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**Exploring the lived experiences of workplace
discrimination faced by Black women with physical
disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Philosophy in Gender Studies

**By
Thuthula Ida Sodumo**

Supervisor: Dr Ikekhwa Albert Ikhile
Co-supervisor: Ms Zamatolo Mtolo

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Despite South Africa's expansive constitutional and labour-rights framework, Black women with physical disabilities continue to encounter entrenched forms of exclusion in hiring, day-to-day work participation, access to reasonable accommodation, performance assessment and promotion. Existing monitoring systems capture representation unevenly, but they reveal less about how discrimination is lived, interpreted and negotiated within workplaces. This study explored the lived experiences of workplace discrimination faced by Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province and developed participant-grounded recommendations for more accountable inclusion. Guided by an interpretivist qualitative design with a phenomenological orientation, the study purposively recruited twelve Black women with current or prior workplace experience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely, transcribed verbatim and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis supported by memo writing, iterative coding and theme refinement. The inquiry was interpreted through intersectionality, Critical Race Theory and the social and rights-based model of disability. Five interrelated themes were generated: structural and environmental barriers; organisational culture and everyday ableism; careers constrained; coping, boundaries and agency; and policy, governance and accountability. The findings show that discrimination was rarely an isolated event. Instead, it was reproduced through linked material, cultural and procedural mechanisms that shaped dignity, belonging, productivity and progression. Participants also described the hidden labour of self-advocacy, overperformance and emotional management required to remain employable in settings that were formally inclusive but practically exclusionary. Meaningful workplace inclusion requires barrier-free environments, auditable reasonable-accommodation systems, gender-responsive and anti-ableist management practice, participatory disability governance and clear lines of accountability. The dissertation contributes empirically to South African disability-and-work scholarship by centring Black women with physical disabilities in a province marked by rurality, poverty and uneven infrastructure, and it offers applied recommendations for employers, regulators, unions and disability-rights actors.

Keywords: workplace discrimination; physical disability; Black women; intersectionality; ableism; reasonable accommodation; Eastern Cape; South Africa.

ISISHWANKATHELO

Ilizwe loMzantsi Afrika linenkqubo-sikhokelo yomgaqo-siseko nemigaqo-nkqubo yamalungelo abasebenzi kodwa amabhinqa aNtsundu akhubazekileyo asahlangabezana neengxaki zokubukulwa ngokwengqesho, ukuthabatha inxaxheba emsebenzini okwenziwa yonke imihla, ukufumana indawo yokuhlala efanelekileyo, ukuvavanywa komsebenzi kunye nokonyuselwa emsebenzini. Inkqubo zokubek' esweni ezikhoyo zikubonisa ngokungalinganiyo ukumelwa kwabantu abakhubazekileyo kwaye ziyiveza kancinane kakhulu indlela ekwenzeka ngayo ukubukulwa, indlela ekutolikwa ngayo nekuthethwana ngayo ngokubukulwa emsebenzini. Olu phando luphonononge amava okubukulwa emsebenzini kwamabhinqa akhubazekileyo aNtsundu kwiPhondo iMpuma Koloni lwaza lwaqulunqa izindululo ezisekelwe kubathathi-nxaxheba ezilungiselelwe ukubandakanya abantu abakhubazekileyo nangakumbi. Olu phando lukhokelwe luyilo lophando-ntyilalwazi olusekelwe kwisiganeko yaye kuqeshwe amabhinqa aNtsundu alishumi elinambini anamava omsebenzi angoku okanye awakhe asebenza ngaphambili. Kwenziwe udliwano-ndlebe nawo ngobuxhakaxhaka beintanethi, lwakhutshelwa lunjengoko lunjalo lwaza lwahlalutywa ngohlalutyo ntyilalwazi lomxholo luncediswa kukubhalwa kwememo, ukukhowuda okuphindaphindwayo kunye nokucokiswa komxholo. Xa kucaciswa olu phando kusetyenziswe ukuhlangana kwezinto, iCritical Race Theory kunye nomfuziselo wokukhubazeka osekelwe kumalungelo. Kuveliswe imixholo emihlanu enxulumeneyo: imiqobo yolwakhiwo neyokusingqongileyo; inkcubeko yeziko kunye nokubukulwa nokujongelwa phantsi kwabantu abakhubazekileyo okwenziwa imihla ngemihla; imisebenzi enezithintelo, ukumelana, imida nearhente; kunye nemigaqo-nkqubo, ulawulo kunye nokuthabatha uxanduva. Iziphumo zibonise ukuba ukubukulwa akuyonto izihambela yodwa. Koko kuveliswa kwakhona ngezinto ezinxulumeneyo, imikhwa yenkcubeko neyeenkqubo eyenza isidima, ukuba yinxalenye, ukukwazi ukuvelisa kunye nenkqubela phambili. Abathathi-nxaxheba bachaze umsebenzi ofihlakeleyo wokuzithethelela, ukusebenza ngokugqithisileyo kunye nokulawula iimvakalelo njengezinto ezifunekayo ukuze uqhubeke nokusebenza kwiindawo ezazifudula zibabandakanya ngokusesikweni kodwa ukwenza kwazo kubakhuphela ngaphandle abantu abakhubazekileyo. Ukuze iindawo zokusebenza zibalungele abantu abakhubazekileyo kufuneka zingabinayo

imiqobo, zibe neendawo zokuhlala ezifanelekileyo nezinokuphicothwa, ziyigqale imiba yesini nemikhwa echasene nokungakwazi ukwenza izinto ezithile, zibe nolawulo oluvumela intatho-

nxaxheba yabantu abakhubazekileyo kunye neendlela ezicacileyo zokuthabath' uxanduva. Uxwebhu lophando lunegalelo elimandla kubudlelane phakathi kokukhubazeka nokusebenza kuba lugxininise kumabhinqa aNtsundu akwiphondo elihlelelekileyo, elisemaphandleni nelineziseko zophuhliso ezingalinganiyo, kwaye lunika izindululo ezinokusetyenziswa ngabaqeshi, abayili bomthetho, imibutho yabasebenzi kunye nabantu abalwela amalungelo abantu abakhubazekileyo.

Amagama angundoqo: ukubukulwa emsebenzini; ukukhubazeka emzimbeni; amabhinqa aNtsundu; ukuhlangana kwezinto; ukubukulwa nokujongelwa phantsi kwabantu abakhubazekileyo; indawo yokuhlala efanelekileyo; iMpuma Koloni; uMzantsi Afrika.

OKUCASHUNIWE

Nakuba iNingizimu Afrika inemithetho eqine kakhulu yezabasebenzi ngokuhambisana nomthethosisekelo, abesifazane bebala elimnyama abaphila nokukhubazeka bayaqhubeka nokubhekana nokukhishwa inyumbazane uma kuqashwa, ekubambeni iqhaza emisebenzini yansuku zonke, ekutholeni indawo yokuhlala efanelekile, ekuhlolweni ukusebenza nasekukhushulelweni ezikhundleni. Izindlelakusebenza ezibekelwe ukuqapha azenzi umsebenzi omuhle ukuqongelelakugcina isibalo sabantu abakhona abaphila nokukhubazeka, futhi kuncane kakhulu ezikwenzayo ngokucwasa ababhekana nakho, indlela olubonwa ngayo noluthathwa ngayo noma okubhekwana nalo ngayo udaba lokucwasa ezindaweni zokusebenza. Lolu cwaningo lugxile ezigamekweni zokucwasa ezibhekene nabesifazane abamnyama abaphila nokukhubazeka esiFundazweni iEastern Cape ezenzeka emsebenzini, futhi lwaqhamuka nezincomo ezivela kubantu ngqo ukuze kube nabazophendula ngokwenzakalayo. Ngokuqondiswa yikhwalthethivi yokuhumusha ehlelwe ngokwephenomenological orientation, ngesikhathi socwaningo kunxenxwe abesifazane abamnyama abayishumi nambili abake babhekana noma kumanje ababhekene nokucwasa ezindaweni zokusebenza. Imposambuzo eSemi-structured yenziwe kubantu besezindaweni zabo, hhayi ubuso nobuso, kwabhalwa phansi konke, futhi sabheka amaphethini afanayo kulokho abantu abakushoyo. Siphinde sabheka izinhloko zamalungelo obulungiswa kwezenhlalo nokukhubazeka ukuze siqonde ukuthi ubuhlanga, ubulili, nokukhubazeka kuthinta kanjani indlela abantu abaphila ngayo noma izimo ababhekana nazo emsebenzini. Ukucwasa emsebenzini akuvamile ukuba kwenzeke kanye, kunalokho, kuyinkinga ejulile yohlelokusebenza enemixhantela eminingi enokuxhumana ethinta amasiko nezinqubo ezakha isithunzi, ukwamukeleka, ukukhiqiza kanye nenqubekelaphambili. Abasebenzi abancishwe amathuba ngokuvamile kufanele bazikhandle ngokweqile ukulwela izidingo zabo, bafihle imizabalazo yabo, futhi balawule imizwa yabo ukuze bagcine imisebenzi yabo ezindaweni zokusebenza ezaziwa ngokuthi ziyabandakanya ekubeni zingabandakanyi abantu bonke. Ucwaningo luhlinzeka ngezinto ezisebenzayo kubaqashi, abenzi bezinqubomgomo, nezinyunyana ukuze kuqasheke kangcono abantu abaphila nokukhubazeka emsebenzini. Ukugxila kulokho okwenzeka kwabesifazane abamnyama abaphila nokukhubazeka ngokomzimba ezindaweni zasemaphandleni eNingizimu Afrika, kugqamisa izinselelo zokuthola umsebenzi ezindaweni ezinobubha, ezingathuthukile.

Amagama amqoka: ukucwasa endaweni yokusebenza; ukukhubazeka ngokomzimba; abesifazane abamnyama; i-intersectionality; i-ableism; izincomo esifanele; iEastern Cape; iNingizimu Afrika.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
BCEA	Basic Conditions of Employment Act
CEE	Commission for Employment Equity
CRT	Critical Race Theory
EEA	Employment Equity Act
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
IJQM	International Journal of Qualitative Methods
PEPUDA	Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
WHO	World Health Organization
WPRPD	White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation examines how organisational policies, physical environments, managerial practices and everyday workplace cultures shape the experiences of Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province. It is concerned not only with whether discrimination occurs, but with how it is produced, rationalised and sustained through recruitment systems, accommodation processes, performance management, interpersonal relations and organisational silence. The study therefore centres a population positioned at the intersection of racialised gender relations, disability-related exclusion and provincial socio-economic marginality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Collins, 2000).

Within South Africa's democratic constitutional order, equality, dignity and freedom are formally protected rights. Yet workplace participation remains unevenly distributed, and the promise of substantive equality is frequently interrupted by inaccessible buildings, transport burdens, dismissive managerial responses, ableist assumptions and weak implementation of disability policy. The present inquiry starts from the premise that legal recognition is indispensable but insufficient: what matters for lived inclusion is whether rights are translated into routine, predictable and respectful organisational practice (Republic of South Africa, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2015; United Nations, 2006).

The chapter introduces the study, situates the problem within South Africa's disability-and-work landscape, explains why the Eastern Cape Province is an analytically significant setting, outlines the research purpose, objectives and questions, and presents the theoretical and methodological orientation of the dissertation. It also clarifies key concepts, scope, delimitations, significance and ethical grounding.

1.2 Background to the study

Disability and employment cannot be understood outside wider structures of inequality. Internationally, persons with disabilities continue to face lower labour-force participation, higher unemployment, occupational segregation, reduced access to promotion and greater exposure to workplace stigma than their non-disabled peers (World Health Organization &

World Bank, 2011; Bonaccio et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2022). These patterns are not explained by impairment alone. Rather, they reflect the interaction between bodies, social meanings, built environments, institutional design and political economy.

In South Africa, disability has historically been shaped by apartheid spatial planning, racialised labour markets, unequal access to health care and education, and uneven infrastructural development. The result is that disability exclusion is layered rather than singular. It is connected to poverty, household dependence, limited mobility, weaker employment networks and institutions that continue to imagine the ideal worker in able-bodied, masculinised and often racialised terms (Graham, 2020; Holness, 2016; Bam & Ronnie, 2020).

Race is central to this disability-and-work landscape because the social consequences of impairment are mediated through historically racialised distributions of education, income, residential location, transport access and labour-market opportunity. Black South Africans have been disproportionately affected by apartheid's spatial and economic ordering, and disability can intensify these inherited exclusions by increasing dependence on inaccessible public systems, household resources and discretionary employer support. For Black women with physical disabilities, race and disability therefore intersect not as separate disadvantages but as mutually reinforcing conditions that shape how competence is read, how mobility is organised, and how claims for accommodation are received in workplaces (Graham, Moodley & Selipsky, 2013; Holness, 2016; Graham, 2020; Basson, 2023).

For Black women with physical disabilities, the workplace becomes a particularly revealing site of inquiry because it is where constitutional ideals of equality encounter daily organisational realities. Inclusion may be formally announced through equity statements, disability desks or anti-discrimination clauses, yet the ordinary conditions of work may remain inaccessible, humiliating or professionally limiting. A worker may be legally employed while still being denied the tools, adjustments, recognition and voice necessary for equitable participation. Understanding this contradiction requires attention to structure, culture and governance at the same time.

1.2.1 Disability, work and post-apartheid transformation

The democratic transition transformed South Africa's legal framework, but it did not erase the social and economic residues of exclusion. Post-apartheid labour legislation sought to

prevent unfair discrimination and to expand access for historically disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities. However, disability has frequently occupied a marginal position within transformation practice. In many organisations, it has been addressed as a compliance category rather than a sustained institutional reform agenda. This creates a situation in which representation is counted but belonging remains unstable.

Scholars of disability inclusion in South Africa have repeatedly shown that the obstacles facing workers with disabilities are not confined to entry into employment. They extend across the employment cycle: application processes, interviews, orientation, access to transport and workstations, task allocation, performance appraisal, training, advancement and retention (Gida & Ortlepp, 2007; Potgieter et al., 2017; Charles et al., 2023; Maclean et al., 2024). These processes are especially significant for physical disability, where mobility, ergonomics, building layout, equipment and transport can decisively shape whether work is feasible, dignified and sustainable.

A post-apartheid transformation lens is therefore useful only when it moves beyond symbolic inclusion. Disability inclusion in employment should not mean the narrow presence of disabled bodies inside institutions; it should mean participation on equal terms, supported by reasonable accommodation, respectful culture, procedural fairness and credible opportunities for progression.

1.2.2 Why the Eastern Cape matters

The Eastern Cape offers a distinctive provincial context for analysing workplace discrimination. It is characterised by high poverty, significant rurality, long travel distances, uneven municipal infrastructure and constrained labour-market opportunities. These conditions affect all workers, but they affect disabled workers differently and often more severely because accessible transport, proximate services, navigable public environments and responsive workplaces are not reliably available (Loeb et al., 2008; Statistics South Africa, 2024).

Statistics South Africa's recent profiling of persons with disabilities confirms persistent socio-economic disadvantage across education, labour-market participation and living conditions, while provincial inequalities remain pronounced (Statistics South Africa, 2024). In a province where work opportunities are already fragile, inaccessible infrastructure and bureaucratic delay can easily become decisive barriers to employment retention and

advancement. The Eastern Cape is therefore not a backdrop to the study; it is an active determinant of how discrimination is encountered and managed.

Foregrounding place also prevents a metropolitan bias in disability scholarship. Much workplace research assumes urban infrastructure, relatively dense labour markets and more visible formal-sector opportunities. The experiences of Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape demand a more grounded account that links workplace inclusion to transport, geography, household resources, social dependency and the uneven distribution of public and organisational support.

1.3 Problem statement

Although South Africa has a robust equality framework in principle, Black women with physical disabilities continue to report patterned exclusion in recruitment, everyday participation, career progression and access to reasonable accommodation. The central problem addressed in this dissertation is the implementation gap between rights on paper and organisational practice. Disability inclusion is often articulated rhetorically, yet material workplace arrangements and social relations continue to reproduce ableist, gendered and racialised hierarchies.

Empirically, there remains limited province-specific qualitative evidence that foregrounds the lived workplace experiences of Black women with physical disabilities and traces how discrimination is reproduced through a combination of infrastructure, managerial discretion, workplace culture and weak governance. Aggregate employment-equity reporting is important, but it cannot adequately capture humiliation, strategic silence, emotional labour and the daily negotiations through which workers seek to remain employable. The result is a persistent knowledge gap between monitoring and lived reality.

1.4 Rationale for the study

The rationale for this research is both scholarly and practical. Scholarly, the dissertation responds to the need for intersectionally grounded disability-and-work research that centres Black women with physical disabilities as knowledge producers rather than as residual cases in broader categories such as ‘women’, ‘Black workers’ or ‘persons with disabilities’. Practically, the study seeks to generate findings that are useful to employers, unions, disability-rights

organisations and regulators concerned with reasonable accommodation, employee dignity and substantive equality.

The study is also justified methodologically. Workplace discrimination is often investigated through policy analysis, litigation or statistical monitoring. These approaches are valuable but limited when the goal is to understand how exclusion is lived, interpreted and negotiated. A qualitative, phenomenologically oriented design makes it possible to examine relational harm, institutional ambiguity, power, fear and coping with a depth that is difficult to achieve through quantitative measures alone.

1.5 Research aim, objectives and questions

Research aim: To explore the lived experiences of workplace discrimination faced by Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province and to develop participant-grounded recommendations for systemic inclusion.

Research objectives: (a) to identify and describe structural, procedural and cultural forms of workplace discrimination encountered by Black women with physical disabilities; (b) to examine how organisational policies, accommodation processes and informal workplace practices mitigate or reproduce discrimination; (c) to analyse how intersecting identities of race, gender, disability and place shape the nature, intensity and consequences of discrimination; and (d) to generate evidence-informed recommendations for rights-based, accountable and gender-responsive workplace inclusion.

Research questions: What forms of discrimination do Black women with physical disabilities experience in the workplace? How do organisational structures and everyday workplace practices shape these experiences, including access to reasonable accommodation and career progression? In what ways do intersecting identities of race, gender, disability and place influence how discrimination is produced, perceived and responded to? What institutional changes are required to move disability inclusion from symbolic compliance to practical accountability?

1.6 Theoretical and conceptual framing

The dissertation is guided by an integrated framework drawing on intersectionality, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black feminist thought, and the social and rights-based model of disability. Taken together, these perspectives make it possible to analyse how exclusion operates

simultaneously through identity, institutional power, knowledge production, spatial inequality and organisational design.

Intersectionality explains why race, gender, disability and place do not operate as additive variables. They interact in ways that generate qualitatively distinct forms of disadvantage and vulnerability (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; McCall, 2005). For the present study, intersectionality is especially important because it prevents disability from being treated as a standalone identity detached from racial capitalism, patriarchy and geography.

Black feminist thought complements intersectionality by insisting that Black women's standpoint is analytically indispensable rather than supplementary. It values lived experience as a legitimate source of theory and draws attention to how credibility, professionalism, care, dependency and authority are socially assigned (Collins, 2000). This is useful in a workplace study where participants repeatedly had to negotiate assumptions about competence, gratitude and worth.

CRT directs attention to the reproduction of racial hierarchy through apparently neutral procedures and organisational common sense. Recruitment criteria, promotion pathways, managerial discretion and professional norms may appear impartial while still distributing recognition and opportunity unequally (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The narratives in this study function as counter-stories that expose the limits of institutional myths of neutrality, merit and inclusion.

The social model of disability shifts attention away from individual deficit and towards environmental, attitudinal and organisational barriers that disable people in practice (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2014). A rights-based approach extends this by locating accessibility and reasonable accommodation within the language of enforceable obligation rather than benevolence (United Nations, 2006; Republic of South Africa, 2015). In this dissertation, disability is therefore analysed relationally: not as a private tragedy, but as something intensified or reduced by social arrangements.

1.7 Key concepts and operational definitions

For this dissertation, physical disability refers to bodily or mobility-related impairments that become disabling through interaction with inaccessible environments, institutional barriers

and discriminatory attitudes rather than through impairment alone (World Health Organization, 2001; Shakespeare, 2014).

Black women refers to women who self-identify as Black African within South Africa's historically racialised social order and who experience womanhood through the continuing legacies of apartheid, patriarchy, class inequality and racialised labour-market positioning. In this study, the term is used analytically rather than biologically: it foregrounds how Black women's workplace experiences are shaped by social location, institutional power, gendered expectations, cultural meanings of respectability and the politics of recognition. The concept is therefore central to understanding why the experiences examined here cannot be reduced either to disability alone or to gender alone.

Workplace discrimination refers to direct, indirect, structural and relational practices that disadvantage a worker or applicant because of disability, race, gender or their intersection. It includes inaccessible recruitment platforms, denial or delay of accommodation, ridicule, exclusion from opportunity structures, and evaluation systems that ignore unequal conditions of performance.

Reasonable accommodation refers to necessary and appropriate modifications or adjustments that enable a person with a disability to enjoy or exercise employment rights on an equal basis with others, provided that such measures do not impose unjustifiable hardship (United Nations, 2006; Department of Labour, 2015).

Ableism is understood as a system of norms and assumptions that treats able-bodiedness as the benchmark of competence, independence, value and normalcy (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014).

Substantive inclusion refers to practical and dignified participation supported by accessible environments, fair procedures, organisational respect and realistic prospects of career development, rather than mere physical presence or symbolic compliance.

1.8 Significance of the study

The study contributes empirically by documenting a provincial, intersectional and qualitative account of workplace discrimination that is not visible in aggregate statistics. It foregrounds how exclusion is reproduced through links between transport, infrastructure,

organisational culture, HR practice and governance, thereby widening the terms on which disability inclusion is assessed.

Conceptually, the study demonstrates the value of combining intersectionality, Black feminist thought, CRT and disability theory for understanding workplace inequality in South Africa. Practically, it offers recommendations relevant to employers, labour practitioners, regulators, unions and disability-rights actors seeking to move from rights language to accountable implementation.

The study also has developmental significance because it speaks directly to the inclusive development agenda reflected in Sustainable Development Goals 3, 5, 8 and 10. By examining dignity, well-being, gendered inequality, decent work and reduced inequalities in relation to disabled Black women's labour-market participation, the dissertation positions workplace inclusion as both a rights issue and a sustainable-development concern.

1.9 Delimitations and limitations

The study deliberately focused on Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province. This delimitation enables analytical depth and contextual specificity, but it also means that the findings are not intended to represent all women with disabilities, all impairment categories, or all workplace settings in South Africa.

As a qualitative inquiry, the dissertation does not claim statistical generalisability. Its ambition is analytic transferability. The findings are offered as theoretically informed insights that may illuminate similar settings, especially where disability inclusion is shaped by poverty, infrastructural inequality and institutional ambiguity.

1.10 Ethical orientation

Because the study invited participants to speak about exclusion, humiliation, self-doubt and vulnerability in relation to employment, ethics extended far beyond consent paperwork. The research design emphasised privacy, pacing, voluntary participation, the right to pause or withdraw, pseudonymisation and secure data handling in accordance with South African ethics guidance and POPIA (National Department of Health, 2015; Republic of South Africa, 2013; World Medical Association, 2013).

An ethical orientation also shaped interpretation and representation. Participants were approached not merely as sources of data but as holders of situated knowledge. Their accounts were handled with care so that quotations illustrated analytic patterns without exposing identities or sensationalising pain.

1.11 Organisation of the dissertation

Chapter 1 introduces the study and its conceptual, contextual and ethical orientation. Chapter 2 reviews and synthesises literature on disability, work, intersectionality, ableism, policy and the Eastern Cape context. Chapter 3 explains the research design, participant recruitment, data generation, analysis, reflexivity and trustworthiness procedures. Chapter 4 presents the findings thematically. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to theory, law and prior scholarship. Chapter 6 concludes the study, answers the research questions, and presents recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

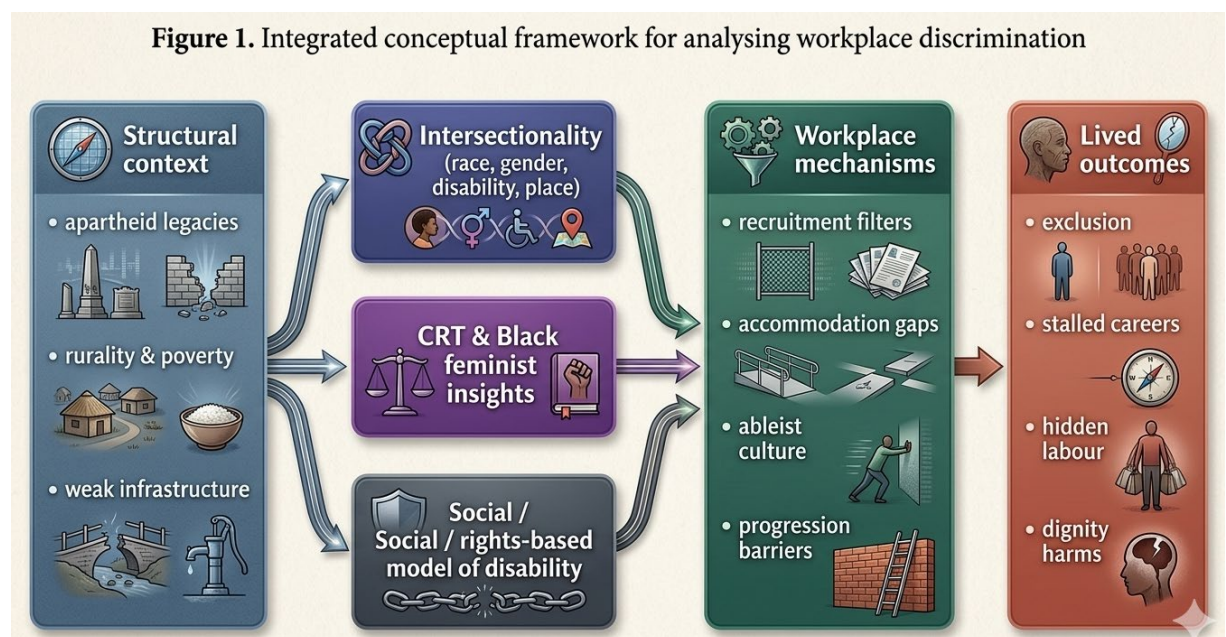


Figure 1. Integrated conceptual framework linking structural context, intersectional power, disability theory, workplace mechanisms and lived outcomes.

Figure 1 illustrates the logic of the study's integrated conceptual framework by showing how workplace discrimination is produced through the interaction between broader structural conditions, intersecting social identities, and organisational practices. The framework demonstrates that discrimination against Black women with disabilities in South Africa cannot

be understood as the result of isolated interpersonal prejudice alone, but rather as an outcome of historically rooted structural inequalities, including apartheid legacies, poverty, rural marginalisation, and infrastructural deprivation, which interact with gendered, racialised, and disability-based forms of disadvantage. These layered inequalities are then mediated through workplace mechanisms such as exclusionary recruitment processes, inadequate reasonable accommodation, ableist institutional cultures, and blocked opportunities for advancement. The cumulative effect of these processes is reflected in lived outcomes such as social exclusion, career stagnation, invisible labour burdens, and dignity harms. In this way, the framework provides an analytical bridge between macro-level social conditions, meso-level workplace systems, and micro-level lived experiences, thereby guiding the interpretation of the findings presented in the subsequent chapters.

Apartheid legacies are especially important in this framework because they connect structural context to the daily experience of disability. Apartheid spatial planning located many Black communities far from economic centres, weakened access to quality education and health services, and produced transport systems that continue to be uneven, costly and often inaccessible. These historical arrangements matter for disability because mobility impairments are not experienced only within the body; they are intensified by long travel distances, poorly maintained public infrastructure, inaccessible buildings and constrained household resources. For Black women with physical disabilities, apartheid's afterlives therefore shape both entry into work and the conditions under which work is sustained. The framework consequently treats workplace discrimination as a multi-level process in which historical racial ordering, gendered expectations and disability-related barriers are reproduced through contemporary organisational routines.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically synthesises scholarship and policy relevant to understanding workplace discrimination experienced by Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province. Rather than cataloguing studies, the review is organised to clarify how disability and discrimination have been conceptualised, how South African labour and equality frameworks have been operationalised, what empirical patterns have been identified, and where important gaps remain.

The review draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, books in disability and feminist theory, South African legislation and policy instruments, and official statistical and employment-equity reports. It is therefore both conceptual and applied. The chapter moves from broad questions about disability, work and inequality to the more specific issue of how Black women with physical disabilities encounter structurally unequal workplaces in a provincial setting characterised by rurality, poverty and uneven infrastructure.

2.2 Approach to the review

This chapter was developed as a critical narrative review rather than as a stand-alone systematic review. Literature was identified iteratively through database searching, citation tracking and consultation of official South African policy repositories. Search terms combined concepts related to disability, employment, workplace discrimination, women with disabilities, reasonable accommodation, South Africa and the Eastern Cape. The purpose of this approach was not exhaustive meta-synthesis, but analytically rigorous contextualisation of the study.

A critical review approach is appropriate for a dissertation of this kind because the aim is to build a coherent conceptual and empirical platform for the primary qualitative study. Priority was therefore given to sources that illuminate mechanisms of exclusion, implementation gaps, workplace practice, intersectional analysis and disability rights. Where recent South African evidence was limited, wider international and Global South scholarship was used to sharpen conceptual interpretation without flattening local specificity.

2.3 Conceptualising disability: from deficit to relational and rights-based understandings

For much of the twentieth century, disability was dominated by medical and rehabilitation frameworks that located disadvantage primarily in impairment, pathology and individual deficit. Within this perspective, disability becomes a private problem to be treated, corrected or managed. The weakness of this approach is that it obscures the role of inaccessible institutions, discriminatory norms and exclusionary environments in producing disablement.

The social model of disability emerged as a critical response to this limitation. Its core contribution was to argue that people are disabled not only by impairment, but by the social organisation of space, work, services and meaning (Oliver, 1990). In this account, steps without ramps, inflexible job design, hostile attitudes and inaccessible public systems are not incidental barriers; they are constitutive of disablement.

Later disability scholarship refined this argument by emphasising that bodies still matter and that an adequate account must avoid both medical reductionism and simplistic environmental reductionism. Shakespeare (2014) argues for a relational understanding in which impairment, bodily pain or fatigue, assistive devices, social expectations and institutional settings interact. This refinement is especially relevant for workplace research, where embodied realities and environmental design meet directly in the execution of daily tasks.

The World Health Organization's ICF framework similarly conceptualises disability as an interaction between health conditions, personal factors and environmental factors (World Health Organization, 2001). While the ICF is not itself a political theory, it helped shift international measurement and policy language toward a contextual understanding of disability. Rights-based frameworks such as the UNCRPD then gave this shift legal and normative force by framing accessibility, non-discrimination and reasonable accommodation as obligations rather than discretionary support (United Nations, 2006).

Socio-cultural perceptions of disability in Africa and South Africa also require attention because disability is never interpreted only through policy language. In many communities, impairment may be filtered through overlapping discourses of pity, dependency, shame, spiritual explanation, family responsibility and charitable assistance. These perceptions can coexist with rights-based language and may continue to shape how disabled people are treated in schools, households, health systems and workplaces. South African evidence on disability

stigma shows that discrimination is associated with diminished self-esteem, depression and restricted social belonging, while rural accounts of women with disabilities show how gender, culture and disability can produce invisibility and reduced public voice (Trani et al., 2020; Thabethe, 2022). Broader African evidence similarly demonstrates that misconceptions about the causes of disability and assumptions about limited capacity can restrict participation across social life (Breffka et al., 2023). For workplace analysis, these socio-cultural meanings matter because employers and colleagues do not enter organisations without the assumptions produced in wider society.

2.4 Disability, employment and the labour process

Work is not merely a source of income. It is also tied to identity, social participation, recognition and citizenship. Exclusion from work, therefore, has material and symbolic consequences. The World Report on Disability and later WHO reports show that persons with disabilities experience persistent inequities in education, employment, income and social participation, with these inequities being especially pronounced in low- and middle-income settings (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011; World Health Organization, 2022).

Bonaccio et al. (2020) offer one of the most useful syntheses of workplace participation across the employment cycle. They show that employer concerns about productivity, accommodation cost, safety, attendance and co-worker reactions often exceed the empirical evidence. In many cases, what appears to be a concern about disability is in fact a concern about organisational unwillingness to redesign ordinary systems. This insight is important for the present dissertation because participants were often judged against a standard workplace model that had never been built with them in mind.

Research on physical disability also highlights the importance of job accommodations, work redesign, supervisor support and return-to-work processes. Wong et al. (2021) show that access to accommodations is central to job retention for people with physical disabilities, yet accommodations often fail because they are delayed, poorly communicated or treated as exceptional. What emerges across this literature is that inequality is reproduced not simply by refusal to employ disabled people, but by weak or absent support after hiring.

Disability is therefore reflected across the full employment cycle. At recruitment and selection, applicants may encounter inaccessible advertisements, interview venues,

psychometric procedures or job criteria that assume standard mobility. During onboarding, the absence of accessible induction materials, transport planning or workstation preparation may make the first weeks of employment precarious. Disclosure and accommodation processes then determine whether the employee can safely request support without being marked as incapable or costly. At the performance-management stage, disability becomes consequential when workers are evaluated without the tools, time, adjustments or accessible environments needed to demonstrate competence. Retention is therefore not secured by appointment alone; it depends on whether accommodation is timely, managers are responsive, progression pathways are open and the employee is not forced to absorb the hidden costs of inclusion (Bonaccio et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2021; Beatty et al., 2019).

2.5 Intersectionality, Black feminist thought and multiple discrimination

Intersectionality is indispensable to the present study because disability does not operate in isolation from race, gender, class and geography. Crenshaw's foundational work challenged additive approaches to discrimination by showing that legal and policy systems often fail to recognise people located at the intersection of multiple axes of subordination (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). McCall (2005) further developed intersectionality as a way of thinking about complexity in social categories and structures, while Abrams et al. (2020) show its value for qualitative health research that seeks to understand layered inequality rather than single-axis experience.

In the South African context, intersectionality is particularly important because race, gender and disability are all historically structured by colonialism and apartheid. Racialised labour markets, gendered care burdens, poverty and spatial inequality shape who is seen as employable, promotable and worthy of accommodation. For Black women with physical disabilities, discrimination is therefore not simply the sum of racism, sexism and ableism. It is a distinct configuration of exclusion in which these systems mutually constitute one another, producing unequal access to education, employment, income and institutional credibility (Graham, Moodley & Selipsky, 2013; Holness, 2016; Trani et al., 2020; Basson, 2023).

Black feminist thought strengthens this framework by treating Black women's lived knowledge as a site of theory rather than anecdote (Collins, 2000). In workplace settings, this matters because professionalism, leadership, dependency and credibility are never distributed neutrally. Participants in this study described being treated as either incapable or excessively

demanding, and such responses cannot be understood adequately without attention to how Black womanhood and disability are socially read together within organisational norms of competence, respectability and voice (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005; Holness, 2016; Basson, 2023).

2.6 Ableism, disablism and the culture of work

Ableism refers to the privileging of able-bodied norms and the assumption that standard bodies and minds represent competence, independence and value (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014). In workplaces, ableism may take overt and covert forms. Overt forms include open ridicule, refusal of accommodation or explicit doubts about capability. Covert forms include designing meetings, tasks, buildings and performance systems around unacknowledged assumptions of bodily uniformity.

The literature also distinguishes between structural ableism and everyday disablism. Structural ableism operates through architecture, procurement, scheduling, technology, policy design and reporting systems. Everyday disablism operates through jokes, infantilisation, scrutiny, lowered expectations and the requirement that disabled workers constantly prove their legitimacy. These forms of oppression often reinforce one another. A missing ramp may be justified by a dismissive organisational culture; a delayed device may be rendered invisible by a managerial discourse of patience and gratitude.

South African scholarship increasingly shows that disability inclusion cannot be assessed only through headcounts. Bam and Ronnie (2020), for example, found that inclusion at work is shaped by relational dynamics, belonging and whether employees with disabilities are recognised as full participants rather than accommodated outsiders. This is consistent with the current study's focus on dignity, participation and progression.

2.7 South African context: disability, poverty, race and gender

South Africa's disability landscape is inseparable from poverty and unequal development. Graham et al. (2014) argue that disability and poverty interact to shape capability deprivation across education, employment, household resources and social participation. These interactions are neither random nor evenly distributed. They are structured by race, gender and location, meaning that disabled people's labour-market opportunities are already unequally patterned before they encounter formal workplaces.

Holness (2016) makes a crucial point for this dissertation: women with disabilities remain marginal within employment-equity hierarchies, even where disability or gender may each be recognised on paper. This reflects a recurrent policy weakness in which designated groups are counted but not analysed intersectionally. The effect is that the most disadvantaged within designated groups can remain invisible even in transformation discourse.

Recent official data reinforce the continuing significance of these inequalities. Statistics South Africa reports persistent socio-economic disadvantage among persons with disabilities and demonstrates that prevalence and living conditions differ by province, sex and other social markers (Statistics South Africa, 2024). These data should not be treated as neutral context alone. They help explain why the costs of accessing and sustaining employment are often much higher for disabled women than for their non-disabled counterparts.

2.8 The Eastern Cape as a place-based determinant of workplace inclusion

Place matters. The Eastern Cape's labour-market conditions are shaped by rurality, weak transport systems, long commuting distances, service-delivery unevenness and concentrated poverty. These structural features can make ordinary work participation dependent on complex negotiations of mobility, household support and access to public services. In such contexts, workplace discrimination cannot be confined analytically to the employer's premises.

Situated within the broader South African setting, the Eastern Cape represents a province where historical underdevelopment, rural settlement patterns and uneven public infrastructure remain highly relevant to employment participation. Earlier research comparing resource-poor areas in the Eastern and Western Cape found that disability interacts with poverty indicators in ways that intensify disadvantage among Xhosa-speaking communities (Loeb et al., 2008). Recent national profiling of persons with disabilities also confirms that disability, education, employment and living arrangements remain unevenly distributed across provinces and social groups (Statistics South Africa, 2024). These conditions mean that transport, distance, road quality, service availability and household resources become part of the labour process. For disabled workers, the question is therefore not only whether a job exists, but whether the route to work, the building, the toilet, the workstation, the field site and the organisational response system together make employment practically sustainable.

Grech (2015) argues that disability scholarship must take seriously the political economy of the Global South, where colonial histories, austerity, infrastructural inequality and poverty intensify disablement. Erevelles (2011) similarly insists that disability is always entangled with labour, embodiment and political economy. These insights are especially relevant in the Eastern Cape, where public and private employers often operate within materially constrained environments yet still bear clear obligations toward accessibility and non-discrimination.

The implication for this dissertation is that reasonable accommodation must be interpreted broadly. It is not limited to a chair, a ramp or a software package. In the Eastern Cape, the feasibility of work may depend on transport arrangements, timing, route accessibility, location of work sites, and the predictability of support systems. A narrow accommodation frame therefore misses critical determinants of inclusion.

2.9 Workplace discrimination against persons with disabilities

Global evidence shows that discrimination against persons with disabilities occurs at multiple points in the employment cycle, including pre-employment screening, hiring, job assignment, evaluation, promotion and termination (Stone & Colella, 1996; Bonaccio et al., 2020; Beatty et al., 2019). Some of this discrimination is direct and explicit. A candidate may be rejected because an employer assumes that accommodation will be costly or that a disabled worker will be less productive. More often, however, discrimination is indirect or systemic. Seemingly neutral requirements, inaccessible application platforms or inflexible performance systems disproportionately disadvantage disabled people by embedding able-bodied assumptions into ordinary organisational routines (Stone & Colella, 1996; Beatty et al., 2019).

In South Africa, Gida and Ortlepp (2007) showed that many organisations engaged disability mainly as a compliance matter and had done little to review HR practices for discriminatory effects. More than a decade later, Potgieter et al. (2017) found that employees with disabilities still encountered career plateaus, limited access to promotion and organisational ignorance about disability. Charles et al. (2023) similarly document conceptual, infrastructural, managerial and organisational barriers to employability within the South African public service. The persistence of these findings over time suggests that the policy environment alone has not been sufficient to transform workplace systems.

Marumoagae (2012) argues that disability discrimination in South Africa often operates through failures of reasonable accommodation and through broader social barriers that undermine equality and dignity. This legal insight is central to the present dissertation because it links what might appear as everyday inconvenience to substantive questions of rights and institutional duty.

2.10 Women with disabilities and workplace inequality

Although there is a sizeable body of disability employment literature, women with disabilities have often been treated as a subcategory rather than as a central analytic focus. This matters because workplace discrimination is gendered in form as well as in intensity. Women with disabilities may be exposed not only to ableism but also to paternalism, sexual harassment, assumptions of dependence, lower expectations of leadership and heightened scrutiny of bodily presence.

Basson (2023) provides one of the clearest recent South African analyses of the multiple discrimination experienced by women with disabilities in the workplace. She shows that legal and policy frameworks recognise equality in principle, but that women with disabilities continue to face compounding disadvantage in employment. Her work is especially valuable because it helps bridge legal scholarship and empirical concern, demonstrating that women with disabilities occupy a persistently vulnerable position in workplace hierarchies.

The current dissertation builds on this literature by focusing specifically on Black women with physical disabilities and by grounding the analysis in lived experience rather than doctrinal interpretation alone. This adds intersectional depth to scholarship that has too often treated women with disabilities as a generic group.

2.11 Reasonable accommodation: concept, promise and failure

Reasonable accommodation sits at the centre of disability equality in employment. It translates abstract rights into concrete adjustments that enable participation on equal terms. Under the UNCRPD, denial of reasonable accommodation is recognised as discrimination (United Nations, 2006). South Africa's Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities further clarifies employer duties in relation to recruitment, confidentiality, placement, accessibility, training and advancement (Department of Labour, 2015).

Despite this strong normative position, accommodation frequently fails in practice. Workers may face repeated delays, partial implementation, bureaucratic indifference or the framing of accommodation as a favour rather than a right. Wong et al. (2021) show that accommodations are central to retention of workers with physical disabilities, but the success of accommodation depends on organisational communication, supervisor responsiveness and employee involvement. When these are absent, accommodation becomes precarious and workers absorb the costs.

The concept of misfit helps explain this process. Workers are often represented as poorly suited to jobs when in fact the environment, workflow or performance standard has been designed around unspoken assumptions of bodily sameness. Accommodation failure therefore converts institutional rigidity into a story of individual inadequacy. This is one of the most important mechanisms of indirect discrimination identified in the literature and in the current study.

2.12 Organisational culture, inclusion and voice

Workplace culture mediates whether policy becomes lived inclusion. An organisation may have progressive documents but still cultivate humour, silence or managerial habits that trivialise disability. Organisational inclusion scholarship emphasises that inclusion requires both belonging and the recognition of distinctive identities and contributions; it is therefore not reducible to numerical diversity or formal presence alone (Shore et al., 2011; Nishii, 2013). Everyday forms of exclusion matter because they shape psychological safety, willingness to disclose support needs and trust in organisational procedures (Edmondson, 1999; Morrison, 2011).

Voice is particularly important in disability-inclusive employment because employees must be able to raise concerns about inaccessible environments, delayed accommodation and unfair treatment without fear that they will be labelled troublesome or ungrateful. Research on employee voice shows that managerial openness and organisational safety shape whether employees speak up or remain silent, especially where speaking up may carry reputational or relational costs (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2011). In the disability context, silence may therefore indicate constrained agency rather than absence of harm.

South African disability scholarship reinforces this point. Bam and Ronnie (2020) highlight the relational dimensions of workplace inclusion by showing that employees with disabilities need to be recognised as full participants rather than accommodated outsiders. Trani et al. (2020) further show that disability stigma in South Africa can affect self-esteem, depression and social belonging. Together, these studies support the argument that organisational culture, inclusion and voice are central to whether formal disability rights become lived workplace dignity.

2.13 Career progression, organisational learning and the hidden labour of competence

The literature increasingly recognises that the inclusion of persons with disabilities should be assessed not only in terms of recruitment but also in terms of advancement, leadership pathways and long-term career development. Potgieter et al. (2017) found that employees with disabilities frequently experienced delayed promotion, limited exposure to growth opportunities and managers' lack of knowledge about disability. These are not merely career frustrations; they structure unequal futures within organisations.

Maclean et al. (2024) provide an important complementary perspective by showing how a state-owned enterprise in the Western Cape was able to meet disability employment targets through specific recruitment practices, orientation processes and the involvement of employees with disabilities in shaping inclusive systems. Their study matters because it demonstrates that progress is possible when disability inclusion is operationalised rather than rhetorically endorsed.

Taken together, the literature suggests that career advancement is a sensitive indicator of whether inclusion is substantive. Organisations may hire disabled employees, but if they remain concentrated in lower-level roles, denied developmental tools or interpreted through a quota lens, then inclusion remains shallow. The present dissertation therefore treats progression as a central dimension of workplace justice.

2.14 South Africa's legal and policy framework

South Africa's Constitution provides the foundational equality guarantee and prohibits unfair discrimination, including on the basis of sex, race and disability (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This constitutional commitment is substantive rather than merely formal,

meaning that equality may require accommodation, barrier removal and differential support where conditions are unequal.

The Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 provide broader labour protections relevant to disability, including fair labour practices, procedural fairness and minimum conditions that may intersect with flexible work arrangements and time off for medical or rehabilitative needs (Republic of South Africa, 1995, 1997).

The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 is the primary labour instrument aimed at eliminating unfair discrimination and advancing equitable representation, explicitly including persons with disabilities as a designated group (Republic of South Africa, 1998). The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 broadens the anti-discrimination framework beyond narrow employment disputes and is relevant because discrimination in transport, services or public infrastructure may indirectly undermine employment participation (Republic of South Africa, 2000).

The 2015 Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities provides practical guidance on disability disclosure, confidentiality, recruitment, advancement, reasonable accommodation and retention (Department of Labour, 2015). At a policy level, the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities positions disability inclusion as a cross-government and cross-society responsibility, linking work to education, transport, participation and dignity (Republic of South Africa, 2015).

Internationally, Article 27 of the UNCRPD affirms the right to work in a labour market that is open, inclusive and accessible, and recognises reasonable accommodation as part of that right (United Nations, 2006). The strength of this framework, however, lies not merely in its wording but in whether institutions attach budgets, procedures, timelines and accountability to implementation.

Taken together, these legal and policy instruments create a coherent rights-based architecture: the Constitution establishes equality and dignity; labour legislation regulates fair employment; the Employment Equity Act and PEPUDA address discrimination and affirmative action; the Code of Good Practice translates disability rights into employment procedures; the WPRPD links workplace inclusion to wider social participation; and the UNCRPD provides the international normative standard. The weakness identified in this dissertation is therefore not

the absence of formal protection, but the uneven conversion of these instruments into budgeted, monitored and enforceable organisational practice.

2.15 Policy implementation and the limits of compliance

Recent employment-equity reporting shows persistent underrepresentation of persons with disabilities across occupational levels despite longstanding legal obligations (Commission for Employment Equity, 2024). The problem, then, is not legislative absence but implementation credibility. Disability is often displaced by more visible transformation categories, or treated as a symbolic add-on without equivalent attention to infrastructure, procurement, accommodation systems or leadership accountability.

The literature suggests several recurring reasons for implementation failure: poor understanding of disability among managers, inaccessible buildings and transport, inadequate budgeting for accommodation, organisational dependence on employee self-disclosure, and the absence of participatory mechanisms through which employees with disabilities can shape workplace systems (Gida & Ortlepp, 2007; Holness, 2016; Charles et al., 2023; Maclean et al., 2024).

This means that policy analysis must move beyond the question of whether an instrument exists. A more important question is whether a workplace has operational systems for implementation: named focal persons, clear request pathways, response timelines, documentation, follow-up and avenues for appeal. These issues directly inform the recommendations developed later in this dissertation.

2.16 Empirical and conceptual gap

The reviewed literature establishes that disability-inclusive employment is constrained by structural barriers, organisational cultures, weak accommodation systems and intersecting inequalities. Nevertheless, four gaps remain salient. First, much South African scholarship treats persons with disabilities as a relatively homogeneous category, thereby obscuring differences structured by race, gender, impairment type and place. Second, although important studies examine disability employment, women with disabilities, disability stigma and accommodation, there remains limited qualitative evidence focused specifically on Black women with physical disabilities in provincial contexts such as the Eastern Cape (Loeb et al., 2008; Holness, 2016; Bam & Ronnie, 2020; Basson, 2023).

Third, aggregate employment-equity and policy reporting provide little insight into everyday relational harms such as humiliation, ridicule, strategic silence and the hidden labour of self-advocacy. Fourth, relatively few studies trace how infrastructure, transport, organisational culture, HR systems and governance interact as a chain of exclusion rather than as separate variables. This is particularly important for the Eastern Cape, where rurality, long commuting distances and uneven infrastructure mean that place is not merely background context but part of how workplace discrimination is produced. The current study addresses these gaps by combining intersectional and disability-theory perspectives with phenomenologically informed accounts of lived workplace experience.

2.16.1 Disclosure, concealment, and the politics of requesting accommodation

A recurrent issue in disability-and-work scholarship concerns whether disabled employees should disclose impairment-related needs and, if so, under what organisational conditions. Although legal frameworks may recognise a right to reasonable accommodation, disclosure is seldom a neutral administrative act. It requires employees to assess whether a manager will respond supportively, whether information will remain confidential, whether disclosure will reshape how competence is judged, and whether future advancement will be harmed. Internationally, disclosure is often described as a strategic calculation made under unequal conditions rather than a simple exercise of rights. Employees may disclose early in order to secure adjustments, delay disclosure until difficulties become unavoidable, or disclose selectively to trusted colleagues while withholding information from line management. These strategies reflect the fact that disclosure can expose workers to stigma even when accommodation is formally available (Bonaccio et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2021).

South African literature suggests that the politics of disclosure are intensified by weak disability literacy and inconsistent managerial practice. Where disability is approached through charity, suspicion, or narrow cost calculations, requests for adjustment may be read as evidence of weakness, special treatment, or low productivity rather than as a lawful step toward equal participation. In such settings, workers may internalise the burden of adaptation, avoid requesting equipment, or accept unsuitable duties in order not to appear demanding. This is particularly significant for Black women with physical disabilities, whose credibility is already shaped by intersecting racialised and gendered expectations. The empirical implication is important: the absence of a formal accommodation request should not be interpreted as the

absence of need. It may instead indicate a climate in which requesting support is perceived as unsafe or futile (Gida & Ortlepp, 2007; Holness, 2016; Bam & Ronnie, 2020; Charles et al., 2023; Basson, 2023; Maclean et al., 2024).

For the present dissertation, the literature on disclosure clarifies why accommodation must be analysed as a relational and governance process rather than merely a technical adjustment. A workplace can have a policy, a form, or even a disability desk and still fail disabled employees if the conditions for safe disclosure are absent. The relevant questions therefore extend beyond whether a request was made. They include who had the authority to decide, how quickly the request was considered, whether the rationale for the decision was documented, whether confidentiality was preserved, and whether the worker experienced retaliation after raising the issue. These questions are especially salient in contexts where participants occupy precarious positions, such as internships, volunteer roles, temporary contracts, or low-status positions within rigid hierarchies. The literature thus supports a reading of accommodation as a test of institutional trustworthiness, procedural fairness, and substantive equality rather than an isolated human-resources transaction.

2.16.2 Transport, infrastructure, and time poverty as employment determinants

A second theme requiring fuller attention is the role of transport and infrastructure in shaping labour-market participation for persons with physical disabilities. Employment is frequently analysed as if the decisive moment were hiring, yet the literature shows that access to work is also determined by the journey to and from work, the navigability of public space, and the reliability of services that support daily living. In many low- and middle-income settings, inaccessible transport systems, unsafe walkways, broken pavements, long travel distances, and poorly maintained public facilities transform formal employment into a fragile achievement. Workers may arrive late not because of lack of commitment but because transport options are unpredictable or physically unusable. Likewise, energy that could have been directed toward work tasks is often spent on negotiating movement through environments that were not designed with disabled bodies in mind (Grech, 2015; Erevelles, 2011).

The Eastern Cape makes this dimension especially important. Its high levels of rurality, long commuting distances, uneven municipal infrastructure, and constrained labour market mean that place-based disadvantage cannot be separated from workplace inclusion. An

employer may claim compliance because the office building technically has a ramp, yet inclusion remains incomplete when a worker cannot reliably reach the premises, navigate toilets with dignity, or access off-site duties such as meetings, field visits, and training venues. The literature therefore cautions against narrow building-focused understandings of accessibility. Accessibility is better understood as a chain of linked conditions extending from the household and transport system to the built environment, communication processes, and job design. When any link in that chain fails, equal participation is undermined (World Health Organization, 2022; Statistics South Africa, 2024).

Time poverty also emerges as a crucial but under-recognised dimension of disability and gender. For many women with disabilities, preparing for work, arranging transport, managing pain or fatigue, attending health appointments, and navigating inaccessible environments require additional time and emotional energy. These labour demands are often invisible within standard employment systems, which assume a worker who can move quickly, travel flexibly, and perform without bodily negotiation. This dissertation therefore approaches transport and infrastructure not as peripheral contextual details but as constitutive determinants of employability, retention, and promotion. The literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that any credible analysis of workplace discrimination in the Eastern Cape must account for the wider ecology of access within which formal employment is pursued and maintained.

2.16.3 Integrative synthesis informing the present study

Taken together, the literature reviewed in this chapter supports five propositions that directly inform the present study. First, disability discrimination in employment is rarely reducible to overt prejudice alone; it is reproduced through the interaction of built environments, administrative routines, managerial assumptions, and informal workplace norms. Second, disability must be analysed intersectionally. Black women with physical disabilities are not simply women plus disabled workers plus Black employees; rather, they occupy a distinctive social location produced through mutually constitutive relations of race, gender, disability, class, and place. Third, legal frameworks matter, but implementation is uneven and often weakest at the point where routine organisational discretion is exercised. Fourth, the consequences of exclusion extend beyond hiring outcomes to include everyday dignity, belonging, voice, health, and career progression. Fifth, provincial context matters because

infrastructure, transport, and labour market conditions shape how formal rights are realised in practice.

These propositions establish the conceptual basis for the present study. Quantitative labour data and policy reviews are necessary for context, but they are not sufficient to explain how exclusion is felt, interpreted, resisted, and normalised in everyday work. The literature therefore points to the need for research that can connect statutory ideals, organisational mechanisms and lived contradiction, while preserving participants' accounts as forms of counter-knowledge. In this sense, the study is positioned not only to document disadvantage but also to contribute to a more realistic theory of disability inclusion in unequal workplaces.

The literature review has also highlighted an important methodological caution: not all experiences of disabled women in employment can be understood through a single explanatory register. Some harms are material, such as inaccessible toilets, transport difficulties, or lack of assistive equipment. Others are discursive and relational, such as infantilisation, suspicion, ridicule, or being treated as a quota appointment. Still others are procedural, taking the form of delayed approvals, missing budgets, ambiguous responsibilities, or weak grievance response. The present study responds to this complexity by examining workplace discrimination as a multi-level phenomenon and by treating participant narratives as analytically valuable forms of counter-knowledge that illuminate the limits of formal transformation discourse.

Table 2.1. Expanded empirical and conceptual literature matrix informing the study.

Author(s) and year	Context/setting	Method/lens	Contribution to this dissertation
Gida and Ortlepp (2007)	South African HRM and disability management	Conceptual / HR analysis	Shows that inclusion requires organisational readiness, disability competence, and system-level HR reform.
Holness (2016)	South African legal and policy discussion	Socio-legal analysis	Explains why rights instruments are necessary but insufficient without implementation and accessible enforcement.

Author(s) and year	Context/setting	Method/lens	Contribution to this dissertation
Potgieter, Coetzee and Ximba (2017)	South African organisations	Qualitative exploration	Demonstrates how inaccessible development opportunities and managerial attitudes constrain advancement.
Basson (2023)	South African women with disabilities	Legal analysis using intersectionality	Provides a strong account of multiple discrimination and the limits of law in practice.
Charles, Gie and Musakuro (2023)	South African public service	Qualitative study	Highlights inaccessible systems, stigma, and weak operationalisation of inclusion measures.
Maclean, Geiger and Ned (2024)	State-owned enterprise in Western Cape	Qualitative case study	Shows that progress is possible when leadership, targeted recruitment, and monitoring are aligned.
Bonaccio et al. (2020)	International workplace literature	Narrative review	Synthesises barriers around disclosure, stereotypes, accommodation, and organisational climate.
Wong et al. (2021)	Accommodation and disability disclosure	Review	Clarifies disclosure as a strategic process shaped by trust, stigma, and organisational design.
Trani et al. (2020)	South Africa and stigma	Quantitative social research	Links disability stigma to well-being and social participation, relevant to workplace belonging and voice.

Source: Author's own compilation based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

2.16.4 Labour-market stigma and the myth of neutrality

A final issue emerging from the review is the persistence of apparently neutral organisational standards that in fact privilege able-bodied norms. Recruitment criteria framed as universal, performance measures framed as objective, and behavioural expectations framed as common sense may each carry hidden assumptions about how a worker should move, communicate, travel, or endure the workday. The literature on ableism is especially useful here

because it demonstrates that exclusion is often reproduced not through openly discriminatory language but through institutional definitions of the ideal worker. Such definitions reward uninterrupted availability, rapid movement through physical space, emotional self-containment, and minimal dependence on environmental modification. Workers whose embodiment does not match these assumptions are then evaluated as departures from the norm rather than as persons encountering remediable design failures (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014).

This critique is especially relevant in labour markets shaped by histories of racial capitalism and gendered inequality. In such settings, neutrality can become a powerful alibi. Decision-makers may claim that a standard applies to everyone while ignoring the fact that its burdens are unevenly distributed. A requirement for unrestricted field mobility, for example, may appear operationally neutral even where the task could be reorganised, shared, or partially digitised. Likewise, assumptions about executive presence or leadership potential may appear meritocratic while drawing on deeply gendered, classed, and able-bodied imaginaries of authority. The literature therefore urges researchers to move beyond the formal language of non-discrimination and to ask whether institutions are interrogating the norms through which competence, professionalism, and productivity are defined.

For the present dissertation, the myth of neutrality helps explain why participants' experiences cannot be resolved through awareness alone. The problem is not simply that some colleagues hold prejudiced attitudes; it is that workplaces are organised around norms that render certain bodies and biographies easier to accommodate than others. Recognising this point expands the analytical reach of the study. It directs attention to the standards through which workers are compared, the design assumptions built into roles, and the forms of labour that organisations silently expect disabled women to absorb. It also strengthens the study's practical recommendations by showing that accountable inclusion requires redesigning organisational norms, not merely adding isolated adjustments around an unchanged centre.

2.17 Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed the conceptual, empirical and policy literature relevant to workplace discrimination against Black women with physical disabilities. The synthesis shows that exclusion is sustained by linked material, cultural and procedural mechanisms, even within a formal rights framework that appears progressive. The chapter, therefore, establishes the need

for a qualitative, participant-centred inquiry capable of tracing how discrimination is produced, experienced and negotiated in a specific provincial context. Chapter 3 explains the methodological choices that guided that inquiry.

Table 2.2 presents the principal conceptual models that inform the analytical framing of this dissertation. Because disability and workplace discrimination cannot be adequately understood through a single theoretical lens, the study draws on complementary frameworks that illuminate impairment, social barriers, institutional responsibility, intersecting inequalities, and structural power. These models provide the conceptual basis for interpreting how exclusion is produced and sustained in workplace settings.

Table 2.2. Selected conceptual models informing analysis of disability and workplace discrimination.

Model / framework	Core emphasis	Use in this dissertation
Medical model	Locates disability mainly in individual impairment, diagnosis and deficit	Critiqued as insufficient for explaining workplace exclusion
Social model	Explains disability through environmental, attitudinal and organisational barriers	Used to interpret inaccessible systems as institutional rather than personal failure
Rights-based model	Frames accessibility, participation and accommodation as enforceable obligations	Supports analysis of inclusion as a matter of dignity and accountability
Intersectionality	Examines how systems of power co-produce distinct forms of inequality	Used to analyse race, gender, disability and place together
Critical Race Theory	Highlights how apparently neutral institutions reproduce racial hierarchy	Used to interpret policy rhetoric, discretion and counter-storytelling

Source: Author's own compilation based on disability, intersectionality, CRT and rights-based frameworks reviewed in Chapter 2.

Table 2.3 summarises the key South African and international legal and policy instruments that shape disability-inclusive employment. The table is included to show that workplace inclusion is not merely an aspirational ideal, but a matter grounded in constitutional

protections, labour regulation, equality law, policy commitments, and international human rights obligations. It also provides the regulatory context against which employer practices and institutional gaps are assessed in this dissertation.

Table 2.3. Key South African rights and policy instruments relevant to disability-inclusive employment.

Instrument	Primary relevance	Implication for employers
Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)	Equality and prohibition of unfair discrimination	Requires substantive rather than symbolic equality
Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995	Fair labour practices and dispute resolution	Requires procedural fairness in incapacity and workplace disputes
Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997	Minimum conditions of employment	Supports fair working arrangements relevant to disability inclusion
Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998	Affirmative action and non-discrimination	Requires barrier removal, planning and reporting on equitable representation
PEPUDA 4 of 2000	Broader anti-discrimination framework	Extends equality obligations beyond narrow workplace events
Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities (2015)	Practical accommodation guidance	Clarifies recruitment, retention, confidentiality and advancement duties
White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015)	Whole-of-government disability inclusion agenda	Positions work within broader accessibility and participation reforms
UNCRPD (2006)	International right to inclusive, accessible work	Recognises denial of reasonable accommodation as discrimination

Source: Author's own compilation based on the listed South African and international legal and policy instruments.

Table 2.4 synthesises selected South African studies that are particularly relevant to the present dissertation. These studies were chosen because they collectively highlight recurring themes in the literature, including compliance-oriented approaches to disability, inadequate accommodation, organisational barriers, intersectional disadvantage, and constrained career

mobility. By bringing these studies together, the table helps position the current research within the existing evidence base and clarifies the specific contribution of this study.

Table 2.4. Selected South African studies informing the dissertation.

Study	Context/design	Principal insight	Relevance to present study
Gida & Ortlepp (2007)	South African HR study	Disability is often handled as compliance or social responsibility rather than system reform	Supports the study's concern with HR practice and implementation gaps
Holness (2016)	Feminist legal analysis	Women with disabilities remain marginal within employment-equity hierarchies	Strengthens the gendered focus of the dissertation
Potgieter et al. (2017)	Qualitative workplace study	Employees with disabilities experience stalled career advancement and managerial ignorance	Informs analysis of progression and promotion barriers
Basson (2023)	South African legal scholarship	Women with disabilities experience multiple discrimination in employment	Provides intersectional and doctrinal grounding
Charles et al. (2023)	Case study of public service employability	Barriers are infrastructural, managerial and organizational	Supports the study's multi-level analysis of exclusion
Maclean et al. (2024)	State-owned enterprise case study	Inclusive recruitment succeeds when systems are operationalised and participatory	Helps identify practical enablers of better workplace practice

Source: Author's own compilation based on selected South African studies reviewed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains how the study was designed and conducted. It outlines the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative phenomenological orientation, sampling strategy, recruitment procedures, interview process, data management, analytic strategy, reflexivity, trustworthiness procedures and ethical safeguards. The methodological approach was selected to generate detailed, contextually grounded accounts of workplace discrimination while maintaining transparency and rigour.

3.2 Research paradigm

The study is underpinned by an interpretivist–constructivist paradigm. This paradigm assumes that social reality is experienced, interpreted and negotiated, rather than merely observed as a fixed external fact (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is appropriate because the dissertation seeks to understand how Black women with physical disabilities make sense of workplace exclusion, inclusion and accommodation within historically unequal institutions.

Interpretivism also recognises that knowledge is co-produced between researcher and participant. Meanings do not simply wait inside the data to be discovered. They are generated through interaction, questioning, narration, silence, memory and interpretation. This epistemological position places reflexivity at the centre of methodological integrity.

3.3 Research approach and design

A qualitative design with a phenomenological orientation was adopted. Phenomenology is concerned with the meaning of lived experience and is therefore well suited to questions of humiliation, dignity, belonging, fear, recognition and coping in everyday work settings (van Manen, 2016). The aim was not to test a causal model or estimate prevalence, but to develop a rich account of how discrimination is lived and understood by participants.

The design remained flexible enough to engage institutional processes such as recruitment, promotion and accommodation, while still attending to the emotional, relational

and embodied dimensions of work. In this sense, the study combined phenomenological depth with a structural analytic lens informed by intersectionality, CRT and disability theory.

3.4 Study setting

The study involved participants residing in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams. Remote interviewing was selected for both practical and ethical reasons: it enabled participation across geographically dispersed districts, reduced travel burdens for women with mobility impairments, and widened inclusion for participants who might otherwise have been excluded by transport barriers or cost (Archibald et al., 2019; Lobe et al., 2020).

Remote interviewing, however, was not assumed to be neutral. Connectivity, privacy, household interruptions and fatigue were treated as part of the research context. Participants were invited to join from locations they considered private and safe, to use audio-only participation if preferred, and to pause or reschedule where necessary. These adjustments were part of an accessibility-sensitive design rather than mere troubleshooting.

Camera use on Microsoft Teams was not compulsory. Participants were informed that they could keep cameras off, switch to audio-only participation, pause the interview or reschedule if connectivity, privacy, fatigue or discomfort arose. This was important because requiring video could have created additional data costs, fatigue and self-presentation pressure. The remote interview method was therefore used flexibly and accessibly rather than as a rigid technological requirement.

3.5 Study population and sample

The study population consisted of Black women with physical disabilities who had current or prior workplace experience in the Eastern Cape Province. Workplace experience was defined broadly to include current formal employment, prior employment, volunteer work and supported or sheltered work settings where participants had engaged directly with organisational rules, practices or accommodation processes.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit information-rich participants able to speak directly to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). This sampling strategy was especially appropriate because the research sought depth and contextual relevance rather than demographic representativeness.

Twelve participants were interviewed. Sample adequacy was guided by information power rather than by mechanical adherence to a saturation formula. Because the study aim was focused, the sample was specific, and the quality of dialogue was strong, the sample provided sufficient analytic richness for the purposes of reflexive thematic analysis (Malterud et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The final sample consisted of six participants in formal employment, four participants who described prior employment experiences, one participant engaged in volunteer work and one participant in supported work. This breakdown clarifies that the dataset captured both current and retrospective workplace experiences, while remaining focused on organisational practices, accommodation processes and discrimination across the employment cycle.

3.5.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria were: self-identification as a Black woman aged 18 years or older; self-reported physical disability or mobility-related impairment; current or prior workplace experience in the Eastern Cape Province; and willingness to participate in an interview in English or another mutually workable language arrangement. In the completed fieldwork, interviews were conducted in English; therefore, no full interview transcript required formal translation. Where participants used short local-language expressions or clarified meaning informally, these were discussed during the interview and rendered into English in a way that preserved the intended meaning.

Exclusion criteria were: no relevant workplace experience linked to the study aim; and impairment outside the primary focus of the study where participants could not meaningfully address the questions on physical accessibility, mobility and workplace accommodation.

3.6 Recruitment procedures

Recruitment combined purposive outreach with cautious snowballing. Initial contact points included disability networks, social organisations and community or professional contacts likely to know women with relevant workplace experience. Potential participants were approached with an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, inclusion criteria, confidentiality measures and the right to withdraw.

Snowballing was handled carefully because the subject of workplace discrimination is sensitive and may be professionally risky. Participants were asked to circulate the study

information to others rather than disclose third-party contact details without consent. This protected privacy and reduced the risk of coercion.

Recruitment continued until the dataset provided sufficiently rich and patterned accounts of the phenomenon. The aim was not redundancy for its own sake, but interpretive sufficiency and analytic depth.

3.7 Data collection method

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method enabled the researcher to cover a consistent set of domains while retaining flexibility to probe examples, meanings, emotions and institutional detail as they emerged (Kallio et al., 2016). Interviews are particularly appropriate when the purpose is to understand how participants interpret experiences that are socially sensitive, unevenly visible or difficult to observe directly.

Interview domains included pathways into work; workplace accessibility; accommodation requests; relationships with managers, colleagues, clients or service users; experiences of ridicule, exclusion, harassment or stalled progression; strategies of coping and self-advocacy; and participants' recommendations for more inclusive workplaces.

Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes, depending on participants' pace, comfort and connectivity. With permission, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Where required, the interviewer slowed the pace, repeated questions or rescheduled the conversation to support participant comfort and data quality.

3.7.1 Development of the interview guide

The interview guide was derived from the research questions, literature review and conceptual framework. Questions were phrased in open-ended language to encourage narration rather than simple confirmation. The guide moved from descriptive prompts to more reflective probes. For example, participants were invited first to describe their workplace context and later to interpret how race, gender, disability and place shaped what happened to them.

The guide was refined prior to data collection to reduce leading language, ensure sensitivity to emotionally difficult topics and preserve flexibility. In line with phenomenological interviewing, the guide functioned as a scaffold rather than a script.

3.8 Data management

Audio recordings were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher. Transcripts were pseudonymised, and identifying workplace details were removed or generalised where quotation might create a risk of recognition. Digital files were stored on password-protected devices in line with POPIA and institutional ethics expectations (Republic of South Africa, 2013).

Transcription itself was treated as part of the analytic and ethical process. Decisions about emphasis, pauses and anonymisation affect how participants' voices are represented (Braun & Clarke, 2022). For this reason, transcripts were reviewed carefully against recordings to improve accuracy and to ensure that de-identification did not distort meaning.

3.9 Data analysis

The study used reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to interpret the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021, 2022). RTA was appropriate because the aim was to identify patterned meanings and mechanisms across a qualitative dataset without reducing analysis to code counts or assumptions of consensus. It also aligns with interpretivist research by recognising the researcher's active role in coding, theme development and interpretation.

Analysis began with repeated reading of transcripts and the writing of early analytic memos. Initial coding attended both to semantic content, such as explicit descriptions of inaccessible toilets or delayed equipment, and to latent meaning, such as what these events revealed about dignity, power, organisational neglect and conditional belonging.

Codes were then clustered into candidate themes and subthemes. These were repeatedly reviewed against the coded extracts and the dataset as a whole to ensure coherence, analytic distinction and relevance to the research questions. Themes were refined not as natural facts located inside the data, but as interpretive outputs produced through sustained engagement with participant accounts, the literature and the theoretical framework.

3.9.1 Phases of analysis

The analysis followed six broad phases associated with RTA: familiarisation with the data; generation of initial codes; searching for candidate themes; reviewing and refining themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the analytic narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Although these phases are described sequentially, in practice analysis was recursive. The researcher moved back and forth between transcripts, codes, memos, theory and writing.

Memo writing was central to this recursive process. Memos captured emerging interpretations, conceptual tensions, reflections on language, and questions about whether a pattern reflected a structural mechanism, an interpersonal dynamic or both. This practice strengthened analytic transparency.

3.10 Researcher reflexivity and positionality

Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process. Reflexive practice involved documenting assumptions, emotional responses, emerging interpretations and moments where pre-existing expectations risked narrowing analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Because research on disability, race and gender carries ethical and political stakes, reflexivity was particularly important for avoiding simplistic readings that individualise structural harms.

The aim of reflexivity was not to claim neutrality. Rather, it was to render the interpretive process more visible and accountable. This included attention to how rapport was built, how silences were interpreted, and how the researcher negotiated the tension between analytic distance and ethical responsiveness.

The researcher occupied a partial insider-outsider position in relation to the study. As a Black woman researching Black women's experiences, she shared important dimensions of gendered and racialised social location with participants and was therefore attentive to how respectability, silence, care and credibility shape women's workplace narratives. However, the researcher did not assume that shared racial or gender identity produced automatic understanding, nor did she treat participants' disability experiences as identical to her own social position. The researcher did not present herself as having the same physical disability profile as participants; instead, she approached the interviews as a listener and interpreter responsible for centring participants' own accounts of embodiment, access, discrimination and agency. Reflexive notes were used to monitor how proximity, empathy and difference influenced questioning, rapport and interpretation.

3.11 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was strengthened through strategies aligned with credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004;

Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility was supported through deep engagement with the dataset, repeated transcript reading, careful quotation use and reflexive challenge of emerging assumptions.

Transferability was enhanced through thick description of the provincial context, participant characteristics and the organisational conditions described in interviews. Dependability was supported by an audit trail documenting recruitment decisions, interview logistics, coding development and theme refinement. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling and through grounding interpretive claims in the data and in relevant scholarship rather than assertion.

3.12 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of South Africa College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee before data collection commenced (ethics clearance reference: [insert official UNISA ethics clearance number and approval date]). Informed consent was confirmed before each interview, and participants were reminded of their right to decline questions, stop the interview or withdraw without penalty. Ethical conduct drew on South African health-research guidance and internationally recognised principles (National Department of Health, 2015; World Medical Association, 2013).

Particular care was required because participants discussed discrimination, humiliation, exclusion and career insecurity. The interview process therefore prioritised emotional safety, pacing, privacy and respect. Participants were offered pauses or discontinuation if distress arose, and quotations were edited only for anonymity and readability, not for substantive reinterpretation.

An ethics of representation also guided the writing of the dissertation. Participants' accounts were treated as situated knowledge rather than illustrative anecdotes, and the analysis sought to avoid both sensationalism and sanitisation.

3.12.1 Managing remote interviewing, accessibility, and rapport

Remote interviewing offered clear practical advantages for this study, but it also required deliberate methodological management. Participants were geographically dispersed and some had mobility-related constraints that would have made face-to-face interviewing costly, tiring, or inaccessible. Conducting interviews through Microsoft Teams widened

participation while reducing transport burden, yet remote modalities can also weaken non-verbal cues, expose participants to connectivity problems, and complicate privacy. To mitigate these risks, interview scheduling was flexible, participants were encouraged to select private spaces, and audio-only participation was permitted where video increased fatigue, discomfort, or data costs. The researcher also opened each session with informal rapport-building conversation to reduce the formality of the online encounter and to ensure that participants felt able to control pacing and pause when needed (Archibald et al., 2019; Lobe et al., 2020).

An accessibility-sensitive remote approach also required close attention to the embodied experience of interviewing. Some participants needed extra time to respond, to reposition themselves, or to manage fatigue and discomfort during the interview. Rather than treating pauses or slower pacing as procedural disruptions, the researcher understood them as legitimate features of inclusive qualitative practice. This orientation mattered because the study sought to avoid reproducing the very productivity norms it was critiquing. In practical terms, this meant keeping interview scheduling realistic, building in comfort breaks, confirming audibility and comprehension throughout, and recognising that data quality is improved—not compromised—when participants are given conditions in which they can speak without strain.

Methodological quality in remote interviewing is therefore inseparable from ethics. The interviews did not merely transmit information; they constituted a relational space in which participants tested whether the study was trustworthy. Establishing rapport online depended on clear consent processes, careful listening, responsiveness to emotional cues, and transparent explanation of how recordings and transcripts would be handled. These practices helped generate richer narrative data and strengthened the credibility of the study's thematic interpretation.

3.12.2 Reflexive memoing, theme development, and analytic discipline

Reflexive memoing played a central role in the movement from interview transcript to final thematic account. Immediately after interviews, the researcher prepared field notes on emotional tone, possible assumptions entering the analysis, contextual observations, and early analytic hunches. During coding, memos were used to capture questions about how a coded segment might connect to wider structures such as policy failure, ableism, managerial discretion, or the politics of disclosure. This process assisted the researcher in distinguishing

between participants' descriptive accounts and the interpretive claims eventually made in the dissertation. It also provided an audit trail showing how thematic decisions evolved over time rather than appearing as fixed insights from the outset (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Analytic discipline was especially important because reflexive thematic analysis does not rely on mechanical coding consensus or numerical thresholds to establish validity. Instead, quality depends on the coherence of the analysis, the depth of engagement with the data, and the clarity with which themes explain the dataset. In this study, codes that appeared initially important were repeatedly reviewed against full transcripts to test whether they represented isolated incidents, broad recurring mechanisms, or conceptually overlapping processes. This iterative review helped prevent premature closure and encouraged the refinement of broader themes, such as structural barriers, everyday ableism, career constraints, agency, and governance. The result is a thematic structure that is both data-grounded and conceptually integrated.

Memoing also supported reflexive accountability. Because the topic of disability discrimination carries strong normative commitments, there is a risk that the researcher may over-read the data through pre-existing political expectations. Reflexive notes were therefore used not only to deepen interpretation but also to challenge it. Where alternative explanations were plausible, for example, whether a managerial action reflected ignorance, resource constraint, or deliberate exclusion, these possibilities were explored before final theme definitions were settled. This does not remove interpretation from the study; rather, it makes the interpretive process more transparent and intellectually defensible.

3.12.3 Working with sensitive narratives of discrimination and dignity

Research on discrimination, humiliation, and exclusion requires methods capable of handling both vulnerability and complexity. Participants may recount experiences that involve grief, anger, shame, fear of retaliation, or unresolved conflict with employers. In this study, interview prompts were designed to move from descriptive questions toward more reflective probes so that participants could establish narrative control before discussing emotionally charged experiences. They were reminded that they could decline any question or stop the

interview at any time. This sequencing reduced the pressure to perform trauma for the sake of the study and helped maintain participant dignity throughout the research encounter.

Sensitive narrative work also influenced analytic representation. Quotations were selected not simply because they were dramatic, but because they clarified thematic mechanisms while protecting anonymity. Potentially identifying details such as exact workplaces, locations, or highly specific role descriptions were masked or generalised where necessary. At the same time, the dissertation avoids over-sanitising participants' accounts, because excessive abstraction can flatten the moral force of their testimony. The analytic challenge was therefore to preserve the texture of experience without exposing individuals to avoidable risk. This balance is especially important when participants come from sectors or communities where disclosure of identity or complaint history could have future employment consequences.

Overall, the methodological choices in this chapter were guided by the view that rigour and care are mutually reinforcing. Accessible interviewing, reflexive memoing, transparent thematic development, and careful representation of participant accounts all strengthened the credibility of the study. They also aligned the research process with the dissertation's substantive commitment to dignity, participation, and justice.

3.13 Chapter summary

This chapter has set out the philosophical assumptions, design logic, sampling strategy, data-generation procedures, analytic approach and ethical safeguards that shaped the study. The methodology was designed to centre lived experience while remaining transparent, reflexive and analytically rigorous. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

Table 3.1 sets out the inclusion and exclusion criteria that guided participant selection for this study. These criteria were developed to ensure that the sample remained closely aligned with the central research aim, namely to examine the workplace experiences of Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province. By clearly defining who was eligible to participate, the study strengthened its conceptual focus, ensured relevance of the data generated, and maintained coherence between the research questions, sampling strategy, and analytic objectives.

Table 3.1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criterion type	Detail
Inclusion	Black woman aged 18 years or older
Inclusion	Self-reported physical disability or mobility-related impairment
Inclusion	Current or prior workplace experience in the Eastern Cape Province
Inclusion	Willingness to participate voluntarily in an interview
Exclusion	No relevant workplace experience linked to the study aim
Exclusion	Primary impairment outside the study's focus where questions on physical accessibility could not be addressed

Source: Author's own compilation based on the study protocol and approved inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Table 3.2 summarises the main analytic procedures followed in the reflexive thematic analysis of the interview data. The table is included to show how the analysis moved systematically from initial engagement with the transcripts to the development of themes that could meaningfully explain participants' workplace experiences. Presenting these phases in a structured way makes the analytic process more transparent and demonstrates how interpretation was built through iterative reading, coding, theme refinement, and synthesis with the study's theoretical and empirical foundations.

Table 3.2. Summary of analytic procedures used in reflexive thematic analysis.

Phase	Analytic action	Purpose
Familiarisation	Repeated reading, note taking and memo writing	To understand tone, incidents, meanings and emerging patterns
Coding	Inductive and theory-informed coding of meaningful data segments	To identify patterned meaning across the dataset
Theme development	Clustering related codes into candidate themes and subthemes	To move from fragments to explanatory patterns
Theme review	Comparing candidate themes with coded extracts and entire dataset	To ensure coherence and distinction

Phase	Analytic action	Purpose
Definition and naming	Clarifying scope, mechanism and central organising concept	To strengthen analytic precision
Writing and synthesis	Integrating themes with theory, law and prior scholarship	To produce the dissertation findings and discussion

Source: Author's own compilation based on Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis procedures and the study's analytic process.

Table 3.3 outlines the strategies used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. Given the interpretive nature of qualitative research, attention to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was essential to ensure that the findings were rigorous, transparent, and grounded in participants' accounts. The procedures summarised in the table demonstrate how the study sought to enhance the quality and integrity of the research process from data generation through to analysis and reporting.

Table 3.3. Strategies used to strengthen trustworthiness.

Criterion	Procedures used	Purpose
Credibility	Repeated transcript reading; careful quotation use; reflexive challenge of assumptions	To ensure grounded and plausible interpretation
Transferability	Thick description of participants, province and workplaces	To assist readers in judging contextual relevance
Dependability	Audit trail; coding memos; documentation of methodological decisions	To make the research process transparent and reviewable
Confirmability	Reflexive journaling; theory–data dialogue; retention of coded extracts	To reduce unexamined researcher influence

Source: Author's own compilation based on Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness criteria and procedures used in the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, organised thematically in line with the reflexive thematic analysis described in Chapter 3. The themes represent patterned meanings across the dataset rather than simple topic clusters. They show how workplace discrimination is produced through the interaction of structural barriers, organisational culture, HR procedures, emotional labour and governance.

To protect confidentiality, all participant names are pseudonyms and potentially identifying organisational details have been masked or generalised. Verbatim excerpts are integrated throughout the theme sections to make participants' voices visible and to ground the analysis in empirical evidence. Quotations are used not as stand-alone evidence but as illustrative anchors for broader analytic patterns. The chapter moves from participant context to theme-by-theme findings and concludes with a cross-theme synthesis of the mechanism of workplace exclusion.

4.2 Participant profile

Twelve participants took part in the study. They ranged in age from 21 to 52 years and came from a range of workplace settings, including the public sector, private companies, education, social services, media, supported employment and the beauty industry. Most were currently employed, while others narrated experiences from previous employment, volunteering or supported work. This diversity was analytically important because it allowed the study to capture exclusion across the employment cycle rather than only among women currently retained in work.

Although the participants shared the broad experience of being Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape, their workplace conditions were not identical. Some occupied administrative or professional roles, while others were in community-facing or service roles. Some had long tenure and had built strategies for surviving exclusion over time; others were earlier in their careers and described more precarious forms of belonging. These differences shaped how discrimination was experienced, but they did not disrupt the pattern that exclusion was sustained through linked structural, cultural and procedural mechanisms.

4.3 Thematic overview

The analysis generated five interrelated themes: structural and environmental barriers; organisational culture and everyday ableism; careers constrained; coping, boundaries and agency; and policy, governance and accountability. The themes are analytically distinct but deeply connected. Structural barriers often triggered interpersonal stigma; culture shaped how accommodation requests were treated; HR procedures converted unequal conditions into unequal outcomes; and the weakness of governance structures left participants to negotiate access individually.

What follows is not a list of incidents but an interpretation of how these mechanisms worked across the dataset. Each theme section begins with an interpretive summary and is then developed through subthemes and illustrative participant accounts.

4.4 Theme 1: Structural and environmental barriers

Theme 1 shows that discrimination often began with the ordinary organisation of work itself. Participants described inaccessible offices, toilets, entrances, circulation spaces, vehicles, school sites and technologies. These barriers restricted not only mobility but also privacy, autonomy, energy and the ability to meet work expectations. Importantly, such barriers were rarely treated as urgent by employers. Access problems were normalised as inconvenience or delayed until participants escalated them repeatedly.

Participants did not describe structural inaccessibility as a neutral design flaw. They experienced it as an institutional message about who the workplace had been built for and who remained an afterthought. Several women explained that even when they had succeeded in entering employment, the everyday environment continued to signal that their presence was conditional.

A related pattern was the mismatch between job expectations and enabling resources. Participants were sometimes required to perform at the same level as colleagues while lacking computers, adapted tools, ergonomic workspaces, accessible sites or transport support. In these contexts, the organisation controlled the conditions of performance and then judged workers as though those conditions were equal.

4.4.1 Physical inaccessibility

Inaccessible toilets, stairs, missing ramps and narrow office layouts were recurrent in participants' accounts. These barriers were not narrated as isolated inconveniences. They compromised dignity, delayed work, increased dependence on others and produced constant bodily calculation about when and how to move within the workplace.

Gxigxi: "An intern trained herself not to go to the toilet because she would not fit... there was no wheelchair ramp."

This quotation demonstrates that physical inaccessibility was not experienced as a minor inconvenience. It shaped dignity, bodily autonomy and the practical capacity to remain at work without avoidable distress.

Participants linked physical inaccessibility to an erosion of professional identity. A worker who could not independently access a toilet or circulate between offices was positioned as dependent even before any explicit interpersonal discrimination occurred. The built environment therefore functioned as a social signal as much as a practical barrier.

4.4.2 Job design, tools and mobility demands

Participants also described exclusion through the tools and demands embedded in job design. Missing computers, inaccessible software, carrying-heavy-file practices, and travel expectations that did not account for physical disability all created mismatches between the worker and the task. This mismatch was sometimes used implicitly to question capability, even though the obstacle originated in organisational design rather than in the person.

Matshiba: "I should not be going up and down stairs carrying files when I only have one hand."

Matshiba's account shows how routine task allocation became discriminatory when it ignored impairment-related limits and reproduced able-bodied assumptions about how work should be performed.

Mavi: "Last year I did not even have a computer, but I was still expected to present my work like everyone else."

Mavi's experience illustrates how organisations may control the tools of performance while continuing to judge employees against formally equal expectations.

Rural and peri-urban work demands intensified these challenges. Site visits, fieldwork expectations and travel to inaccessible community settings were especially burdensome where roads, buildings and transport options were already limited. In this sense, structural discrimination extended beyond the office interior to the spatial organisation of work in the province.

4.4.3 Policy-to-practice gaps in the material environment

Several participants reported that disability policies, forums or desks existed on paper but had little material effect. A ramp might be promised without completion; equipment might be requested without procurement; and problems might be acknowledged without timeline, budget or accountability. This pattern made policy appear ceremonial rather than protective.

The material dimension of this theme is important because it shows that discrimination can be reproduced without openly hostile language. Delay itself functioned as exclusion. When access depended on persistence, alliances or escalation, the burden of implementation shifted from institution to employee.

4.5 Theme 2: Organisational culture and everyday ableism

Theme 2 captures the interpersonal and symbolic dimension of exclusion. Even where structural barriers were visible, participants emphasised that organisational culture shaped whether those barriers were taken seriously or trivialised. Infantilisation, ridicule, excessive surveillance, pity and avoidance created climates of conditional belonging in which workers felt present but not fully respected.

Participants repeatedly described having their competence doubted in subtle ways. They were offered unsolicited help that undermined autonomy, spoken to as though less capable, and scrutinised more harshly for ordinary mistakes. In several accounts, humour was used to disguise discrimination. Jokes about disability, comments about slowness or persistent references to special treatment transformed hostility into something that could be dismissed as banter.

This theme also revealed why silence matters. Many participants weighed the risks of speaking up against the possibility of victimisation, being labelled difficult, or losing fragile support from supervisors or colleagues. The result was a workplace culture in which discrimination could continue precisely because formal complaint pathways were not trusted.

4.5.1 Infantilisation and presumed incompetence

A recurrent pattern across the dataset was the reduction of adult professional women to childlike or dependent status. Participants described being spoken over, doubted, over-monitored or assigned tasks on the assumption that they could not manage complexity. This eroded confidence but also had practical consequences for advancement because capability was judged through prior assumptions rather than demonstrated performance.

Ntsangani: "People see us as childish... you are not treated like a full human being."

This account makes visible the relational harm of infantilisation: the participant was not simply denied convenience, but full adult professional recognition.

The presumption of incompetence was especially damaging when participants were otherwise qualified or experienced. In these moments, workplace interaction did not merely communicate interpersonal disrespect; it denied the legitimacy of participants' occupational identities.

4.5.2 Microaggressions, ridicule and social exclusion

Microaggressions accumulated into a hostile everyday environment. Participants narrated being watched closely, corrected publicly, laughed at, or framed as perpetually complaining whenever they named bodily needs or accessibility barriers. Small acts were cumulative: they signalled that disabled workers were hyper-visible when they needed support and invisible when they sought recognition.

Social exclusion also appeared in more informal practices such as not being included in discussions, team activities or decision-making processes. Such exclusion diminished access to informal information and networks that are often crucial for progression. It also communicated that participation was conditional rather than ordinary.

4.5.3 Fear of victimisation and constrained voice

Several participants disclosed that they strategically withheld complaints, requests or emotional reactions because they feared retaliation, labelling or professional loss. This fear was particularly pronounced among participants with more precarious employment statuses,

including volunteer or previously employed roles. For them, voicing needs carried the risk of appearing ungrateful or replaceable.

Loleka: "I cannot always speak up because I am scared of being victimised."

Loleka's statement confirms that constrained voice was not an individual failure of confidence but a rational response to perceived workplace risk.

The findings suggest that silence should not be interpreted as absence of harm. Rather, silence often indicated a realistic assessment of power. Participants managed themselves carefully because they had learned that workplaces could reframe self-advocacy as insubordination, negativity or dependency.

4.6 Theme 3: Careers constrained

Theme 3 demonstrates how discrimination was sedimented into long-term career trajectories. Participants did not describe their careers as shaped only by individual aspiration or merit. Recruitment filters, promotion systems, performance expectations and limited access to training all shaped whether they could enter, remain in and progress through work on equal terms.

One of the clearest findings was that apparently neutral rules often had unequal effects. Requirements such as manual driving competence, unrestricted mobility or rigid productivity expectations were not always essential to the substantive work, yet they operated as gatekeeping mechanisms. Participants therefore encountered discrimination not only in what employers said, but in how jobs were defined.

Progression barriers were particularly painful because they transformed years of work into stalled futures. Several participants described remaining in the same position for long periods despite competence, study or accumulated experience. Others felt that achievements were interpreted as quota outcomes rather than earned advancement.

4.6.1 Recruitment filters and indirect exclusion

Participants described recruitment and entry processes that presumed standard bodies and movement patterns. The problem was not only explicit refusal. It was the embedding of unnecessary criteria into selection procedures. In such cases, the exclusionary effect was procedural and could easily be misrecognised as ordinary job fit.

For some women, these experiences shaped career imagination itself. After repeated encounters with inaccessible or inappropriate entry requirements, participants began to narrow their own sense of what professions remained realistically open to them.

4.6.2 Stalled progression and tokenistic recognition

Promotion delays, limited leadership pathways and tokenistic interpretations of success were major features of this theme. Participants explained that even where they had been appointed or retained, their achievements were sometimes discounted as compliance exercises. This reduced motivation and deepened a sense that the workplace welcomed representation more readily than advancement.

Gxigxi: "People say you got the promotion because of your disability, like it is only a compliance exercise."

This quotation shows how tokenistic interpretations of advancement can undermine achievement even when formal promotion occurs.

Tokenism also made recognition unstable. Success did not necessarily increase legitimacy; it sometimes intensified suspicion that a disabled employee had been favoured unfairly. Participants therefore carried the burden of proving that every achievement was deserved.

4.6.3 Training, performance and unequal conditions of evaluation

Limited access to training, tools and supportive supervision further constrained careers. Some women were expected to produce high-quality work without the equipment or environmental adjustments necessary to do so. Others experienced assessment systems that ignored transport difficulty, fatigue or inaccessible work sites.

These findings suggest that performance itself was socially organised. It was not a neutral indicator of effort or skill. It reflected whether the institution had first provided equitable conditions under which performance could be demonstrated.

4.7 Theme 4: Coping, boundaries and agency

Theme 4 highlights that participants were not passive recipients of discrimination. They developed strategies of survival, self-advocacy and resistance. Yet these strategies often came

at significant emotional, bodily and professional cost. Agency in this dataset should therefore be read as action under constraint rather than evidence that systems were functioning well.

Overperformance was especially striking. Several participants described working harder than colleagues, preparing more carefully, or accepting heavier emotional burdens simply to counter assumptions of incompetence. Boundary-setting emerged later for some participants as a learned strategy after exhaustion or repeated mistreatment. Others relied on selected allies within the workplace to make participation possible when formal systems failed.

This theme is important because it reveals the hidden labour required to remain employable. Inclusion often depended on the worker's capacity to absorb extra administrative, emotional and bodily effort.

4.7.1 Overcompensation and proving competence

Participants frequently narrated the need to work 'harder', 'better' or 'more visibly' than others to establish that they were capable. This overcompensation functioned as both protection and burden. It gave some participants a sense of agency, but it also normalised an unfair standard in which disabled workers had to earn recognition through exceptional effort.

Ntonga: "I have to work ten times harder just to show that we are capable."

Ntonga's account captures the hidden performance burden placed on disabled workers who must repeatedly counter assumptions of incapacity.

The emotional tone of these accounts was often ambivalent. Participants were proud of their resilience, yet also aware that resilience was being demanded by organisational failure.

4.7.2 Boundary-setting, strategic voice and escalation

Some participants responded by setting firmer boundaries, naming what they could and could not do safely, or escalating unresolved matters to unions, forums or senior management. Boundary-setting represented a refusal of limitless accommodation to the institution. It reasserted that disabled workers were not individually responsible for compensating endlessly for inaccessible systems.

However, strategic voice was unevenly available. Participants with less secure positions or weaker organisational support reported greater caution. Escalation could bring results, but it also carried relational and emotional risk.

4.7.3 Allies and fragile support networks

Where formal systems were weak, informal allies played an important role. Sympathetic colleagues, a single supportive manager or union representatives could make a substantial difference to whether participants felt able to remain at work. These relationships provided emotional affirmation and practical assistance.

Yet the support was often fragile because it depended on personalities rather than institutionally guaranteed processes. Participants were acutely aware that support from one person could disappear when roles changed or relationships deteriorated.

4.8 Theme 5: Policy, governance and accountability

Theme 5 captures participants' insistence that policy matters only when it is operationalised. Disability desks, committees or inclusion statements had little credibility if they lacked responsibility, resourcing, monitoring and consequences. Participants judged policy by implementation rather than by existence.

The findings show that governance failure was not abstract. It was lived as delay, repetition, uncertainty and exposure. Workers had to tell their stories repeatedly, navigate unclear channels and depend on informal persistence. This made access appear discretionary and left employees unsure whether concerns would be addressed fairly or at all.

Participants also expressed a strong participatory vision of inclusion. They did not want policies designed for them in their absence. They wanted disabled employees to be involved in decision-making, review and monitoring because lived experience was seen as essential to workable solutions.

4.8.1 Non-functional disability structures

Participants described disability desks or forums that existed symbolically but did not perform the practical work expected of them. In some cases, there were no clear names, roles, timelines or reporting systems. In others, structures existed but lacked authority to resolve problems.

Mraxa: "We tried to make the disability desk official, but when we looked for names and responsibilities there was nothing."

The quotation clarifies why symbolic structures were experienced as inadequate: without named authority and responsibility, governance became difficult to activate.

This subtheme shows how institutions can perform commitment without changing outcomes. Symbolic structures may create the appearance of inclusion while leaving employees to continue self-managing access.

4.8.2 Enforceable accommodations and auditable processes

Participants consistently called for accommodation to become routine, documented and time-bound. They wanted requests acknowledged, assessed and implemented within clear periods, with designated responsibility and follow-up. The desire was not for special favour but for predictability.

An auditable process was important to participants because it would reduce dependence on personality and goodwill. Documentation, budgets and escalation routes were imagined as protections against disappearance, delay and denial.

4.8.3 Participatory inclusion and protected voice

The participants' recommendations were notably democratic. They argued that disability inclusion is more credible when employees with disabilities are involved in the systems meant to include them. Participation was framed not only as representation, but as a mechanism for better design. Workers who live the barriers are often best placed to identify practical solutions.

Mavi: "Involve employees with disabilities in decision-making."

Mavi's recommendation grounds the participatory logic of the study: inclusion is more credible when disabled employees shape the systems that affect their work.

Protected voice also mattered. Participants wanted spaces where concerns could be raised without ridicule or retaliation. This request reflects the finding, carried across earlier themes, that fear of victimisation is itself a major barrier to institutional improvement.

4.9 Cross-theme synthesis

Across the dataset, workplace discrimination emerged not as episodic mistreatment but as an interconnected process unfolding over time. Structural barriers restricted access and independent functioning. Organisational culture then interpreted those constraints through

ableist and gendered assumptions, diminishing credibility and belonging. HR systems converted unequal conditions into career stagnation through recruitment filters, inaccessible training and performance expectations detached from actual support. Participants responded through coping strategies that were often effective in the short term but costly in the long term.

The cross-theme synthesis suggests a mechanism of exclusion with at least five linked stages: inaccessible systems; cultural devaluation; procedural translation of disadvantage into performance and progression outcomes; high-cost coping; and unequal participation. Governance failures cut across these stages by allowing barriers to persist without predictable remedy.

At the same time, the findings reveal that change is possible. Where participants encountered transparent support, active listening or timely environmental adjustments, they reported greater autonomy, stability and dignity. This indicates that exclusion is not inevitable; it is institutionally produced and therefore institutionally alterable.

4.9.1 Consequences of discrimination across dignity, health, and livelihood

Although the themes above describe how discrimination was produced, participants' accounts also pointed clearly to its consequences. These consequences were not confined to discomfort at work; they extended into bodily fatigue, emotional strain, constrained career trajectories, damaged confidence, and reduced trust in institutional processes. Several participants described the constant work of anticipating barriers before leaving home, monitoring how colleagues were perceiving them, or deciding whether to speak up about unfair treatment. This anticipatory labour consumed attention and energy that could otherwise have been invested in job performance, learning, or recovery from physical strain. Discrimination therefore operated not only as an episodic event but as an ongoing organisational condition that shaped how participants inhabited work.

At the level of dignity, participants described feeling watched, doubted, or treated as though they were incomplete professionals. These experiences eroded the sense of belonging that formal employment is often presumed to confer. Inclusion on paper did not guarantee recognition in practice. For some, the effects were cumulative: repeated jokes, delays, patronising comments, or inaccessible tasks conveyed that their presence had to be managed rather than valued. This distinction matters analytically because a worker may remain employed

while still experiencing profound exclusion from the symbolic and relational core of workplace life.

The livelihood consequences were equally significant. Where promotion stalled, tools were withheld, or mobility-related duties remained poorly organised, participants experienced reduced opportunities to build seniority, increase earnings, or establish professional identities commensurate with their qualifications. For those in precarious or volunteer positions, exclusion also shaped future aspiration. The data therefore suggest that workplace discrimination contributes to the reproduction of wider inequality by narrowing the long-term economic and professional horizons of Black women with physical disabilities.

4.9.2 Variations across sector, role status, and employment security

Thematic patterning was evident across the full dataset, but participants' experiences were not identical. Variation occurred by sector, role status, and degree of employment security. Participants located in public-sector settings often described the presence of formal disability forums, equity structures, or policy documents, yet these mechanisms were frequently experienced as slow, weak, or ineffective unless escalated through unions or senior officials. By contrast, some private-sector participants encountered more discretionary managerial cultures in which accommodation could be secured relatively quickly when a sympathetic leader was present, but could also be withheld without transparent procedure when leadership was unsupportive. This suggests that policy visibility and practical responsiveness do not always travel together.

Employment status also shaped voice. Participants in volunteer, temporary, or otherwise insecure positions described greater hesitation in challenging unfair treatment, even when barriers were clear. Insecure status reduced the perceived safety of complaint and made accommodation requests feel risky. In these accounts, formal rights were mediated by dependence on supervisors, hopes of future permanent employment, or fear of being labelled troublesome. The findings thus reinforce the view that vulnerability in the workplace is structured not only by disability and gender but also by precarity and organisational hierarchy.

Role type further influenced the form of discrimination encountered. Participants whose jobs required travel, public interaction, or site visits reported distinctive problems related to mobility, transport, and assumptions about professional credibility in public-facing settings.

Those in administrative roles more often emphasised inaccessible offices, equipment delays, and stalled progression. These differences do not undermine the thematic coherence of the results; rather, they show how common mechanisms of exclusion are expressed through specific labour processes and institutional demands.

4.9.3 Illustrative participant vignettes

A vignette-based synthesis further illuminates the human meaning of the findings. Mavi's account exemplified how seemingly ordinary administrative decisions, such as failing to provide a computer or delaying equipment, can profoundly shape whether a worker is able to demonstrate competence on equal terms. Her narrative showed that exclusion does not always take the form of dramatic refusal; it can appear as prolonged organisational indifference that quietly undermines performance and self-worth. Mavi's case therefore condensed the interdependence of job tools, managerial responsiveness, and judgements of merit.

Ntsangani's account illustrated the cumulative harm of long-term organisational stagnation. Despite seniority, experience, and continued employment, she described a persistent sense that she remained fixed in place while others moved ahead. Her narrative highlighted how discrimination may be reproduced through promotion cultures, subtle devaluation, and the repeated need to prove one's legitimacy. In this way, the data point to a form of exclusion that is compatible with formal retention but incompatible with substantive career development.

Loleka and Mxesibe, in different ways, illustrated the entanglement of disability and mobility. In their accounts, work was shaped not only by office-based policies but also by travel expectations, inaccessible external sites, licensing assumptions, and anxiety about whether a workplace would understand the realities of movement through uneven terrain. Their narratives support the conclusion that disability-inclusive employment in the Eastern Cape cannot be reduced to building access alone; it also depends on how institutions organise transport, fieldwork, and the geography of everyday work.

Nyongo and Ncede exemplified the politics of voice and escalation. Both accounts showed that disabled workers often become the administrators of their own inclusion, tracking requests, appealing to forums, and mobilising unions or internal structures when ordinary channels fail. These narratives capture a recurring paradox in the dataset: the very employees who are marginalised by weak governance are frequently the ones compelled to do the hidden

organisational labour of making governance function. The vignette synthesis therefore reinforces the argument that discrimination is sustained when institutions outsource inclusion work to those already disadvantaged by exclusion.

Table 4.3. Cross-theme consequences of workplace discrimination were identified in the dataset.

Domain of consequence	Illustrative manifestations in participant accounts	Analytic significance
Dignity and belonging	Feeling watched, ridiculed, infantilised, or treated as a quota appointment	Shows that formal employment does not automatically translate into recognition or equal membership.
Health and embodiment	Fatigue, pain, stress, anticipatory anxiety, and emotional strain linked to inaccessible environments	Demonstrates that discrimination is materially and bodily consequential, not merely symbolic.
Performance and credibility	Being evaluated without tools, accessible space, or reasonable accommodation	Reveals how organisational failure is converted into apparent individual underperformance.
Career trajectory	Delayed promotion, limited training, static roles, and self-limitation of future aspiration	Links everyday workplace exclusion to long-term economic and professional inequality.
Voice and governance	Fear of complaint, need to escalate, dependence on unions or sympathetic managers	Shows that procedural justice and protected voice are central to inclusion.

Source: Author's own compilation from the study findings.

4.9.4 The hidden labour of self-advocacy

An important cross-cutting insight in the dataset is that participants were repeatedly required to perform the hidden labour of self-advocacy in order to secure conditions that should have been routine. This labour included explaining disability to colleagues, documenting inaccessible spaces, following up on equipment requests, negotiating task adjustments, managing other people's awkwardness, and deciding when to escalate concerns to unions or internal structures. Participants did not describe these activities as empowering in any straightforward sense. Rather, they often experienced them as exhausting, repetitive, and unequally distributed. The burden of making the workplace minimally functional was

frequently shifted onto those already disadvantaged by inaccessible design and organisational indifference.

This hidden labour also had temporal consequences. Time spent on advocacy was time taken from work tasks, recovery, rest, and career development. Participants' narratives therefore show that self-advocacy is not simply a communication skill; it is a form of unpaid organisational work generated by governance failure. Where systems are credible, employees should not need to continuously re-argue for the legitimacy of their presence or their right to accessible conditions. The recurrence of self-advocacy across the dataset thus strengthens the conclusion that discrimination operated through institutional normalisation: barriers persisted because organisations assumed that disabled workers would continue compensating for them.

At the same time, the findings should not romanticise silence as passivity. Participants' self-advocacy often demonstrated strategic intelligence, persistence, and collective awareness. Some learned when to escalate, when to document, when to rely on allies, and when to set limits. Yet the very necessity of these strategies remains analytically troubling. A just workplace would treat self-advocacy as a protected right that can be exercised when needed, not as an everyday survival requirement. This section therefore deepens the dissertation's argument that accountable inclusion requires redistributing the work of inclusion from individual employees to the institution itself.

4.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the empirical findings of the dissertation. The analysis shows that workplace discrimination in the Eastern Cape is generated through interacting structural, cultural and institutional mechanisms, and that women's responses to it involve complex forms of labour, caution and agency. Chapter 5 interprets these findings in relation to the theoretical framework and relevant scholarship.

Table 4.1 provides an anonymised overview of the participants included in this study. Presenting these characteristics is important for situating the findings within the lived realities of Black women with physical disabilities across different sectors, roles, and employment conditions in the Eastern Cape Province. The table also illustrates the diversity of disability experiences represented in the sample while showing the recurring workplace difficulties that framed participants' narratives.

Table 4.1. Participant characteristics (anonymised).

ID	Age	Sector	Role (masked)	Self-described disability	Employment status	Illustrative workplace issue
P1 Mavi	50	Public	Administrative role	Polio	Employed	Equipment requests remained unresolved
P2 Loleka	33	Social services	Community-facing role	Double amputee	Employed	Driving and transport accommodations were inconsistent
P3 Manentsa	42	Education	Volunteer role	Left hemiplegia	Volunteer	Mobility support and rest needs were poorly understood
P4 Matshiba	37	Private	Senior administrator	Upper-limb amputation	Employed	Accessible office space was secured only after escalation
P5 Gxigxi	44	Private	HR practitioner	Blount's disease	Employed	Promotion was delayed for many years
P6 Mraxa	21	Beauty industry	Nail technician	Hypophosphatemia / short stature	Previously employed	Clients doubted expertise; sexual harassment occurred
P7 Mxesibe	35	Private	Senior administrator / social worker	Paraplegia; wheelchair user	Previously employed	Some work sites were inaccessible
P8 Ncede	38	Public	Administrative officer	Lymphoedema	Supported work	Progression remained limited despite further study
P9 Mfundo	35	Private	Assistant facilitator	Albinism / partial sight	Previously employed	Complaints were not acted upon
P10 Ntonga	49	Public	Social worker	Visual impairment	Previously employed	Accommodation was trivialised through humour and delay

ID	Age	Sector	Role (masked)	Self-described disability	Employment status	Illustrative workplace issue
P11 Ntsangani	52	Media	Marketing manager	Quadriplegia; wheelchair user	Employed	Career progression was static over a long period
P12 Nyongo	37	Public	Grants administration	Blount's disease	Employed	Assigned undesirable tasks and labelled attention-seeking

Source: Author's own compilation from anonymised participant data.

Table 4.2 summarises the major themes and subthemes generated through the reflexive thematic analysis. The table is included to show how participants' accounts were organised into a coherent analytical structure that captures the multiple levels at which workplace discrimination was experienced and interpreted. By setting out the themes in this way, the dissertation provides a clear foundation for the more detailed presentation and discussion of the findings that follows.

Table 4.2. Themes and subthemes identified in the analysis.

Theme	Subthemes
Structural and environmental barriers	Physical inaccessibility; job design and tools; policy-to-practice gap
Organisational culture and everyday ableism	Infantilisation and stigma; microaggressions and ridicule; fear of victimization
Careers constrained	Recruitment filters; stalled progression and tokenism; training and performance hurdles
Coping, boundaries and agency	Overcompensation; boundary-setting and strategic voice; allies and thin support networks
Policy, governance and accountability	Non-functional structures; enforceable accommodation; participatory inclusion

Source: Author's own compilation from the reflexive thematic analysis.

Figure 2 visually maps the relationships between the central themes that emerged from the study. Rather than treating the findings as isolated issues, the figure demonstrates how structural barriers, organisational culture, constrained career opportunities, coping practices, and questions of policy and accountability were interconnected in shaping participants' workplace experiences. In this way, the figure helps the reader see the overall pattern of the findings before engaging with the fuller narrative analysis in the chapter.

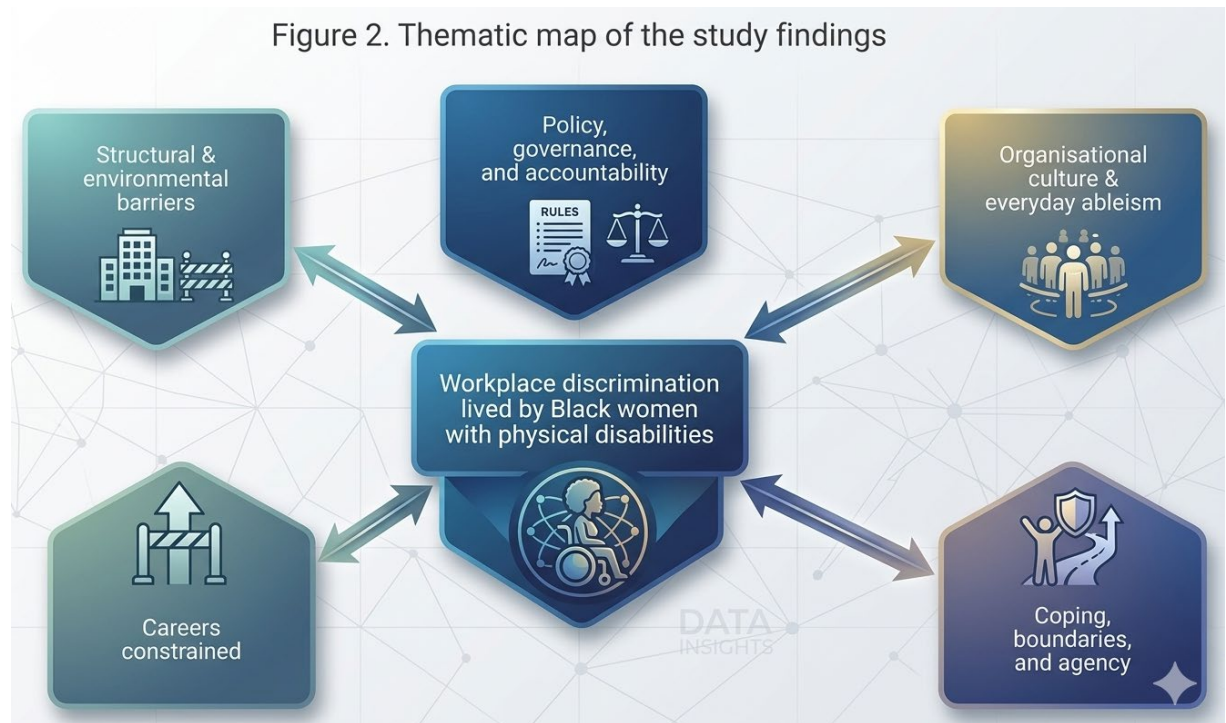


Figure 2. Thematic map of the study findings.

Figure 3 extends the analysis by presenting a mechanism model of workplace exclusion derived from the study findings. While the preceding discussion identifies the major themes shaping participants' experiences, this figure illustrates how those themes operate cumulatively over time rather than as isolated incidents. It shows that inaccessible systems, ableist organisational cultures, exclusionary human-resource practices, and the burden of coping do not occur independently, but build upon one another to produce increasingly unequal and precarious employment outcomes for Black women with physical disabilities.

Figure 3. Mechanism model of workplace exclusion emerging from the findings

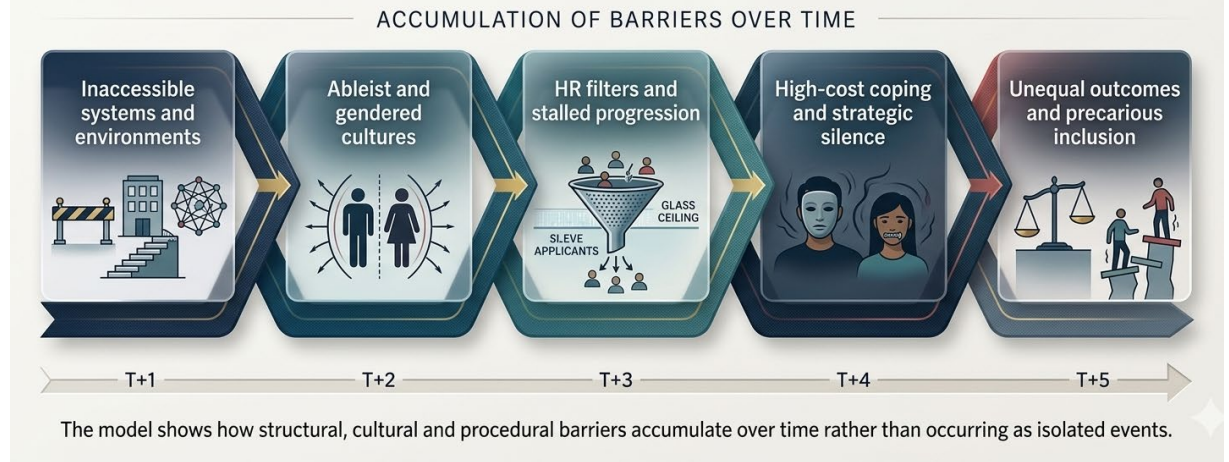


Figure 3. Mechanism model of workplace exclusion emerging from the findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets the findings in relation to the research questions, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and the integrated conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 1. The purpose of the discussion is not to repeat the findings, but to explain what they mean for understanding workplace discrimination against Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province, and why these experiences matter for theory, policy and practice.

The discussion proceeds thematically, while also drawing attention to the mechanism that links themes together. It argues that workplace exclusion is reproduced sequentially and relationally: inaccessible environments create dependence and friction; culture translates those conditions into lesser worth; HR systems convert unequal conditions into apparently fair outcomes; and weak governance leaves employees to secure equality through private labour rather than public accountability.

5.2 Reading the findings through intersectionality, Black feminist thought and Critical Race Theory

The findings strongly affirm the value of intersectionality. Participants did not experience disability as a single category detached from race, gender and place. Rather, disability was lived through racialised and gendered assumptions about competence, professionalism, vulnerability and gratitude. This is precisely the type of complexity that intersectionality was designed to illuminate: harms that are obscured when institutions treat race, gender and disability as separate administrative categories rather than mutually constitutive systems of power (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; McCall, 2005).

Black feminist thought adds a critical insight into credibility and standpoint. Participants' narratives show that Black women with physical disabilities were not merely excluded from infrastructure or opportunity; they were often denied full recognition as authoritative knowers of their own workplace needs. When participants explained what support was required, they were frequently met with delay, humour or disbelief. This resonates with Collins' (2000) argument that Black women's knowledge is routinely subordinated within dominant institutional frameworks.

CRT further sharpens the analysis by drawing attention to how apparently neutral procedures reproduced patterned disadvantage. Requirements around mobility, timing, manual driving, performance and promotion may appear universal, yet they were enacted within labour markets and workplaces already structured by racialised inequality. The narratives in this study operate as counter-stories that expose how institutional neutrality can mask substantive injustice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

5.3 Theme 1 revisited: structural and environmental barriers as institutional discrimination

The first major interpretive insight is that structural barriers are not merely background conditions. They are active forms of institutional discrimination. Participants' accounts of inaccessible toilets, stairs, transport burdens, tools and field sites show that exclusion began before any interpersonal hostility occurred. This confirms the central claim of the social model of disability: environments and systems can disable people in practice even where no one openly declares discriminatory intent (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2014).

In the South African context, these findings are particularly significant because the Code of Good Practice explicitly frames accessibility and reasonable accommodation as employer responsibilities (Department of Labour, 2015). The persistence of these barriers therefore reveals more than neglect; it reveals a failure to translate rights into organisational routines. The fact that workers had to keep asking for basic access indicates that accessibility was not embedded into the normal design of work.

The Eastern Cape context deepens this point. Provincial rurality, unreliable transport and uneven infrastructure magnified the significance of workplace barriers. A step, inaccessible vehicle or distant site did not simply create inconvenience; it could determine whether work was possible at all. This extends existing literature by showing that accommodation in spatially unequal settings must include transport and geographical access, not only workstation adjustments.

These findings also help explain why some participants interpreted inaccessibility as an affront to dignity. When a workplace remains materially inaccessible after hiring a disabled worker, it communicates that the organisation is willing to benefit from the worker's labour

without restructuring itself around equal participation. In this sense, structural barriers operate symbolically as well as practically.

5.4 Theme 2 revisited: culture, ableism and conditional belonging

The second major insight concerns organisational culture. Participants' experiences of infantilisation, surveillance, ridicule and social exclusion show that formal policy cannot produce inclusion where everyday organisational meaning remains ableist. Campbell (2009) and Goodley (2014) argue that ableism functions not only through exclusionary structures but through normative assumptions about which bodies count as productive, autonomous and fully human. The present study supports this argument strongly.

What is particularly striking is that culture mediated the interpretation of material barriers. An inaccessible building in a respectful organisation may be treated as a correctable problem. The same barrier in an ableist culture becomes evidence that the worker is difficult, slow or dependent. Culture therefore shaped whether participants were approached as valued employees or as administratively troublesome exceptions.

The findings also suggest that ableism was gendered and racialised. Participants were expected to remain patient, grateful and non-confrontational even when their needs were ignored. This resembles what might be called conditional belonging: inclusion is permitted so long as the employee does not disturb institutional comfort. Such dynamics help explain why participants often censored themselves. Silence was not passivity; it was a survival strategy within unequal power relations.

These results align with Bam and Ronnie's (2020) argument that workplace inclusion cannot be measured adequately without attending to belonging and relational recognition. They also connect with Trani et al. (2020), whose work on stigma in South Africa underscores how discrimination affects self-worth and social participation. The current study extends this insight into the workplace by showing how cultural disrespect shapes whether a worker feels safe to request support, challenge injustice or imagine advancement.

5.5 Theme 3 revisited: "neutral" HR rules and career stagnation

Theme 3 shows how discrimination can be built into seemingly ordinary HR systems. Recruitment filters, promotion delays, inaccessible training and performance expectations detached from actual support all illustrate how procedural neutrality can conceal unequal effect.

This is an important contribution because it shifts analysis away from overt prejudice alone toward the organisational production of disadvantage.

Potgieter et al. (2017) found that employees with disabilities in South Africa encounter career plateaus and restricted advancement. The present study confirms and deepens that finding by showing how such stagnation is produced. Workers were not simply failing to progress; they were often evaluated within systems that controlled the conditions under which performance evidence could be generated. Missing equipment, inaccessible travel requirements and diminished recognition all narrowed what could later count as merit.

This is where the concept of resource gating becomes analytically valuable. Organisations gate access to the tools, environments, training and supervisory support that enable strong performance, and then use the resulting performance record to justify unequal outcomes. In such cases, discrimination is procedural and cumulative. It does not require an employer to say that a disabled woman is less capable; it only requires the institution to withhold the enabling conditions of capability.

Maclean et al. (2024) provide a useful counterpoint. Their Western Cape case study suggests that when recruitment and inclusion systems are intentional, participatory and operationalised, disability targets become more achievable. The contrast with the current findings is instructive: the problem is not lack of possible solutions, but the absence of managerial will and accountability in many settings.

5.6 Theme 4 revisited: agency under constraint and the hidden costs of employability

Participants' strategies of overperformance, careful self-management, selective voice and alliance-building demonstrate that disabled workers are not passive. Yet the discussion must resist converting these strategies into celebratory narratives of resilience. The participants' accounts instead show that agency often emerged because institutions failed. Workers had to carry the labour of making the workplace function for them.

This resonates with rights-based disability analysis. Under the UNCRPD, equality should not depend on the individual capacity to negotiate or absorb exclusion (United Nations, 2006). When participants worked 'ten times harder', withheld complaints or relied on a single ally to remain at work, they were effectively subsidising institutional non-compliance with private labour. This is a hidden cost of employability rarely visible in policy reporting.

The findings also reveal a temporal dimension of exclusion. Over time, coping strategies can exhaust workers, shape career aspiration and narrow the horizon of what seems possible. This is an important corrective to inclusion discourse that treats retention as success without asking what retention costs the worker. A woman may remain employed while experiencing chronic overwork, silence and stalled progression. Such employment is formally inclusive but substantively unequal.

5.7 Theme 5 revisited: policy strength versus implementation credibility

Theme 5 underscores a central contradiction of the South African disability-rights landscape: the policy architecture is comparatively strong, but implementation remains uneven. Participants described disability desks, forums and policies that existed symbolically yet lacked budgets, clear responsibility, monitoring and consequence. This finding supports the argument made throughout the dissertation that policy existence is not equivalent to policy effect.

The Commission for Employment Equity continues to report limited progress in disability representation across occupational levels (Commission for Employment Equity, 2024). The present study adds depth to that macro picture by showing how implementation failure is lived from below. For participants, non-compliance appeared not as abstract statistical underperformance but as repeated delay, emotional fatigue, procedural confusion and exposure to ridicule.

Participants' calls for documented workflows, designated officials, timelines, budgets and participatory monitoring are therefore analytically significant. They identify accountability as the missing bridge between rights and practice. In effect, the findings suggest that disability inclusion should be audited as an organisational system, not merely celebrated as a value statement.

5.8 A mechanism model of workplace exclusion

When read together, the themes reveal a mechanism model of workplace exclusion. First, inaccessible environments and job designs create practical constraints. Second, organisational culture interprets those constraints through ableist, racialised and gendered assumptions, reducing credibility and belonging. Third, HR procedures convert the resulting disadvantage into apparently fair assessments of fit, performance or promotability. Fourth, workers respond through self-advocacy, overcompensation and selective silence. Fifth, weak

governance allows the cycle to persist unless an exceptional manager, colleague or union intervention interrupts it.

This model helps explain why anti-discrimination law alone has not eliminated harm. Legal norms are mediated by infrastructure, managerial interpretation and everyday practice. In other words, the institution does not merely implement law; it translates law through its own routines, priorities and cultures. Where that translation is weak, rights become aspirational rather than routine.

The mechanism model also clarifies why inclusion must be anticipatory rather than reactive. Waiting for workers to ask repeatedly for access places the burden on those already disadvantaged. By contrast, anticipatory design, participatory planning and auditable accommodation systems redistribute responsibility back to the institution.

5.9 Contribution to knowledge

This dissertation makes four principal contributions. First, it contributes a province-specific, participant-centred account of how workplace discrimination is produced at the intersection of race, gender, disability and place. By foregrounding the Eastern Cape, the study broadens South African workplace scholarship beyond urban and generic institutional assumptions.

Second, the study contributes an operational understanding of discrimination. It shows that exclusion is not only interpersonal or attitudinal but also procedural and infrastructural. This helps bridge feminist, disability and labour scholarship with implementation concerns such as budgeting, procurement, reporting and workflow design.

Third, the dissertation advances the concept of resource gating as a mechanism of indirect discrimination. The findings show how the unequal distribution of enabling conditions can later be reinterpreted as neutral evidence of limited performance or fit.

Fourth, the dissertation contributes to policy and organisational debate by demonstrating that participatory governance is not an optional consultative add-on. It is central to credible disability inclusion because workers with disabilities hold indispensable knowledge about practical barriers and workable solutions.

5.10 Implications for policy and practice

The study has several practical implications. For employers, accessibility should be treated as core business rather than discretionary support. This means linking accessibility audits to facilities planning, procurement cycles and digital systems; creating clear accommodation workflows; and reviewing job descriptions and performance indicators for unjustified physical assumptions.

For HR departments, the findings indicate that disabled employees should never be evaluated for performance or promotion without first receiving the tools, adjustments and supervisory support necessary to perform equitably. For managers, the findings underscore the need for anti-ableism and disability-rights training that goes beyond general sensitivity language to address concrete decision points such as workload allocation, meeting practices, communication and evaluation.

For regulators and policy actors, the dissertation suggests that employment-equity reporting should be more tightly linked to compliance on accommodation, accessibility and complaint handling. Representation alone cannot capture the quality of inclusion. For unions and advocacy organisations, the findings support stronger legal literacy, participatory monitoring and collective strategies that reduce the isolation of disabled workers.

5.10.1 Why rights fail in practice: discretion, culture, and organisational capacity

One of the most important insights generated by the discussion is that the failure of disability rights at work is seldom due to the complete absence of norms. In the South African case, constitutional, labour, equality, and disability-policy instruments are comparatively robust. Yet participants' accounts show that rights routinely fail at the level of implementation because organisational discretion remains weakly structured and weakly monitored. Managers decide whether requests are urgent, whether accommodations are affordable, whether duties can be reorganised, whether comments amount to harassment, and whether escalation is treated as legitimate or troublesome. In this discretionary space, rights are translated—or not translated—into everyday practice. The findings therefore support a socio-legal view in which implementation failure is not a secondary problem following law, but a central site where inequality is reproduced (Holness, 2016; Basson, 2023).

Organisational culture is equally important. Where disability is understood through charity, inconvenience, or exceptionalism, even technically correct policies may be enacted in ways that undermine dignity. Employees may receive ad hoc assistance while remaining excluded from decision-making, advancement, or relational recognition. By contrast, the literature suggests that more enabling institutions tend to normalise accommodation, distribute responsibility beyond a single champion, and make disability inclusion part of routine management rather than an occasional act of goodwill (Maclean et al., 2024). The present findings align with this view: what participants wanted was not benevolence, but predictable systems, credible accountability, and everyday professional respect.

Capacity also matters, but it should not be invoked as a neutral excuse. Resource constraints are real, particularly in unequal provinces and public institutions under pressure. However, the data suggest that many exclusionary practices were not expensive problems awaiting large budgets; they were failures of planning, prioritisation, documentation, and managerial seriousness. The dissertation therefore argues that implementation gaps must be analysed through a political economy of organisational attention. What an institution budgets for, measures, and treats as urgent becomes governable. What it leaves to informal negotiation remains fragile. This insight shifts the discussion from generic calls for awareness toward the more concrete question of how disability equality is embedded in core systems of budgeting, procurement, supervision, monitoring, and grievance response.

5.10.2 Implications for transformation, feminist disability justice, and institutional reform

The findings also carry broader implications for how transformation is understood in South African workplaces. Transformation discourse often foregrounds demographic representation, policy compliance, or the formal existence of equity structures. While these remain important, the present study shows that demographic presence alone is a weak indicator of justice. A workplace may employ disabled women and still reproduce ableist, racialised, and gendered relations that limit dignity, participation, and progression. A feminist disability justice perspective is therefore useful because it asks not only who is present, but whose body is treated as the norm, whose pace is recognised as legitimate, whose discomfort is seen as actionable, and whose future is imagined within the organisation. In this sense, the study extends

transformation debates beyond counting bodies toward evaluating whether institutions are reorganising themselves around substantive equality.

Feminist disability justice also highlights the uneven distribution of hidden labour. Participants repeatedly described having to monitor access, explain needs, manage others' discomfort, and drive processes that should have been routine organisational responsibilities. This labour is interpretively important because it reveals how inclusion can be formally promised while practically outsourced to those already carrying the burden of exclusion. The study therefore supports a justice-oriented reform agenda in which accommodation is institutionalised, complaint processes are protected, and disability governance is not dependent on the persistence of individual employees. Such reform is not only administratively desirable; it is ethically necessary if workplaces are to move from symbolic inclusion toward durable participation.

Institutional reform, in turn, requires attention to scale. Some changes are local and immediate, such as providing equipment, redesigning offices, or improving meeting access. Others are meso-level, including line-manager training, performance-system redesign, or monitored accommodation workflows. Still others are structural, such as accessible transport planning, stronger labour inspection, and better alignment between employment policy and disability-rights implementation. The discussion therefore suggests that workplace discrimination is best understood as a multi-level governance problem. Any response that targets attitudes alone will be too thin; any response that targets law alone will be too distant from everyday practice. What is required is a layered strategy linking policy, management, infrastructure, and protected employee voice.

Table 5.2 distils the main rights-implementation gaps that emerged from the discussion and links them to corresponding institutional reform priorities. The table is intended to move the analysis from diagnosis to action by showing how the barriers described by participants translate into concrete areas for organisational and policy intervention. In doing so, it highlights that workplace exclusion is sustained not only by formal policy weakness, but also by failures of implementation, accountability, and institutional culture.

Table 5.2. Rights-implementation gaps and institutional reform priorities are emerging from the discussion.

Discussion issue	What the findings show	Implication for reform
Accommodation	Requests were delayed, discretionary, or framed as favour rather than right	Create auditable workflows, named decision-makers, budgets, and appeal pathways.
Culture	Everyday ableism persisted through ridicule, infantilisation, and exclusion	Embed anti-ableist practice in supervision, induction, and managerial accountability.
Progression	Advancement was shaped by inaccessible development and tokenistic recognition	Review promotion, training access, and performance criteria for indirect discrimination.
Voice	Workers feared victimisation and often self-managed escalation	Protect whistleblowing, strengthen grievance pathways, and monitor retaliation risk.
Place and mobility	Transport and off-site access affected retention and task allocation	Treat accessibility as a chain of access extending beyond the office building.

Source: Author's own compilation from Chapter 4 findings and Chapter 5 discussion.

5.10.3 Toward a participant-grounded model of accountable inclusion

Drawing the findings and literature together, the dissertation proposes a participant-grounded model of accountable inclusion. The model begins from a simple premise: inclusion becomes credible only when employees can enter, move through, participate in, and progress within work without having to convert ordinary access needs into extraordinary personal battles. On this view, accountability has at least four linked dimensions. The first is material accountability, which concerns the built environment, transport arrangements, assistive devices, and job tools required for equal participation. The second is procedural accountability, which concerns documentation, decision-making, timeframes, escalation routes, and review mechanisms. The third is relational accountability, which concerns how workers are spoken to, believed, supervised, and recognised as full professionals. The fourth is developmental accountability, which concerns whether disabled women are afforded genuine access to learning, visibility, and advancement rather than being retained at the margins of organisational life.

The value of this model is that it avoids the reduction of inclusion to any single domain. A workplace may perform well materially but fail relationally, for example by providing equipment while tolerating ridicule or paternalism. It may perform procedurally but fail developmentally by retaining disabled women in static roles without meaningful progression. Conversely, an organisation may have supportive interpersonal relations but fail materially and procedurally if equipment, transport, and accessible facilities remain unresolved. The model therefore encourages examiners, policymakers, and employers to ask a broader set of questions about what equal participation actually requires in practice. This aligns with intersectionality because the adequacy of inclusion cannot be judged solely by whether disability is mentioned in policy; it must be judged through the patterned experience of those located at multiple axes of disadvantage.

Importantly, accountable inclusion is not only a workplace management agenda. It also has implications for labour inspection, union practice, public procurement, and provincial planning. Institutions that contract services, fund programmes, or regulate employment can reinforce accountability by making accessibility and accommodation performance visible and consequential. The model advanced here therefore represents not a universal formula, but an empirically grounded framework for evaluating whether the rights of Black women with physical disabilities are being translated into lived equality. It is one of the dissertation's key conceptual contributions because it emerges directly from participants' narratives while remaining legible to policy and organisational practice.

Table 5.3 presents a participant-grounded model of accountable inclusion developed from the study findings and discussion. The table brings together the key dimensions through which meaningful workplace inclusion can be assessed, moving beyond symbolic compliance to a more practical and evaluative understanding of accountability. By identifying material, procedural, relational, and developmental dimensions, the model offers a concise framework for thinking about what institutions must do if inclusion is to be experienced as real, durable, and just in the everyday working lives of Black women with physical disabilities.

Table 5.3. Participant-grounded model of accountable inclusion developed from the study.

Dimension of accountable inclusion	Core question	Illustrative institutional requirement
Material accountability	Can the employee physically access work, tools, and work-related mobility?	Accessible facilities, transport planning, equipment, and task redesign.
Procedural accountability	Are requests and complaints processed transparently and timeously?	Documented workflows, named decision-makers, appeal routes, and monitoring.
Relational accountability	Is the worker treated as credible, competent, and fully human?	Anti-ableist supervision, respectful communication, and safe disclosure conditions.
Developmental accountability	Can the worker train, progress, and exercise professional voice?	Equitable access to training, promotion, acting roles, and protected participation.

Source: Author's own compilation from participant-grounded findings and discussion.

5.11 Limitations of the discussion

Although the discussion has drawn strong analytic conclusions, it is important to recognise the study's boundaries. The data are qualitative and contextual. The dissertation therefore does not claim universal explanation. Rather, it provides a theoretically informed account of one specific social location and its organisational implications.

At the same time, the consistency of the study's findings with wider South African and international literature suggests that the mechanisms identified here are unlikely to be idiosyncratic. They may be especially relevant to other settings where disability inclusion is shaped by poverty, rurality, gender inequality and weak institutional accountability.

5.12 Chapter summary

This chapter has interpreted the findings through intersectionality, Black feminist thought, CRT and disability theory. It has argued that workplace discrimination against Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape is reproduced through linked structural, cultural and procedural mechanisms, and that credible inclusion requires anticipatory design, enforceable accommodation and participatory governance. Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation and translates these insights into recommendations.

Figure 4 translates the study findings and discussion into a practical workflow for reasonable accommodation and institutional accountability. The figure is intended to show how accommodation should move from an informal, discretionary, and delayed process to a structured system with clear responsibilities, timelines, documentation, and review mechanisms. In this way, it provides an applied model for how workplaces can respond more consistently, fairly, and accountably to the needs and rights of employees with disabilities.



Figure 4. Proposed reasonable-accommodation and accountability workflow derived from the findings and discussion.

Table 5.1 brings the major findings of the study into direct conversation with the wider scholarly and policy literature, while also identifying their practical implications for workplace reform. The table is included to demonstrate that the patterns emerging from participants' accounts are not isolated observations, but are consistent with broader theoretical, empirical, and policy debates on disability inclusion and discrimination. By aligning the findings with existing literature and concrete institutional implications, the table helps to strengthen the analytical contribution of the dissertation and clarifies the relevance of the study for practice.

Table 5.1. Alignment between major findings, literature and practical implications.

Finding	Supporting literature	Practical implication
Inaccessibility is a form of institutional discrimination	Oliver (1990); Shakespeare (2014); Department of Labour (2015)	Accessibility must be planned and budgeted, not handled reactively

Finding	Supporting literature	Practical implication
Ableist culture mediates the effect of policy	Campbell (2009); Goodley (2014); Bam & Ronnie (2020)	Managerial training and respectful culture are central to inclusion
Neutral HR systems can generate unequal outcomes	Potgieter et al. (2017); Charles et al. (2023); Bonaccio et al. (2020)	Recruitment, performance and promotion systems require disability review
Self-advocacy carries hidden labour and cost	United Nations (2006); World Health Organization (2022)	Equality should not depend on workers privately absorbing institutional failure
Policy without accountability remains symbolic	Commission for Employment Equity (2024); Basson (2023); Maclean et al. (2024)	Institutions need timelines, focal persons, budgets and monitoring

Source: Author's own compilation aligning study findings with cited literature and practical implications.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the dissertation by drawing together the argument developed across the preceding chapters. It revisits the research purpose, synthesises the principal findings, answers the research questions, identifies the study's contribution to knowledge, acknowledges limitations and presents recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

6.2 Overall conclusion of the study

This dissertation set out to explore the lived experiences of workplace discrimination faced by Black women with physical disabilities in the Eastern Cape Province. The study has shown that workplace exclusion is not produced by impairment alone. Rather, it is generated through the interaction of inaccessible environments, ableist organisational cultures, inequitable HR systems, precarious coping and weak accountability structures.

The findings demonstrate a persistent gap between legal protection and organisational practice. South Africa's formal equality framework is comparatively strong, yet participants continued to encounter delayed accommodation, ridicule, constrained voice, stalled progression and symbolic disability structures that offered limited practical protection. The study therefore confirms that rights-based inclusion requires more than policy existence; it requires routine implementation, institutional learning and enforceable accountability.

6.3 Synthesis of key findings

First, structural and environmental barriers remained central. Inaccessible buildings, toilets, transport arrangements, work sites and tools undermined independent participation, privacy and performance. These barriers were often treated as secondary inconveniences rather than equality issues.

Second, organisational culture normalised everyday ableism. Infantilisation, microaggressions, ridicule and exclusion communicated that participants were present on conditional terms. These relational harms shaped whether workers felt safe to disclose needs or challenge unfair treatment.

Third, careers were constrained by neutral-seeming procedures. Recruitment filters, inaccessible training, delayed equipment and promotion systems that discounted competence reproduced unequal occupational futures.

Fourth, participants exercised significant agency, but that agency was costly. They overperformed, self-managed, set boundaries, escalated complaints and depended on thin support networks. These strategies enabled survival but did not solve structural injustice.

Fifth, policy and governance structures were often symbolic rather than operational. Participants consistently called for functional disability structures, named responsibility, accommodation workflows, protected voice and participatory inclusion.

6.4 Responses to the research questions

Research question 1 asked what forms of discrimination Black women with physical disabilities experience in the workplace. The study found structural, cultural, procedural and relational forms of discrimination, including inaccessibility, accommodation denial or delay, ridicule, social exclusion, inequitable performance evaluation and blocked advancement.

Research question 2 asked how organisational structures and everyday workplace practices shape these experiences. The findings show that inaccessible infrastructure, weak accommodation systems, rigid job criteria, managerial discretion and everyday interpersonal practices collectively translate formal rights into unequal lived realities.

Research question 3 asked how intersecting identities influence the production and experience of discrimination. The study found that race, gender, disability and place were deeply intertwined. Participants navigated not only disability stigma, but also racialised and gendered assumptions about competence, dependence, professionalism and voice.

Research question 4 asked what changes are required to move disability inclusion from symbolic compliance to practical accountability. The findings indicate that institutions need auditable accommodation systems, designated responsibility, budgeted interventions, participatory governance, inclusive performance and recruitment systems, and protected mechanisms for raising concerns.

6.5 Contribution to knowledge

The dissertation contributes to scholarship on disability and work in South Africa by centring Black women with physical disabilities in a province-specific analysis. It expands intersectional disability scholarship by demonstrating that place and infrastructure are not contextual leftovers but constitutive elements of labour-market inequality.

It also contributes methodologically by showing the value of a qualitative phenomenological design for understanding how policy failure is lived. Compliance statistics may reveal underrepresentation, but they do not show the emotional labour, strategic silence and dignity harms through which exclusion is sustained.

Finally, the study contributes conceptually by identifying the sequential mechanism through which inaccessible systems, ableist culture, HR procedures and weak governance co-produce unequal employment outcomes. This mechanism-based account offers a useful framework for future research and organisational diagnosis.

6.6 Limitations of the study

As a qualitative inquiry with a focused sample, the findings are not intended for statistical generalisation. The dissertation offers contextual and analytic depth rather than numerical representativeness. The focus on Black women with physical disabilities was analytically deliberate, but it means that the findings should not be presumed to capture all experiences of women with disabilities or all impairment categories.

Some participants described prior employment, meaning that memory and retrospective interpretation shaped aspects of the dataset. Remote interviewing widened access but may also have influenced rapport and the depth of disclosure for some participants. Nonetheless, the consistency of patterns across participants and their alignment with wider literature support the analytic credibility of the study.

6.7 Recommendations

The recommendations below are organised by level of responsibility because sustainable inclusion cannot be secured by individual employees alone. It requires coordinated action by employers, regulators, labour actors and disability-rights stakeholders.

6.7.1 Recommendations for employers

Employers should conduct routine accessibility audits that cover not only entrances and toilets but also circulation routes, workstations, software, communication channels, meeting practices, emergency procedures and work-related transport demands. Audit findings should be linked to timelines, budgets and follow-up reviews rather than kept as generic compliance reports.

Every organisation should establish a written reasonable-accommodation workflow that includes request acknowledgement, assessment with employee participation, decision-making timeframes, funding responsibility, implementation monitoring and appeal or escalation pathways. Accommodation must be handled as a routine organisational system rather than as a favour negotiated case by case.

Employers should also review recruitment, job descriptions, testing requirements, probation systems and performance indicators for indirect discrimination. Where physical assumptions are not genuinely essential to the work, they should be removed or replaced with inclusive alternatives.

6.7.2 Recommendations for human resource departments and line managers

HR departments should receive disability-rights and anti-ableism training that is practical, not merely awareness-oriented. Training should include confidentiality, disclosure, accommodation assessment, communication, performance management, grievance handling and the intersectional dimensions of race and gender.

Line managers should not evaluate disabled employees as though everyone works under identical conditions. Fair assessment requires that tools, access and supports are in place before performance judgments are made. Managers should also create regular check-in mechanisms through which disabled employees can raise concerns without fear of ridicule or retaliation.

6.7.3 Recommendations for government and regulators

The Department of Employment and Labour and related oversight bodies should strengthen the link between employment-equity reporting and accommodation compliance. Organisations should be required not only to report representation numbers but also to report on unresolved accommodation requests, average response times, accessibility planning and the functioning of disability structures.

Government planning in provinces such as the Eastern Cape should recognise accessible transport and infrastructure as employment issues. Workplace inclusion will remain incomplete if disabled workers cannot reliably reach, enter and move within work sites and related public services.

6.7.4 Recommendations for unions and disability-rights organisations

Because participants described escalation to unions, disability forums and senior officials as one of the few ways unresolved accommodation concerns could gain attention, unions and advocacy organisations should strengthen disability-rights literacy among workers, particularly around reasonable accommodation, documentation, grievance pathways and protection against retaliation. Collective support can reduce the isolation that many participants described and can help ensure that voice is protected rather than individualised.

Disability-rights organisations should also be involved in workplace learning and monitoring initiatives that move inclusion beyond symbolic observance days or policy launches. This recommendation is grounded in the study's finding that participatory inclusion is more credible when lived expertise is included in decision-making, review and accountability processes.

6.7.5 Recommendations for future research

Future research should undertake comparative studies across provinces to examine how rurality, sector and institutional form influence disability inclusion. Longitudinal research would also be valuable for tracing how accommodation decisions affect retention, promotion, well-being and exit over time.

There is further need for scholarship on Black women with disabilities in leadership trajectories, informal work, digital and hybrid workplaces, and precarious employment settings where protections may be weaker but dependence on self-advocacy even greater.

These future-research directions could be developed into a doctoral study that compares disability-inclusive employment across provinces, sectors and impairment groups. A doctoral project could examine how accommodation decisions unfold over time, how union and regulator involvement shapes outcomes, and how provincial infrastructure conditions influence retention, well-being and career progression for women with disabilities.

6.7.6 Implementation priorities and monitoring indicators

For the recommendations of this dissertation to move beyond aspiration, they must be translated into implementable priorities with measurable indicators. At organisational level, the first priority is to formalise accommodation as a monitored workflow rather than an informal series of requests. This means recording requests, turnaround times, reasons for approval or refusal, costs, review dates, and responsible decision-makers. Monitoring should not be limited to whether an item was eventually provided; it should also assess whether delays affected performance, well-being, or attendance. A second priority is to integrate disability inclusion into management systems that already carry organisational authority, including induction, procurement, facilities planning, supervision, performance review, and occupational health processes. When disability is left at the margins of ordinary governance, it becomes dependent on exceptional advocacy and is therefore experienced as unstable.

Third, organisations should monitor progression-related indicators rather than representation alone. These include training participation, internal promotion rates, acting opportunities, performance-review outcomes, retention patterns, and the distribution of high-visibility assignments among disabled employees. Such indicators can help reveal whether a workplace is retaining disabled women in static roles while celebrating symbolic inclusion. Fourth, grievance pathways should be monitored for accessibility and safety. Institutions should record disability-related complaints, the time taken to resolve them, the proportion escalated beyond line management, and whether complainants reported retaliation or deterioration in working relationships after speaking up. These indicators would provide a much stronger basis for accountability than broad policy statements or occasional awareness events.

At provincial and national level, labour and disability-rights stakeholders can use aggregated monitoring to identify recurring implementation bottlenecks, such as inaccessible buildings, chronic equipment delays, transport barriers, or weak local dispute-resolution capacity. The broader lesson is that accountability must be designed. Workplaces do not become inclusive merely because the right values have been declared; they become more inclusive when expectations are specified, responsibilities are named, evidence is reviewed, and inaction carries consequences. The implementation orientation outlined here therefore strengthens the practical relevance of the dissertation and clarifies how participant-grounded recommendations can support sustained institutional change.

Table 6.1 proposes a set of monitoring indicators to support the implementation of the dissertation's recommendations in a practical and measurable way. The table is intended to show that meaningful inclusion requires not only policy commitments and institutional reform, but also ongoing systems for tracking whether change is actually taking place. By linking each priority area to a concrete indicator, the table provides a basis for assessing progress, identifying persistent gaps, and strengthening accountability over time.

Table 6.1. Suggested monitoring indicators for implementing the dissertation's recommendations.

Priority area	Suggested indicator	Why it matters
Accommodation	Average turnaround time from request to decision and implementation	Measures whether support is timely enough to protect equal participation.
Accessibility	Number of unresolved built-environment barriers by site and quarter	Keeps physical access visible as a management issue rather than an individual complaint.
Progression	Training, promotion, and acting-opportunity rates for disabled women employees	Helps detect hidden career stagnation despite formal inclusion.
Voice and grievance	Disability-related complaints resolved and retaliation reports tracked	Assesses whether workers can raise concerns without fear.
Governance	Frequency of disability forum meetings and completion of action items	Tests whether inclusion structures are functional and not merely symbolic.

Source: Author's own compilation from the study recommendations.

6.7.7 Directions for institutional self-audit

A useful practical extension of this dissertation is the idea of institutional self-audit. Organisations often express commitment to disability inclusion but lack a structured method for assessing whether everyday practices align with that commitment. A self-audit should therefore move beyond counting employees with disabilities and instead examine the ordinary systems through which exclusion or inclusion is produced. At minimum, employers should review the accessibility of recruitment processes, application platforms, interview venues, transport expectations, induction materials, office layouts, toilets, emergency procedures, digital systems, grievance channels, and promotion criteria. Such an audit should also ask whether disabled

women are represented in decision-making forums and whether complaint data reveal patterns of delay, stigma, or retaliation. The audit becomes meaningful when it is linked to action plans, budget lines, named responsibilities, and periodic reporting to senior leadership.

Self-audit is especially valuable because it shifts the locus of inquiry from individual deficit to institutional preparedness. Instead of asking whether a worker can cope with existing arrangements, the organisation asks whether its arrangements are compatible with the diversity of workers it claims to include. This approach aligns with the social model of disability and with the rights-based emphasis of the UNCRPD and the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It also supports organisational learning. Repeated audits can identify which barriers are recurring, which departments resolve issues effectively, and where inclusion depends too heavily on informal champions. Over time, these insights can inform procurement standards, facilities planning, supervisory practice, and internal accountability structures.

For public institutions in particular, self-audit also has a democratic significance. Public employers are not merely private workplaces; they are visible sites through which constitutional commitments are enacted. When they fail to provide accessible, respectful, and equitable employment, the gap between constitutional promise and lived reality becomes especially stark. The dissertation therefore recommends that self-audit be treated not as a discretionary corporate exercise but as part of substantive equality governance. Used well, it can convert participant-grounded lessons from this study into a living organisational practice of reflection, measurement, and repair.

6.7.8 Concise policy proposal for relevant stakeholders

Based on the findings, the dissertation proposes that relevant stakeholders adopt a Disability-Inclusive Workplace Accountability Framework for provincial workplaces. The proposed framework should require employers to maintain written accommodation procedures, budget lines for accessibility, designated disability focal persons, time-bound response standards, confidential documentation systems and periodic reporting on unresolved barriers. This policy proposal is intended for employers, the Department of Employment and Labour, disability-rights organisations, unions and institutional transformation offices.

The framework should also require participatory review by employees with disabilities so that inclusion is not designed without those most affected by workplace barriers. At

minimum, annual reporting should cover accessibility audits, accommodation turnaround times, disability-related grievances, training and promotion outcomes, retaliation concerns and remedial actions taken. Such a proposal translates the study's recommendations into a practical accountability instrument that can be adapted to public, private and non-profit workplaces.

6.8 Final reflection

At its core, this dissertation is a study about dignity at work. The participants did not ask for exceptionalism. They asked for workplaces that listen, plan, respect and respond. Their accounts make clear that inclusion cannot be measured solely by whether a disabled woman is on the payroll. It must also be measured by whether she can move, contribute, belong, progress and speak without being diminished.

A defensible disability-inclusion agenda in South Africa must therefore ask not only who is present, but how that presence is organised, valued and sustained. If institutions take seriously the lessons from this study, then workplace inclusion can move from symbolic compliance to practical justice.

Table 6.2 presents an indicative implementation matrix derived from the study findings and recommendations. The table is intended to translate the dissertation's arguments into a more practical planning framework by identifying key action areas, responsible actors, realistic time horizons, and expected outputs. In doing so, it reinforces the position that disability-inclusive employment requires coordinated institutional action rather than broad commitments alone.

Table 6.2. Indicative implementation matrix derived from the study findings.

Action area	Lead actor(s)	Time horizon	Indicative output
Accessibility audits and adaptation plans	Employers; facilities units	0–12 months	Audit report and prioritised remediation plan
Formal accommodation workflow	HR; disability focal point	0–6 months	Written procedure and response-time tracking
Manager and staff anti-ableism training	HR; external trainers	6–12 months	Training records and evaluation data

Action area	Lead actor(s)	Time horizon	Indicative output
Link EE reporting to accommodation compliance	Department of Employment and Labour; CEE	12–24 months	Expanded reporting and oversight indicators
Participatory disability governance	Employers; unions; employee representatives	0–12 months	Functional disability forum with minutes and action log

Source: Author's own compilation from the study findings and recommendations.

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APPENDICES

The appendices that follow provide supporting material for the dissertation and are intended to strengthen transparency, auditability, and practical usefulness. They supplement the main text and are not a substitute for the analysis in Chapters 1–6.

APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview guide was designed to elicit detailed accounts of workplace discrimination, accommodation, organisational culture, and participant recommendations. Questions were open ended, flexible, and responsive to participants' pacing and comfort.

Section A: Introduction and rapport

- Please tell me a little about yourself and the kind of work you do or have done.
- How would you describe your disability in your own words, and what kinds of workplace adjustments, if any, are important for you?

Section B: Access to work and entry into employment

- Can you describe your experiences of looking for work or entering your current or previous workplace?
- Were there any aspects of recruitment, interview processes, travel, or orientation that felt inaccessible or exclusionary?

Section C: Everyday workplace experience

- What has your day-to-day experience at work been like as a Black woman with a physical disability?
- Can you describe any moments when you felt respected, included, ignored, underestimated, or treated unfairly?

Section D: Accommodation and support

- Have you ever requested support, adjustments, or changes to make your work easier or more equitable?
- How did managers, colleagues, or human-resources personnel respond?
- What happened when support was delayed or not provided?

Section E: Performance, progression, and voice

- How have your disability, gender, and race influenced how your work is judged?
- Have these factors shaped your opportunities for training, promotion, acting roles, or leadership?
- When problems arise, how safe do you feel raising concerns?

Section F: Recommendations

- What should employers do differently to make workplaces genuinely inclusive?
- What advice would you give to another woman with a physical disability entering employment?

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT SUMMARY

Participants received an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the approximate duration of the interview, the use of audio recording, and the measures taken to protect confidentiality.

Consent covered participation, recording, secure storage of data, use of anonymised quotations in the dissertation, and the right to decline any question or withdraw from the interview without penalty.

Because the study dealt with potentially distressing experiences of discrimination, participants were informed that they could pause the interview, reschedule, or stop at any point. Distress-sensitive interviewing and referral options formed part of the ethical protocol.

APPENDIX C: EXPANDED PARTICIPANT PROFILE NARRATIVES

P1 Mavi

Mavi's account reflected the cumulative effects of delayed equipment provision and the quiet normalisation of inequity. Her narrative demonstrated how a worker can remain formally included while lacking the basic tools necessary for equitable performance. She repeatedly framed accessibility as an organisational responsibility rather than a matter of personal resilience.

P2 Loleka

Loleka’s narrative foregrounded mobility, transport, and the fear of victimisation. Her account showed how travel expectations and assumptions about standard bodily function can shape access to work long before a person reaches the office. It also revealed how an insecure voice constrains the possibility of early resolution.

P5 Gxigxi

Gxigxi’s story highlighted stalled progression and the lingering suspicion that disabled employees are advanced only to satisfy compliance demands. Her narrative was analytically important because it illuminated how symbolic inclusion can coexist with delayed advancement and diminished professional recognition.

P8 Ncede

Ncede’s account illustrated the paradox of policy visibility without practical response. Although disability forums and internal structures existed, action required persistence and escalation. Her experiences helped clarify why governance arrangements must be judged by functionality rather than mere existence.

P11 Ntsangani

Ntsangani’s narrative condensed several of the dissertation’s central findings: long-term career stagnation, everyday ableism, and the demand to continuously prove competence. Her account showed that remaining employed does not necessarily mean that inclusion has been achieved.

APPENDIX D: EXTENDED LITERATURE MATRIX

This appendix expands the literature review by presenting a structured matrix of key sources used in the dissertation. It clarifies how each source contributed conceptually, contextually, methodologically, or practically to the final analysis.

Table A1. Extended literature matrix.

Source	Type	Central insight	Use in dissertation
Crenshaw (1989; 1991)	Theory / legal scholarship	Intersectionality explains how multiple systems of power produce distinctive harms.	Provided the core framework for analysing race, gender, and disability together.

Source	Type	Central insight	Use in dissertation
Collins (2000)	Black feminist theory	Knowledge is shaped by social location and power relations.	Supported the centring of Black women's lived experience as legitimate knowledge.
Oliver (1990); Shakespeare (2014)	Disability theory	Disability is produced through social and environmental barriers, though embodiment still matters.	Framed disability as relational rather than individual deficit.
Holness (2016); Basson (2023)	Socio-legal analysis	Formal equality does not automatically secure substantive workplace inclusion for women with disabilities.	Informed the critique of rights-implementation gaps.
Charles et al. (2023); Maclean et al. (2024)	South African empirical studies	Public-sector and enterprise contexts show both persistent barriers and conditions for partial progress.	Offered comparative South African workplace evidence.
Bonaccio et al. (2020); Wong et al. (2021)	International workplace reviews	Disclosure, stereotypes, accommodation, and organisational climate shape the employment cycle.	Supported analysis of disclosure, job design, and accommodation.

Source: Author's own compilation based on key sources used in the dissertation.

APPENDIX E: ORGANISATIONAL SELF-AUDIT CHECKLIST FOR DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT

The checklist below translates the dissertation's recommendations into a practical self-audit tool that employers, unions, and governance structures can adapt for internal review.

Table A2. Organisational self-audit checklist.

Checklist area	Key review questions	Status/notes
Recruitment and induction	Are adverts, application systems, interviews, and induction procedures accessible and free from unnecessary exclusionary requirements?	

Checklist area	Key review questions	Status/notes
Physical and digital accessibility	Can employees independently access offices, toilets, meetings, digital systems, and emergency procedures?	
Accommodation workflow	Are requests documented, reviewed timeously, and linked to budgets, appeal routes, and review dates?	
Management practice	Do line managers receive guidance on anti-ableist supervision, respectful communication, and protected disclosure?	
Career development	Are disabled women accessing training, promotion, acting opportunities, and visibility on equitable terms?	
Voice and grievance	Are complaints safe, accessible, confidential, and monitored for retaliation risk?	

Source: Author's own compilation for organisational self-audit use.