

## **Disability and Parenthood - The right of a person with disability to become a parent and enjoy the benefit of parenthood in the community**

Julian Priscilla Mabangwe

### **Malawi Council for the handicapped. Malawi**

Very clearly more information needs to be disseminated on how PWDs can exercise their rights to become parents. This can be done by producing articles related to sexual reproduction and through these, PWDs could be made aware and be able to choose what is right for them. These articles could be compiled in form of newsletters, pamphlets and posters.

Human Rights organizations can assist to disseminate information on the rights to parenthood. These organizations are a mouthpiece to all human beings. I have discovered that when Human Rights organizations are disseminating messages, they do not specifically mention issues of disability. They talk of human rights for all, and yet we say disability in itself is a human rights issue.

These organizations need to be sensitized and be asked to encompass issues relating to disabilities. They should be able to clearly state that the decision to get married, have children or a family is a right and responsibility of every person, including a PWD.

The following is a narrative of my own life story. I would like to share with you this personal experience

As a lady with disability, who struggled in life to become a parent.

I am over forty years now and I am proud that I have fought every inch to become what I am.

While growing up I kept on dreaming that I would have a baby of my own because all my sisters were married and had their own. They used to send their children to assist me doing daily chores but could not let them sleep at my house. I was working and staying in my own house as an independent person, but was still treated like an infant. At night I used to feel so lonely, had no one to talk to, no one to bring me water, or sharing of food. That was horrible!

At the age of 25, I got pregnant. This news brought shock to my sisters, aunts and uncles, because that was the last thing they ever expected of me. I remember when I was young, my mother used to say it would have been better if I became a church nun. She felt being a nun would be best for me in order to serve the Lord than getting married. I used to be told that there was more harm than good in marriage life that I could not manage to handle it. Worse still, I was told delivering a child was another horrible thing that I could not face due to my disability. All these threats were meant to discourage me.

The sad news I got was that I should abort the pregnancy because all my sisters had gone through child delivery and they thought I could not manage the process. They frightened me by saying that if able-bodied women die during delivery, who was I to try that. They even threatened to report the man who was responsible for my pregnancy to the police. I told them that the gentleman admitted he did not follow

The right procedure but accepted to take me as a wife. This was a mere joke to the whole family, a taboo! One of my sisters said, "if he doesn't know our family properly, he will see, we will send him to rot in jail."

Arrangements were done by my sisters together with my aunt to take me to the hospital for abortion, but what they did not know was that I had made up my mind to keep the pregnancy and that I was eager to see a child of my own..

I privately went to see a doctor for counseling and advice on the pregnancy. The doctor assured me that it was possible for me to deliver a healthy baby and that if some problems could occur during delivery, I would be assisted to delivery through caesarian section.

My relatives took me to the hospital. I did not resist. When we reached there, I told them in the presence of the doctor that I was not ready to go through the abortion process because I needed the baby inside me. I told them how lonely I felt when I was staying alone while they (relatives) had their own children and nobody bothered to give me one of their children whom I could stay with. I reminded them that abortion was just another great sin and I asked them to wait and see what God had planned for me. The doctor strongly told them that there was nothing wrong with me being pregnant and assured them that things would be fine. They all felt ashamed and returned home with their heads down.

All this time, my mother played a low profile because she was afraid, too, that anything could have happened to me. I discussed with her about all her fears and she discovered that I had strong feelings about having my own child. She understood me quite well and ever stayed close to me.

Time came when I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. This became the time of joy and reconciliation to the whole family. They were all happy and became very supportive. Few years later I got married to the man and had a handsome baby boy. I am a happy mother of these two children. The girl is now 18 years old and the boy is 14. My children are very accepting and comfortable that I am their mother. They truly love me and I do everything for them that any parent can do to their children.

This is a personal experience on how I struggled to become a parent with disability. All one need is courage! I made up my mind and became strong. According to my personal experience, I have seen that motherhood for a woman with disability is undesirable to the non-disabled society. What everyone needs to know is that the decision to have a child or not, or adopt a child is the right and responsibility of every person including a PWD.

I want to remove the negative attitude that makes people think that persons with disabilities are sexually

inactive. What they should know is that all human beings are capable of a sexual relationship with another person. It should not be seen as an abnormal thing for a person with disability getting married and having children. This is very normal!