth narrative. Crucially, Leviticus 21:22 itself preserves the priestly entitlements of

those with physical blemishes: “He may eat the bread of his God, both the most holy and the holy.” The text restricts a specific cultic function whilst explicitly preserving inclusion, sustenance, and dignity. Schipper (2018) similarly argues that the cultic restrictions of Leviticus 21 must not be read as a hermeneutical licence for broader social exclusion. This is not an evasion of the text's difficulty but a recognised exegetical strategy, consistent with the wider canonical-critical practice of reading particular legislative provisions against a text's own normative centre, and it is offered here explicitly so that the argument can withstand scrutiny from scholars sceptical of selectively favourable readings of difficult texts. For Nigerian biblical scholars, this exegetical distinction is of considerable practical importance: the Priestly text does not licence either the theological stigmatisation of PWDs or their exclusion from communal life, economic participation, or social dignity.

The Narrative of Mephibosheth: Inclusion, Dignity, and Covenantal Care (2 Samuel 9)

Amongst the narrative texts of the Old Testament that bear upon disability, the story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9 has attracted the most sustained attention from disability scholars and theologians. Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul, was lame in both feet as a result of a fall sustained during infancy (2 Sam. 4:4). His own self-description as a “dead dog” (2 Sam. 9:8) is paradigmatic of the internalised stigma that disability produces in exclusionary cultural contexts, a dynamic that bears striking resemblance to the psychosocial impact of disability stigma documented in contemporary Nigerian research (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016).

King David's intervention is exegetically decisive. He summons Mephibosheth not out of pity or condescension but out of covenantal obligation, the lovingkindness (Hebrew: *hesed*) owed to the house of Jonathan by virtue of covenant (1 Sam. 18:3; 20:12–17). This covenantal framework transforms the basis upon which Mephibosheth is included: it is not charity but justice, not patronage but restored right. David restores to Mephibosheth the lands of Saul (economic restitution), invites him to eat permanently at the royal table (social inclusion), and appoints Ziba's household to cultivate the land on his behalf (structured practical support enabling participation). This distinction between charity and covenantal obligation is, as argued throughout this article, the strongest interpretive resource the Old Testament offers Nigerian disability discourse, and it is deployed consistently below in the discussion of the DAPPA, the care-employment nexus, and the article's concluding recommendations.

Schipper's (2006) landmark study brings disability studies methodology to bear upon this narrative with considerable sophistication. For the Nigerian context, the Mephibosheth narrative offers a vision in which a person with a disability is not an object of charity or an occasion for spiritual speculation but a subject of covenantal obligation, whose dignity is non-negotiable and whose social and economic participation is actively structured by those with power and resources to enable it a model with direct bearing, as the later sections argue, on how the Nigerian state and Nigerian families ought to structure disability employment and care.

The Wisdom of Job and the Prophetic Vision of Isaiah

The book of Job constitutes a sustained interrogation of the theology of retribution that undergirds many traditional African, and indeed ancient Israelite, understandings of disability and suffering. The Joban poet systematically dismantles the assumption, voiced by Job's three friends, that physical suffering is the direct consequence of moral or spiritual failure. Job's persistent insistence upon his own integrity in the face of calamitous physical affliction (Job 2:3–10; 31:1–40)

constitutes a prophetic refusal of the disability-as-divine-punishment hermeneutic that continues to shape Nigerian cultural attitudes toward PWDs, attitudes documented empirically in the Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) study discussed below. The divine verdict in the epilogue (Job 42:7) constitutes an authoritative Old Testament repudiation of simplistic causal accounts of disability and suffering.

The vision of Second Isaiah (Isaiah 35; 40–55) adds a further dimension. Isaiah 35:5–6 envisions the eschatological restoration of those with visual and mobility impairments as a central element of divine redemption. Exegetes have read this passage as a prophetic sign of the comprehensive restoration of human dignity and social wholeness. Applied to Nigeria, this prophetic vision implies that present-day practices of care, inclusion, and employment access are not peripheral religious concerns but anticipations, in the here and now, of the very wholeness the prophets describe, a theological warrant directly relevant to the policy failures documented in the sections that follow.

The Nigerian Socio-Cultural Context of Disability

Nigeria is characterised by extraordinary cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, encompassing over 250 ethnic groups and a population divided broadly between Islam and Christianity, with significant residual influence from traditional African religious cosmologies. It is important to stress that these traditional cosmologies are not monolithic: beliefs about the causation and meaning of disability vary considerably across Nigeria's northern, southern, eastern, and western regions, and across its constituent ethnic and religious communities, such that any generalised account risks flattening genuinely distinct local traditions (Okafor et al., 2022). With that qualification in place, Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) document how interpretive frameworks in which disability is viewed as a curse from God, the consequence of ancestral violations, or the result of spiritual attack, recur with sufficient frequency across these varied contexts to produce pervasive stigmatisation that penetrates family, community, and institutional responses to PWDs.

The BMC Public Health study (2025), drawing upon the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, confirms that traditional beliefs in Nigeria continue to associate disability with stigma and social exclusion, restricting PWDs' access to education, employment, and social participation; as noted above, this is treated here as corroborating rather than singularly authoritative evidence, given the scale and diversity of the population it purports to describe. The internalisation of stigma by PWDs themselves, powerfully echoed in Mephibosheth's self-description as a “dead dog,” constitutes a further dimension of exclusion, as individuals who have absorbed a narrative of their own defectiveness may be less likely to pursue employment, assert their rights, or engage with rehabilitation services (Etieyibo & Omiegbe, 2016).

Family responses to disability in Nigeria are similarly shaped by these cultural frameworks. Sango and Deveau (2022) document pervasive parental shame, concealment of disabled children, and exclusion from educational and social opportunities as characteristic family responses. The Global Disability Fund's Situational Analysis (2024) further notes that the absence of standardised national data on disability prevalence, compounded by underreporting driven by stigma, has rendered evidence-based disability policy acutely difficult to develop.

Nigeria's status as one of the most intensely religious societies in the world renders the theological dimension of disability attitudes particularly consequential. The Priestly legislation of Leviticus 21, read without the exegetical nuance set out above, has been deployed in some ecclesial contexts

to justify the exclusion of PWDs from leadership, worship, and fellowship. Similarly, the theology of retribution, against which the book of Job protests so powerfully, has been reinforced by certain streams of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity that identify disability with unconfessed sin, insufficient faith, or spiritual bondage. However, religious communities that adopt theologies of inclusion, grounded in the covenantal, not charitable, ethic exemplified by David's treatment of Mephibosheth, can serve as powerful counterweights to cultural stigmatisation and as advocates for the rights and welfare of PWDs.

The Care-Employment Nexus

In the absence of a formalised state-funded disability care infrastructure comparable to the Home and Community-Based Services systems operative in high-income countries, disability care in Nigeria is predominantly delivered within the family unit. This arrangement places disproportionate and often overwhelming burdens upon female family members, whose own educational, occupational, and social participation is frequently curtailed by caregiving responsibilities. Nwosu and colleagues (2024) document that unpaid family caregiving constitutes the primary, and in many contexts the only, available form of disability support, and that this work remains unrecognised in national policy frameworks, unrewarded financially, and unsupported by professional training or service infrastructure.

This unpaid and unrecognised caregiving labour constitutes, in the assessment of this article, the single most consequential structural barrier to disability employment identified in the Nigerian literature, and it exposes a fundamental and largely unexamined design flaw in the DAPPA itself. The Act's five per cent employment quota presupposes a "ready-to-work" PWD: an applicant who can present at a workplace, perform its duties, and sustain attendance without reference to the personal-assistance, mobility, and care arrangements that make such participation possible in the first place. The DAPPA contains no corresponding provision for the public funding or professionalisation of the care infrastructure required to produce this "readiness." That infrastructure is, at present, entirely privatised within the family, and overwhelmingly within women's unpaid labour. A legislative quota imposed upon a labour market while the conditions of labour-market readiness remain wholly unaddressed by the state amounts, in effect, to a policy demand without a corresponding policy investment; this is not a peripheral implementation gap but a structural contradiction at the heart of the Act, and it offers a more complete explanation of the DAPPA's failure than political will or enforcement capacity alone.

The care-employment nexus is therefore bidirectional and self-reinforcing in the Nigerian context. PWDs who depend upon family members for personal care are frequently unable to access employment because their care arrangements are incompatible with the demands of the labour market; simultaneously, caregiving family members are themselves prevented from sustaining consistent employment, reducing household income and deepening the poverty that compounds disability disadvantage. This interlocking system of care deprivation and employment exclusion cannot be addressed through legislative reform alone but requires the development of formalised, professionalised, and publicly funded disability care services (Sage et al., 2022; CLEAR, 2024).

Legislative and Policy Framework for Disability Employment in Nigeria

The DAPPA of 2018 represents Nigeria's most comprehensive legislative response to the rights and welfare of PWDs to date (Agha et al., 2024). The Act prohibits discrimination against PWDs in employment, education, healthcare, and access to public places, and establishes the National

Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) as the principal regulatory and enforcement body. Section 28 mandates that all public institutions reserve a minimum of five per cent of employment opportunities for PWDs.

The DAPPA's passage was preceded by a legislative history that reveals the limitations of formal legal reform in the absence of political will and institutional capacity. The Nigerians with Disability Decree of 1993 was never substantively implemented (Global Disability Fund, 2024). Nigeria ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2007 and its Optional Protocol in 2010, yet substantive domestic legislative reform was not achieved until 2018. Orabueze and Omenugha (2023, as cited in Agha et al., 2024) characterise the protection afforded by the DAPPA as “only a fable,” reflecting the profound gap between the law's intentions and its actual impact.

The implementation record of the DAPPA has been deeply disappointing. As of 2024, 26 of Nigeria's 36 states, including Benue and Delta, had yet to implement the Act's provisions (CBM, 2024). The five per cent employment quota has not been systematically enforced, and no credible national data on compliance rates have been published. The NCPD itself has faced persistent resource constraints, limited regulatory authority, and inadequate political support, rendering it largely ineffective as an enforcement mechanism. This ineffectiveness should not be attributed to a single cause: it is the product of both an underlying structural-legal weakness and a resourcing failure operating together. On the regulatory side, the NCPD's enabling provisions grant it monitoring and advisory functions but stop short of vesting it with clear, independent sanctioning authority, comparable powers of compulsion, or a statutory mandate to compel disaggregated employment reporting from public institutions; in the absence of such teeth, compliance remains effectively voluntary. On the resourcing side, the Commission has operated with inadequate budgetary allocation, insufficient staffing, and limited field presence across Nigeria's 36 states, which constrains even the monitoring and advisory functions it does formally possess. Agha and colleagues (2024) identify the principal barriers as weak political will, insufficient funding, poor public awareness, negative attitudinal barriers among employers, inaccessible physical infrastructure, and the absence of standardised disability assessment and referral systems, a combination that confirms both the regulatory and the budgetary diagnoses offered here.

A significant, if uneven, development has been the enactment of state-level disability laws in 23 of Nigeria's 36 states (Global Disability Fund, 2024), creating significant geographical disparities in the legal protection available to Nigerian PWDs depending upon their state of residence.

Employment Outcomes for Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria: Empirical Evidence

The MacArthur Foundation's analysis (2024) confirms that fewer than one per cent of PWDs are employed in the formal sector, a figure that stands in stark contrast to the 74.9 per cent formal employment rate recorded for non-disabled working-age persons in comparable high-income country contexts (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2024). The overwhelming majority of Nigerian PWDs with any economic participation find their livelihoods in the informal sector — subsistence agriculture, petty trading, artisanal work, and begging — where earnings are low, irregular, and unprotected by employment law (Global Disability Fund, 2024).

A critical upstream determinant of this employment exclusion is the systematic disadvantage of PWDs within the educational system. The Global Disability Fund's Situational Analysis (2024) documents the absence of reliable enrolment data for children with disabilities, the inaccessibility

of school infrastructure and learning materials, and the chronic shortage of trained special education personnel. These exclusions are particularly acute at the secondary-to-tertiary transition stage. The absence of specialised pre-employment transition services, of the kind introduced in the United States through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 and evaluated by Taylor and colleagues (2025), means young Nigerians with disabilities typically navigate this transition without structured institutional support. A further, often-overlooked dimension of this transition failure concerns assistive technology (AT). Even where disability-inclusive education is successfully provided, the absence of affordable screen readers, mobility aids, communication devices, and adapted workplace technologies means that the formal sector transition remains effectively blocked at its final stage; education without accompanying AT provision produces qualified candidates who nonetheless cannot physically access or perform formal-sector work, and Nigerian vocational rehabilitation policy has yet to treat AT provision as a core rather than peripheral component of employment readiness.

Nigerian women with disabilities occupy a position of particularly acute disadvantage, experiencing the compounding effects of gender discrimination, disability stigmatisation, and disproportionate caregiving obligations. The Global Disability Fund's Situational Analysis (2024) identifies women and youth with disabilities as facing compounded risks of exclusion. Nwosu and colleagues (2024) document that the burden of informal caregiving, which disproportionately falls upon women, restricts both the employment of women with disabilities and the occupational participation of non-disabled women who care for disabled family members, producing a dual gender disadvantage. This intersectional analysis is consistent with the broader international evidence reviewed by Witte and colleagues (2024) and with the scholarship on intersectionality pioneered by Crenshaw (1989). For Nigerian policy, the implication is unambiguous: disability employment strategies that are not explicitly gender-sensitive risk perpetuating and deepening the disadvantage of women with disabilities.

Reading the Old Testament for Nigerian Disability Justice

The exegetical survey above illuminates what may be termed the Old Testament's covenantal ethic of care, a consistent normative framework in which the protection, inclusion, and active support of vulnerable persons is constituted as a non-negotiable obligation of the covenant community and its governing institutions, rather than a discretionary act of charity. This ethic finds expression in the Holiness Code's prohibitions against the exploitation of PWDs (Lev. 19:14), in the Deuteronomic legislation (Deut. 27:18), in the Joban repudiation of retributive disability theology, in the prophetic vision of disability inclusion as an eschatological sign of divine justice (Isa. 35), and most powerfully in the narrative of David and Mephibosheth, in which covenantal lovingkindness (*hesed*) takes the concrete form of land restoration, social inclusion, and structural support for participation.

For Nigerian Old Testament scholarship, this covenantal ethic provides a hermeneutical foundation for challenging both the traditional cultural frameworks that have stigmatised PWDs and the religio-political complacency that has allowed the DAPPA's provisions to remain unimplemented. The argument is not merely that the Bible is sympathetic toward disability, a superficial reading easily countered by citations of Leviticus 21, but that the normative centre of the Old Testament's ethics demands an active, structurally engaged, and materially specific commitment to the welfare and participation of PWDs. This is, in Old Testament terms, a matter of justice (*mishpat*) and covenantal faithfulness (*hesed*), not of charity, and this distinction,

consistently maintained throughout this article, is what distinguishes the argument advanced here from conventional appeals to Christian benevolence.

The most immediate hermeneutical contribution of Old Testament scholarship to the Nigerian disability context may be the Joban deconstruction of the theology of retribution. In a cultural environment where disability is routinely attributed to divine punishment, ancestral transgression, or spiritual deficiency, the book of Job constitutes a radical counter-testimony. Nigerian Old Testament scholars are uniquely positioned to perform this hermeneutical service for their communities: re-reading Job for Nigerian congregations, preaching Leviticus 19:14 with exegetical rigour, articulating the Mephibosheth narrative as a model of covenantal care, and being forthright about the cultic limits and historical dangers of Leviticus 21:17–23 are acts of biblical scholarship with direct and measurable implications for the employment, welfare, and dignity of millions of Nigerian PWDs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the employment prospects of persons with disabilities in Nigeria are shaped by a multilayered system of disadvantage encompassing religio-cultural stigmatisation, legislative under-enforcement, privatised care infrastructure, educational and assistive-technology exclusion, and gender-based compounded disadvantage. The DAPPA of 2018, whilst constituting a significant legislative achievement, has as yet delivered minimal material change, in part because it imposes an employment obligation without addressing the privatised care conditions that determine who can be “ready” to work. The transformation of this situation demands not merely technocratic policy adjustment but a fundamental reorientation of the cultural, theological, and ethical frameworks within which Nigerian society understands and responds to disability.

Old Testament scholarship has a distinctive and irreplaceable contribution to make to this transformation. The exegetical resources surveyed in this article, the Holiness Code's prohibition of exploitation and exclusion, the carefully qualified reading of Leviticus 21's cultic symbolism, the Joban deconstruction of retributive disability theology, the Mephibosheth narrative's model of covenantal care, and the prophetic vision of disability inclusion as a sign of divine justice, constitute a hermeneutically powerful biblical basis for challenging stigma, reforming practice, and advocating for policy change. The covenantal distinction between charity and obligation, sustained consistently from the exegesis of 2 Samuel 9 through to the recommendations above, is the article's central and most transferable contribution: it reframes disability employment not as a matter of benevolence that society may choose to extend, but as a debt of justice that covenant communities, and the states they inhabit, are obligated to pay.

The pursuit of occupational justice for Nigerian PWDs is, ultimately, inseparable from the pursuit of a society in which the covenantal ethic of hesed, loving-kindness expressed in concrete, structurally enacted care and inclusion, is the operative principle of social organisation. It is the contention of this article that the Old Testament itself, rightly read, critically qualified, and courageously proclaimed, contains the hermeneutical resources necessary to inspire and sustain that pursuit.

Recommendations

Enforcing the DAPPA Five Per Cent Employment Quota. The Federal Government of Nigeria must establish credible, transparent, and adequately resourced mechanisms for the enforcement of the DAPPA's five per cent employment quota, including statutory sanctioning authority for the NCPD, mandatory disability employment reporting by all covered institutions, and state-level implementation plans with clear timelines and accountability mechanisms. From a biblical perspective, this enforcement is not merely a bureaucratic task but a material expression of the covenantal commitment to the vulnerable modelled in David's restitution to Mephibosheth: enforcement is the contemporary, structural equivalent of hesed, not an optional administrative add-on.

Developing Formal, Publicly Funded Disability Care Infrastructure. The almost total absence of formalised personal assistance services, supported employment programmes, and community-based rehabilitation in Nigeria must be addressed through publicly funded care infrastructure modelled on evidence-based international approaches (Sage et al., 2022; CLEAR, 2024). As argued above, the DAPPA's employment quota cannot succeed while the care infrastructure required to produce a “ready-to-work” PWD remains entirely privatised within families and disproportionately borne by women; de-privatising this care burden is therefore a precondition for, not merely a complement to, employment quota enforcement, and is itself a covenantal obligation rather than a discretionary welfare gesture.

Investing in Disability-Inclusive Education, Vocational Training, and Assistive Technology. Substantive inclusion of PWDs in formal employment requires upstream investment in accessible, disability-inclusive education, adequately resourced special education provision, pre-employment transition services, and, critically, affordable assistive technology, without which educational gains cannot translate into employment access. Vocational rehabilitation programmes informed by Chun and colleagues (2024) and Taylor and colleagues (2025) must be established and funded as a policy priority.

Re-Evangelising Disability Theology in Nigerian Faith Communities. Nigerian Old Testament scholars, theologians, and church leaders have a responsibility to lead a systematic re-engagement of Nigerian faith communities with the biblical material on disability, centring the normative ethics of covenantal justice and hesed, rather than charity, outlined in this article, and explicitly naming the historical dangers of uncritical readings of Leviticus 21. Preaching, theological education, and pastoral training curricula must explicitly address and theologically refute the disability stigma that current teaching in many communities inadvertently reinforces.

Developing Disaggregated National Disability Data Systems. The inadequacy of existing disability data in Nigeria, compounded by underreporting driven by stigma and by reliance on a limited number of national surveys, severely hampers evidence-based policy development. The National Bureau of Statistics must mandate disability disaggregation in all national surveys, in line with the Washington Group Short Set methodology, and the NCPD must develop a national disability assessment and referral system with standardised criteria.

Addressing Gender and Intersectionality within Disability Policy. Disability employment policy in Nigeria must include explicit, gender-specific disability employment policies and targets, attending to the compounded disadvantage experienced by women with disabilities and by female caregivers of PWDs. Gender-disaggregated data collection, targeted outreach programmes, and

reforms to informal caregiving recognition and remuneration are essential, non-negotiable components, consistent with the covenantal rather than charitable model of inclusion advanced throughout this article, of a truly inclusive disability employment strategy.

REFERENCES

- Agha, U., Nwanna, C., & Okeke, I. (2024). Evaluating the implementation of the disability act in Nigeria: What are the challenges? *Journal of Social Welfare and Disability Studies*. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jswds/article/download/294513/277163>
- Anastasiou, D., & Kauffman, J. M. (2013). The social model of disability: Dichotomy between impairment and disability. *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 38(4), 441–459. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jht026>
- Belser, J. W. (2019). Priestly aesthetics: Disability and bodily differences in Leviticus 21. *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 73(4), 355–366. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964319859001>
- BMC Public Health. (2025). Disability prevalence and associated factors in Nigeria: Policy implications and the path towards inclusive development. *BMC Public Health*, 25, 4153. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-25492-0>
- CBM International. (2024). *Advancing disability rights in Nigeria*. <https://www.cbm.org/our-work/project-insights/disability-rights-nigeria.html>
- Chun, J., Alston, R., & Brooks, G. (2024). Promoting quality career pathways for individuals with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 60(3), 299–310. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-240014>
- Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR). (2024, May). *What do we know about the effectiveness of disability employment interventions?* U.S. Department of Labor. https://clear.dol.gov/sites/default/files/Disability%20Employment%20Research%20Synthesis%20Brief_May2024.pdf
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalising the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
- Disability:IN. (n.d.). *Global directory—Nigeria*. <https://disabilityin.org/country/nigeria/>
- Etieyibo, E., & Omiegbe, O. (2016). Religion, culture, and discrimination against persons with disabilities in Nigeria. *African Journal of Disability*, 5(1), a192. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v5i1.192>
- Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. (2024, August). Are workers with a disability facing new opportunities or new challenges? *On the Economy Blog*. <https://www.stlouisfed.org/on-the-economy/2024/jul/are-workers-disability-facing-new-opportunities-new-challenges>
- Global Disability Fund. (2024). *Nigeria situational analysis on the rights of persons with disabilities*. <https://globaldisabilityfund.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/SITAN-Nigeria-Brief.pdf>
- Kauffman, J. M., & Anastasiou, D. (2023). Changing the medical model of disability to the normalisation model of disability: Clarifying the past to create a new future direction. *Disability & Society*, 38(19–20), 3233–3260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2255926>

- LawPavilion. (2023, October 27). *Legal framework of people living with disabilities in Nigeria*. <https://lawpavilion.com/blog/legal-framework-of-people-living-with-disabilities-in-nigeria/>
- Leadership Newspaper. (2024, November 27). Enforce Disability Act 2018. *Leadership*. <https://leadership.ng/enforce-disability-act-2018-2/>
- MacArthur Foundation. (2024). *Make way for the disability rights agenda in Nigeria*. <https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/make-way-for-the-disability-rights-agenda-in-nigeria>
- Nwosu, C., Fasiku, V., & Adisa, T. (2024). Transforming family caregiving: Professionalising unpaid care work for sustainable development in Nigeria. *PMC / The Lancet Regional Health—Africa*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11122710/>
- Okafor, A. E., Salami, T. K., & Ojewale, O. (2022). Role of traditional beliefs in the knowledge and perceptions of mental health and illness amongst rural-dwelling women in western Nigeria. *African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine*, 14(1), 3547. <https://doi.org/10.4102/phcfm.v14i1.3547>
- Oliver, M. (1983). *Social work with disabled people*. Macmillan.
- Olyan, S. M. (2008). *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting mental and physical differences*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sage, R., Standley, K., & Mashinchi, G. M. (2022). Intersections of personal assistance services for rural disabled people and home care workers' rights. *Frontiers in Rehabilitation Sciences*, 3, 876038. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fresc.2022.876038>
- Sango, P. N., & Deveau, R. (2022). A scoping review of empirical literature on people with intellectual disability in Nigeria. *Disabilities*, 2(3), 474–487. <https://doi.org/10.3390/disabilities2030034>
- Schipper, J. (2006). *Disability studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David story*. T&T Clark.
- Schipper, J. (2018). Joshua–Second Kings. In S. Melcher, M. C. Parsons, & A. Yong (Eds.), *The Bible and disability: A commentary* (pp. 93–119). SCM Press.
- Schur, L., Kruse, D., & Blanck, P. (2013). *People with disabilities: Sidelined or mainstreamed?* Cambridge University Press.
- Stewart, D. T. (2017). Leviticus–Deuteronomy. In S. Melcher, M. C. Parsons, & A. Yong (Eds.), *The Bible and disability: A commentary* (pp. 57–92). Baylor University Press.
- Taylor, J. P., Whittenburg, H. N., Avellone, L., Castruita Rios, Y., Park, S., Poppen, M., & Tansey, T. (2025). The impact of pre-employment transition and individualised vocational rehabilitation services on employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21651434241239967>
- Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation. (1975). *Fundamental principles of disability*. UPIAS.

- United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>
- Witte, I., Reme, S. E., & Haavorsen, P. (2024). Does gender matter in supported employment? A qualitative study of participants' experiences. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 61(2), 219–234. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-240030>
- World Health Organization. (2011). *World report on disability*. WHO Press.
- Yong, A. (2011). *The Bible, disability, and the church: A new vision of the people of God*. Eerdmans.

License

Copyright (c) 2026 Theophilus, B.O. Olajiga, Oluwaseyi, N. Shogunle, Kehinde, E. Obasola



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Authors retain copyright and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC-BY\) 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgment of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal.