

Original Research Article

# Perceptions of State-Owned Enterprises on the Employment of People with Disabilities and Special Needs in Namibia: A Qualitative Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Previous research has shown that employers' attitudes can affect the hiring of People with Disabilities and Special Needs (PWDSN); however, there is insufficient research on the perceptions of Namibian state-owned enterprises (SOEs), their recruitment practices, and their compliance with national legislation and guidelines.

**Aim:** This study examined the views and experiences of SOE managers and HR personnel regarding the employment of PWDSN in Namibia.

**Methods:** A phenomenological qualitative research design was used for this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen participants who were recruited using purposive sampling. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim before thematic analysis. Adherence to the four ethics principles, comprising autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice, was maintained throughout the process.

**Results:** Five main themes were generated from the study. These relate to employee welfare; perceptions of impairments on performance abilities; employee experiences and exposure; work environment and employment procedures. Findings show that there are insufficient dedicated recruitment strategies for PWDSN and limited adherence to national policies and legislation. Recommendations include strategies for development and implementation of employment practices that are inclusive of people with disabilities and special needs within the SOEs.

**Conclusion & implications:** Despite some progress to ensure sustainable employment of PWDSN, there remain significant gaps and inequality in the development, understanding and implementation of inclusive employment practices within the SOEs included in this study. These findings are valuable for supporting decision-making across multiple stakeholder groups, including management, human resources personnel, health and safety officers, wellness coordinators, training and development teams, organisational planners, and recruitment professionals in SOEs in Namibia. The findings may also be applicable to other organizations operating under comparable employment policies and legislation. Furthermore, this study offers recommendations to support the implementation and consistent adherence to inclusive employment policies and legislation.

**Keywords:** Employment, persons with disabilities, job accommodations, human rights, state-owned enterprise, Namibia

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## INTRODUCTION

The Namibian Constitution, together with the Affirmative Action Act (1998) and the National Disability Council Act (2004), provides legal protection for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs (PWDSN) by prohibiting discrimination and promoting equitable employment opportunities for groups historically marginalized from mainstream labour markets (Hindjou, 2022). In Namibia, approximately 53.4 % employees work in the private sector, 21.5 % are employed by government, 17.5% work in other settings such as private households and 7.6 % work for State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2018). Although SOEs account for 7.6 % of Namibia's formal workforce, there is an absence of research on the role of SOEs in addressing the employment inequalities faced by PWDSN. SOEs in Namibia are responsible for key services such as water, ports, electricity and energy. Therefore, they have a significant responsibility to ensure that inclusive employment policies are in line with the Government of the Republic of Namibia directives (Paulus, 2022). The SOEs in Namibia have a total estimated financial portfolio of \$N119 billion, which is an equivalent of 49% of Namibia's GDP (The Brief, 2023; World Bank, 2024). This makes the SOEs key players in employment and socio-economic landscape of the country.

The estimated number of Namibian PWDSN increased from 42,932 in 1991 to 98,413 in 2011, of which only 6,388 were employed (Chibaya et al., 2022). These numbers remain questionable due to the limited coverage of disabilities within the national housing and population census data variables. PWDSN constitute one of the most financially marginalized minority groups and are disproportionately excluded from the psychosocial, economic, and health benefits associated with meaningful employment (Tinta & Kolanisi, 2023). Disabilities and special needs encompass a wide spectrum of conditions, including physical, sensory, intellectual, psychiatric, neurological, neurodiverse, and learning disabilities, highlighting the diverse support requirements and structural barriers faced by this population (Wearmouth, 2022). 'Disability' describes conditions restricting a person's movements, senses, or activities, while special needs are the diverse requirements of individuals who have unique characteristics or circumstances and stigma (Carty et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2022). The National Disability Act, Act 26 of 2004 defines disability as "physical, mental or sensory impairment that alone, or in combination with social or environmental barriers, affects the ability of the person concerned to take part in educational, vocational, or recreational activities". These factors contribute significantly to the high unemployment rate among PWDSN, which requires urgent attention from State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) (Modise, 2022). Załuska et al. (2020) found that there is a link between employers' perceptions toward PWDSN and the factors contributing to their unemployment. These perceptions were found to be linked to: a job applicant's disability or special need status; the employer's previous experience and knowledge of PWDSN; recruitment strategies or practices; as well as policies and legal requirements (Strindlund, Abrandt-Dahlgren & Ståhl, 2019).

McKinney and Swartz (2021) highlighted the key role that employers' perceptions, attitudes, recruitment practices, and policies play a great role in shaping the employment landscape for PWDSN (Pinilla-Roncancio, et al., 2022). Despite it being the responsibility of SOE managers and human resource personnel to manage the employment process, many do not have the required knowledge and experience to recruit PWDSN (Maclean & Ned, 2024). Negative perceptions and prejudices also hamper the employment prospects of PWDSN, as there are misconceptions regarding their productivity and training costs (Malesa & Maleka, 2023). The inadequacy of policies and legislation to effectively include PWDSN in national development agendas is clear. *There is an absence of research on SOEs implementation and adherence to the policies and laws of the Government of Namibia; lack of accountability and enforcement mechanisms ensuring equitable representation of*

PWDSN in employment (Katulo & Mapudzi, 2024; Mahomed, Lord & Stein 2019; Padrón, Kovačević & Moreno, 2023; Breen, Havaei & Pitassi, 2019).

*Research investigating employers' perspectives of persons with disabilities and special needs found that PWDSN are minorities with minimal participation in the labour force compared to peers without disabilities and/or special needs (Schloemer-Jarvis, Bader & Böhm, 2022). Studies on the employers' perception present mixed or inconsistent research findings. Most studies found that employers' perception is an important factor in the employment of PWDSN (Kanobe et al., 2022). Positive and negative attributes influence the employers' perception and subsequently their attitudes, thus affecting the comparison, conclusions and application to the Namibian context (Goliath, 2022).*

There remains limited evidence on the development and implementation of policies and legislation governing the employment of persons with disabilities and special needs (Percy, 2018). This gap underscores the need to critically examine organisational efforts to uphold the rights and address the challenges faced by these employees, particularly in relation to equitable access to employment, retention, and opportunities for advancement (Blustein et al., 2019). The employers' perception in the Namibian SOEs is under-researched and there is a low rate of employment of PWDSN in the country with unemployment rate among PWDSN ranging from 34% to 91% in some regions (Ylinen, 2024; Engelbrecht, 2020, National Statistics Agency, 2019). Therefore, there is a need to establish the recruitment practices as well as the formulation and implementation of established disability policies and laws (Chichaya, Joubert & McColl, 2020). Therefore, this study explored the perceptions and experiences of Namibian SOEs regarding the employment of PWDSN, and assessed the extent to which these organisations promote and safeguard employees' rights (Chibaya, Naidoo & Govender, 2022). The findings indicate that many SOEs lack targeted recruitment strategies for PWDSN and demonstrate limited adherence to national disability- related policy and legislation. These gaps highlight the need for strengthened strategies that support the development and implementation of inclusive employment practices across SOEs in Namibia. A comprehensive understanding of employers' perceptions, recruitment practices, and policy adherence is necessary to create effective strategies to improve the employment prospects of PWDSN in Namibia (Załuska et al., 2020; Strindlund, Abrandt-Dahlgren & Ståhl, 2019).

## METHODS

A qualitative phenomenological research design was used in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the employment situation of PWDSN from the perspectives of SOE employers. This qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth understanding of phenomenon and context in which it occur (Holloway & Galvin, 2023). Grimaud, Gumbo and Le Belfou (2022) argue that a qualitative paradigm allows researchers to analyse data by examining phenomena within their natural context. Guided by this approach, the study explored the perspectives and experiences of SOE managers and HR personnel regarding the employment of PWDSN in Namibia. The Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) were applied to guide and structure the reporting of the study findings (O'Brien et al, 2014).

The study employed a multi-stage selection process for respondents. First, all State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) operating in Namibia as of March 1, 2019, were identified. Second, these SOEs were categorized into broad operational sectors: mining, agriculture, banking, housing, and telecommunications. Finally, one SOE sector was purposively selected from each of these five sectors. The inclusion criteria included fulltime employees in management/supervisory positions; involved in employee recruitment and overseeing implementation of organizational human resources policies and legislation. Approval was then obtained to conduct interviews with management and human resources

personnel at the selected organizations. Fifteen participants were included in the study, i.e., three from each of the five chosen organizations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Six interviews were held face-to-face and nine via telephone due to logistical challenges of meeting face to face. All participants were asked the same questions based on the identified literature gaps on the employment of PWDSN. Written consent for participating in the study and being audio recorded was obtained from all participants. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim before data analysis. The interview guide consisted of the following questions:

1. What is your perception of persons with disabilities and/or special needs as employees and colleagues?
2. How do you feel about working with people with disabilities and/or special needs? Is this the case with other employees?
3. Do you think employees in your organization are trained and/or informed on how to deal with issues of disability and special needs? Please elaborate.
4. Do you think your working environment is conducive for people with disabilities and/or special needs?
5. What are the current recruitment practices of people with disabilities and/or special need in your organization?
6. What do most employees feel about the employment of people with disabilities in your organization? Is that the same way you feel, too?
7. What are the available opportunities for people with disabilities and/or special needs in your organization?
8. To what extend does your organization implement national legislatures on the employment of people with disabilities and special needs?
9. In your view, are staff members equipped to implementing legislature on the employment of people with disabilities and/or special needs?
10. Are you satisfied with the way your organization is adhering to national guidelines and legislature? Please elaborate.
11. What are the barriers to employing people with disabilities and special needs?
12. What are the benefits of employing people with disabilities and special needs?

Thematic analysis was employed to explore participants' perceptions. As Herzog, Handke, and Hitters (2019) note, thematic analysis offers a flexible and robust approach for analysing qualitative data. This study followed the analytical procedures outlined by Reyes, Bogumil, and Welch (2024), which include familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and the production of a coherent analytical narrative. In order to mitigate the risk of bias, bracketing was used. According to Weatherford and Maitra (2019), bracketing is used to acknowledge and manage possible biases by suppressing assumptions to approach research data with openness and objectivity, thereby improving the credibility and rigor of the findings (Rashid et al., 2019).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The research received approval from the University of Liverpool. Approval to conduct the study was also obtained from the gatekeepers who are the leaders of the SOEs included in the study. Verbal and written consent were obtained from each participant prior to the commencement of the data collection processes. The study maintained the ethical consideration through voluntary participation, right of withdrawal, refusal to answer any questions as well as upholding of anonymity. To maintain anonymity, participants' names are not reported; instead, they are identified as Participant One through Participant Fifteen in the presentation of data.

## RESULTS

A total of fifteen participants, six females and nine males from SOEs across five economic sectors took part in the study. Most of the participants had experience working with PWDSN, with the exception of two participants. Table 1 shows the themes and sub-themes.

**Table 1:** Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Employee Welfare and Support	Opportunities and Benefits
	Aids and Assistance
Impairments and Performance	Physical Impairments
	Attitudes and productivity
Employee Experiences and Exposure	Positive and Negative Experiences
	Thoughts and Observations
Awareness Creation, Guidance, Knowledge and Understanding	Information Dissemination and Sensitization.
	Awareness and Access to Information
Working environment and employment processes	Inclusivity and Accessibility
	Recruitment Practices

### Theme 1: Employee welfare and support

This theme describes the employers' efforts to improve the well-being of PWDSN, i.e., creating a welcoming environment that promotes physical and emotional well-being, resulting in enhanced performance and staff morale.

#### *Sub-theme 1: Opportunities and benefits*

Despite employee welfare going further than health and safety management, adapting working conditions that accommodate different employees' needs is critical, as quoted by one SOE:

*"Employees with disabilities have same opportunities just like all employees. At times, the organization goes an extra mile for their equipment, alterations and training. There is also provision made in their medical aids for their needs." (P2)*

*"We employed quite a few of people with disabilities or special needs., For example, we can hire blind people to work as switchboard operators, or we can hire a person on a wheelchair to work as receptionist and so on." (P8)*

#### *Sub-theme 2: Aids and assistance*

This sub-theme is related to adjustments made or aids provided to promote accessibility, which enable PWDSN to be productive.

*"Support and aids position employees in a position to enable them to do their work properly." (P4)*

### Theme 2: Impairments and performance

The participants in this study see impairments and performance as an indicator for physical and mental functioning of employees, and how they contribute to the employee's fulfilment and executions of tasks and responsibilities.

#### *Sub-theme 1: Physical impairments*

This sub-theme captures the understanding of managers, HR personnel and others involved in recruiting PWDSN and their relationship to employee performance.

*"Limitations preventing people to move or act in a certain way or acting normal. Employees limitation to doing certain things due to their physical disabilities." (P6).*

*"A person with a mental, emotional or physical disability. Someone that may need help with communication, movement, self-care or decision making." (P10).*

#### ***Sub-theme 2: Attitudes and productivity***

This theme assesses the employers' attitudes toward performance and productivity in the SOE: *There were both positive and negative attitudes toward the performance and productivity of PWDSN among participants.*

*"I perceive them as normal employees, because they are mentally capable with the ability to contribute to the organizational needs and goals." (P6)*

*"My perception is that these people need extra assistance in executing their jobs and that a total of 70% performance should be regarded as a 100%." (P12).*

#### ***Theme 3: Employee experiences and exposure***

This theme serves to create an understanding of employees' observations and experiences of working with PWDSN. Thus, enabling employees to share their thoughts and experiences encountered while working with employees with disabilities and special needs.

#### ***Sub-theme 1: Positive and negative experiences***

This sub-theme captures participants' feelings and experiences of working with PWDSN as employees. Their level of exposure to PWDSN appeared to shape their attitudes in different ways. Participants with greater exposure reported negative attitudes, while those with limited exposure expressed more positive or neutral views. This contrast may be linked to varying levels of comfort and confidence when interacting and working with PWDSN.

*"I personally feel challenged; do I attend to their needs or assist them? I don't know what assistance to offer. I am not comfortable talking to them, particularly about their disabilities. I observed that some colleagues are comfortable and others like me are not." (P1).*

*"To me, working with employees with disabilities is the same as with other employees. I am only challenged with the employees who are not mentally well. I am impressed by my previous boss and our current employees with disabilities. These staff members are intelligent and performing very well. I at times consult them for work tasks." (P2)*

#### ***Sub-theme 2: Thoughts and observations***

This theme includes the ideas, actions, opinions, and processes of employers when it comes to the employment of PWDSN: *No participant observed or developed negative thoughts about the employment of PWDSN. The only negative thought or observation is the employees' lack of understanding of individual's disability or special needs.*

*"The colleagues in the same department with employee with disabilities understand better, they are more comfortable and know how to deal with these colleagues. Yes, I feel the same too." (P10)*

*"Our recruitment makes provision for qualified applicants from designated groups as defined in the Affirmative Action Act (1998) that also encouraged employees with disabilities to apply." (P11)*

#### ***Theme 4: Awareness creation, guidance, knowledge and understanding***

This theme is a description of employers' view on the requirement of training and provision of disability related information for employees, implementation of relevant legislations as well as whether they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to deal with disabilities and special needs matters.

#### ***Sub-theme 1: Information dissemination and sensitization***

The sub-theme information dissemination and sensitization, includes awareness and education as described by participants when asked if they think employees in their organization were trained or informed to deal with issues of disabilities and special needs:

*"Not really. Employees' education and awareness are not done here. However, assistance and engagement are done by a health and safety committee established to deal with employees' needs." (P1)*

*"Not all staff members have enough training or knowledge on how to deal with disability issues. There are no dedicated efforts to cater for the needs of people with disabilities and special needs. No developed standard and guidelines." (P11)*

#### *Sub-theme 2: Awareness and access to information*

This sub-theme highlights employees' limited preparedness and inadequate access to information needed to implement relevant legislation. Hence, it reflects participants' views on how organisations create awareness, provide information, or equip employees with the necessary knowledge to implement legislation on the employment of persons with disabilities and special needs (PWDSN).

*"No, there are no platforms to equip employees. No awareness on legislature, the bank relies on HR department to implement this legislature." (P2)*

*"Not all employees but management and those responsible for the implementation are equipped." (P4)*

### **Theme 5: Working environment and employment processes**

This theme focuses on solutions that could support and adjust the employment process according to different needs.

#### *Sub-theme 1: Inclusivity and accessibility*

This sub-theme assesses if the working environment is suitable for PWDSN to make a meaningful contribution to the organization.

*"Definitely, our environment is conducive, simply because we have the required facilities and equipment that are accessible to our staff with disabilities, ranging from toilets, parking and equipment required to carry out the duties and responsibilities. Provision and adjustments are made based on the nature of disability of the staff members." (P4)*

*"Our environment is hazardous; we do not encourage the recruitment of disabled persons." (P10)*

#### *Sub-theme 2: Recruitment practices*

This sub-theme highlights the current recruitment practice in the SOEs. The sub-theme consists of categories for the current recruitment practice identified by participants. These practices should prioritize inclusivity, accessibility and reasonable accommodation.

*"No provision is made for people with disabilities. They are required to go through the same process as other employees, except that they are in most cases encouraged to apply. Provision to cater for their needs is then made if they're shortlisted or hired." (P3)*

The participants' demographic variables were found to influence the employment of PWDSN; however, the literature indicates mixed perceptions regarding the employment of PWDSN across genders. Verulava and Bedianashvili (2021) noted that there are no differences, while Nguyen and Armoogum (2021) observed a more positive perception among women. These findings were supported by Ballo (2020). According to Pritchard (2019), this shows that women are more sympathetic and better understand PWDSN.

Across the five sectors, the study found a notable difference in the participants' perceptions, i.e., agriculture and mining were seen as being risky, demanding and

unconducive for PWDSN. Kanobe et al. (2022) found that employees in the banking, housing, and telecoms sectors were more positive about employing PWDSN.

Employers' experience and exposure to PWDSN also contribute to their perceptions and employment of PWDSN. Verulava and Bedianashvili (2021) noted that employers' position, length of service and experiences of working with PWDSN have a positive influence on employers' perceptions. Kanobe et al. (2022) indicated that exposure to PWDSN in the workplace may lead to a positive perception and the eventual employment of more PWDSN. For this reason, earlier exposure to PWDSN positively influences employers' views. Bonaccio et al. (2020) similarly reported that employers with prior exposure were more likely to recruit PWDSN.

This study found that most SOEs only employed one PWDSN, although one had five employees with disabilities. Derbyshire et al. (2024) similarly noted that despite laws and policies to address discrimination against PWDSN, their employment rate remains low.

The participants said that the support and services provided to PWDSN were equal and non-discriminatory, and that equal opportunities and benefits are provided to all employees. This was as per Carr and Namkung (2021), who claimed that employees are given similar support and welfare services, without discrimination based on race, gender, age, disability, culture or sexuality. According to the interviewees, services such as special assistance, equipment, affiliation, medical aid, and membership are available to all staff. According to Wu et al., (2020), these services are offered to ensure effective well-being, to enhance performance capacity, and to motivate employees to fulfill their duties and responsibilities. In addition, Carr and Namkung (2021) confirmed that in the United States, there are support and welfare services for all employees, regardless of their disabilities or special needs. Romeo, Yepes-Baldó and Lins (2020) found this to be useful to retain employees.

Some interviewees reported that certain employers hold negative perceptions about employing PWDSN; however, this occurs in contexts where the provision of disability-specific support and welfare is often overlooked. According to Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., (2020), a lack of effective employee support and welfare has a negative impact on both employees' and employers' perceptions, leading to the unemployment of PWDSN. This was confirmed by Watts and Hodgson (2022), who found that employees have diverse support and welfare needs that arise from different aspects of their well-being. For this reason, understanding the needs of employees with disabilities and special needs is of great importance as it impacts the employment of PWDSN (Peronja, Dadic & Mihanovic, 2019).

The participants recognized the link between impairment and employee performance and its influence on the employment of PWDSN (Reyes, Bogumil & Welch, 2024). Employees can have mental, physical and psychological impairments that influence their performance and attitude. According to Peronja and Mihanovic (2019), employers' perceptions of employing PWDSN are shaped by the degree to which they understand and recognize the associated impacts. This was confirmed by Marques et al., (2020), who claimed that the way in which employers address their employees' impairments influences their perceptions of the employment of PWDSN (Hajure et al., 2021). Overall, a positive outlook leads to a positive attitude, and eventually improves employee performance (Zhu et al., 2019).

This study shows that staff with physical impairments have the right attitudes to carry out their duties and responsibilities. The interviewees indicated that employees with disabilities and special needs are capable, productive performers. This is as per Zhu et al., (2019), who linked impairments and employee performance to both positive and negative perceptions and influences. According to Dreaver et al., (2020), comprehending the relationship between impairment and an employee's performance can influence a manager's

opinions. These findings confirm that impairments affect employers' perceptions and affect the employment of PWDSN (McKinney & Swartz, 2021). For this reason, employers should not view an impairment as an obstacle to performance or employment (Dreaver et al., 2020).

This study found that there are mixed perspectives, experiences and exposure to PWDSN. Dwertmann et al. (2023); Callaghan (2020) and Wilde & Hsu (2019) similarly found that employers' experiences and exposure can result in negative or positive perceptions of the hurdles facing PWDSN in the workplace, which influence employment and recruitment processes. According to Ogińska-Bulik and Juczyński (2024), positive experiences and exposure lead to positive perceptions, and vice versa.

This study found that it is critical to create awareness and sensitize employers to PWDSN. SOEs utilize different strategies for reaching out to their employees, including awareness creation, guidance, understanding, and knowledge creation. Other studies have discovered that disseminating information and sensitizing people is crucial for positively influencing employers' perceptions regarding the employment of PWDSN (Verulava & Bedianashvili, 2021; Lee, Li & Tsai, 2021).

As per the study, some SOEs create more information sharing platforms than others. According to Charles (2022), informed employers contribute more to the integration of PWDSN, particularly with regards to implementing national policies and laws. Charles, Gie and Musakuro (2023) argued that a lack of information sharing platforms lead to an uninformed workforce, which negatively affects employers' perceptions of the employment of PWDSN. It also obstructs the recruitment processes of PWDSN and impedes the successful implementation of policies and procedures linked to disability inclusion (Pinilla-Roncancio & Rodríguez Caicedo, 2022). This was confirmed by Mhone (2022), who showed that information sharing and familiarizing employers with legislation can promote equal opportunities and treatment and eliminate work-related stigma and discrimination.

This research found that the working environment not only includes the physical and structural features of a work setting but encompasses social acceptance and ensuring that the needs of PWDSN are met. The interviewees described accessibility features in their workplaces and evaluated their current recruitment practices in light of the employment challenges of PWDSN. This is in line with Hafeez et al., (2019), who argued that employers should create an emotionally and physically healthy atmosphere to ensure a positive working environment.

The participants highlighted that SOEs do not create policies related to PWDSN, but rather adopt national policies, guidelines and laws, e.g., the Affirmative Action Act, Act 29 of 1998 and employment equity guidelines. Reasonable accommodations related to equipment, financial resources, accessibility, inclusivity, and professional development are some of the aspects that affect employers' perceptions of the employment of PWDSN. Chumo et al. (2023) similarly found the working environment to be critical for the accommodation and employment of PWDSN.

The interviewees also claimed that their organizations utilize special grading, inclusive advertising and selection, considerate shortlisting, special scoring, prioritizing, and implementing and adhering to policies and laws to accommodate PWDSN. On the contrary, however, Shaw et al. (2022) found that current recruitment strategies are not sufficiently conducive to mitigate the employment challenges of PWDSN, which they attributed to a lack of capacity and HR development. Organizations should thus use inclusive and disability-specific recruitment practices. Borghouts et al. (2021) also suggested that companies should develop recruitment strategies that accommodate the needs of PWDSN.

#### **Limitations and areas for Further Research**

The focus on 15 participants might have left out other potential participants, which could affect the generalization of the findings. While the participants were responsible for the implementation of laws and the recruitment processes, it is unclear whether their opinions and practices represent those of all SOEs. Secondly, disabilities and special needs were not clearly defined to the interviewees, leading to confusion. The terms 'disability' and 'special needs' broadly in the research in order to leave it up to the participants' interpretations. This could be seen as a limitation as if they had been clearly defined, the interviewees may have responded differently. It is recommended that future studies use a bigger sample and extend the number of SOEs to capture a wider view of employers' perceptions of the employment of PWDSN. Future research should also include PWDSN as participants. Finally, future research should address the factors that influence employers' perceptions of PWDSN in Namibia.

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite some progress to ensure sustainable employment of PWDSN, there remain significant gaps and inequality in the development, understanding and implementation of inclusive employment practices within the SOEs included in this study. These findings are significant for various stakeholders, including management, HR personnel, health and safety officers, wellness coordinators, training and development teams, planners, and those involved in recruitment processes. This research has generated evidence that could be helpful in informing improvements in ensuring inclusive recruitment for PWDSN within SOEs in Namibia. The findings could also be applicable to other organizations where similar employment policies and legislation apply in line with international labour practices. Additionally, the findings from this study provide recommendations for the implementation and adherence to inclusive employment policies and legislature. The implementation of the Affirmative Action Act, Act 29 of 1998, and adherence to the National Disability Act, Act 26 of 2004, the National Policy on Disability (2025-2030), and the National Vocational Training Act, Act 18 of 1994 varies across organizations. By addressing this, it could eliminate negative perceptions, lessen employment challenges, and result in inclusive employment practices for SOEs.

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### Competing interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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### Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, DA, upon reasonable request.

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