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Resilience of Deaf Workers Facing Workplace Discrimination

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| <p>Article history: Received 10 March 2025 Received in revised form 12 April 2025 Accepted 25 May 2025 Available online 20 June 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Resilience; deafblindness; workplace discrimination</p> | <p>Work is a fundamental aspect of human life, including for deaf individuals who have the right to work and a decent livelihood in accordance with the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. This study examines the resilience of a 23-year-old woman with severe hearing impairment who works in the administration department at Telkom, Batu. It explores how she copes with various forms of workplace discrimination. This study employs a qualitative case study approach, focusing on in-depth analysis of the subject's experiences. Using interview and documentation data collection techniques. The subject faced discrimination in the form of an excessive workload, unequal treatment compared to colleagues, and verbal abuse from superiors. Despite these challenges, H demonstrated resilience through four stages: struggling, surviving, recovering, and thriving. Factors influencing H's resilience include financial motivation, determination to rise and learn from experience, independence and initiative, and spirituality as a source of emotional reinforcement. This study underscores the need for equitable workplace support and reasonable accommodations for deaf employees. It also offers insights into resilience strategies that can help individuals overcome workplace discrimination.</p> |

1. Introduction

Work is a fundamental aspect of human life, including for people with disabilities. According to the United Nations, work is not only a source of income but also plays a crucial role in an individual's dignity, well-being, and personal development [1]. However, discrimination against people with disabilities in terms of employment is widespread and well documented. Discrimination in various forms is still a major problem experienced by workers with disabilities, despite the existence of a legal framework that regulates equality and protection of disability rights [2].

Mulyani's research found that the forms of discrimination experienced by workers with disabilities are such as bad stigma, wage gaps, lack of accommodation, difficulties in promotion to not getting insurance [3]. Research indicates that disabled employees often face limited opportunities for skill development due to workplace discrimination [4]. In addition, the stereotype

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that often arises is that employers and non-disabled workers think that disabled workers will not be able to complete their job duties properly and satisfactorily [5].

Among workers with disabilities, those with hearing impairments face unique challenges that exacerbate workplace discrimination, there are certain groups that face additional and more specific challenges, such as those experienced by hearing impaired workers [6]. One of the most common forms of discrimination experienced is a lack of communication access, which can have a significant impact on the ability to participate in meetings, training and day-to-day interactions in the workplace [7]. These communication barriers are often exacerbated by a lack of awareness and understanding from coworkers and superiors, which can lead to social isolation and exclusion from important information flows in the work environment [8]. In addition, workers with hearing disabilities are also often faced with stereotypes that deem them less competent or unable to contribute fully, which in turn hinders promotion opportunities and career progression [9].

The emergence of discrimination can hinder the performance of deaf workers during work. In addition, discrimination in the workplace results in people with disabilities experiencing low self-esteem and difficulty in adjusting to isolate themselves [3]. Based on research conducted by University College London (UCL) said that discrimination can also be detrimental to health, because it has a direct impact on the body through responses to stress, affects the living environment, and limits individual opportunities to improve health [10].

In order for deaf workers to work comfortably, it is necessary to have a level of self-resilience to face various challenges, including discrimination that may be experienced in the workplace. According to Amir, (2021) self-resilience is needed in the world of work. Self Resilience is a person's ability to survive and face challenges that occur in life [11]. For deaf workers, resilience is essential in overcoming workplace challenges, including discrimination. Resilience enables them to adapt, persist, and thrive despite systemic barriers [12]. So, it can be interpreted that with good self-resilience, deaf workers will be able to solve all work challenges, including discrimination experienced in the work environment.

Preliminary studies indicate that individuals with hearing impairments have faced discrimination from early education through high school but have developed resilience strategies to overcome these challenges. This attracted the attention of researchers to look deeper into how self-resilience is formed and plays a role in facing these challenges. When working at a café in Batu City, the subject again experienced discrimination in his work environment. Not only from coworkers, but also his superiors often take actions that are not in accordance with the provisions in the labor protection law. Subjects face various forms of treatment that violate their basic rights as workers with hearing disabilities.

Therefore, this research focuses on the forms of discrimination and the process of resilience of deaf workers in the world of work. It is important to understand how deaf workers are able to survive and overcome the various forms of discrimination they face, as well as how resilience plays a role in career success and the ability to deal with situations of uncertainty. This study seeks to

- i. identify the forms of workplace discrimination faced by deaf workers,
- ii. examine the resilience strategies they employ,
- iii. analyze the role of resilience in their career development. In addition, the results of this study are expected to be used to provide provisions for students with hearing disabilities to be better prepared to enter the world of work.

2. Methodology

This research was conducted using qualitative research with a case study approach method. Qualitative research can be divided into three main things, consisting of initial response, construction process, and inference [13]. The subjects and participants in this study are individuals with disabilities who have worked, the focus of this research is on disabilities with hearing impairments. The number of subjects as well as respondents studied in this study was 1 person with the following characteristics:

- i. The participant is a person with a hearing impairment who is or has been employed.
- ii. Participants reside in the Greater Malang area.
- iii. Participants are 18-65 years old.
- iv. Participants have experienced discrimination in the workplace.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in both oral and written formats to accommodate the participant's communication preferences. Additionally, document analysis in the form of school report cards and diplomas to review Indonesian language scores as an indicator of communication skills, award certificates as proof of achievement, and conversations (chat) between coworkers and owners in the new workplace to find out the subject's communication skills was also used to support findings.

In order for the data obtained from the two techniques to be considered valid, a series of procedures are carried out to test credibility, namely triangulation of techniques and member checks.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Profile of Deafblindness in Employment

The research subject, H, a 23-year-old woman who works in administration at a Telkom office in Batu, has a degree of hearing loss in the severe to very severe category (71dB - 91dB and above). H can only hear loud noises, such as horns or wind noise when driving without a helmet. He relies more on visual cues to communicate and understand his surroundings. Based on Nugroho's classification, (2023), individuals with severe hearing loss tend to be unable to hear everyday sounds and only react to loud noises, so H falls into this category, showing a reliance on visual communication [14].

H's communication skills develop through gradual experiences, starting with visual observation from an early age. H tried to understand communication by looking at lip movements and trying to imitate them. The help of friends and limited support from the educational environment, such as inconsistent speech therapy at SLB, helped H to build her communication skills. Despite her limitations, H was highly motivated to master verbal communication, including help from her English teacher who taught her basic vocal exercises. This process reflected a combination of self-effort, visual observation and minimal support from friends and teachers. The challenges faced, such as a not always supportive environment and limited access to speech therapy, show H's perseverance in developing her communication skills.

H relies on visual observation to understand conversations, especially through lips and body language. This ability is in line with Hernawati's (2007) theory on the importance of visualization for individuals with hearing disabilities [15]. H is able to adapt to the work environment by relying on visual observation and using writing for more formal communication, such as through social media, to avoid miscommunication. In the work environment, H often uses social media or written messages when communicating with consumers for product promotion, so as to maintain control of

communication without being affected by her hearing limitations. This strong receptive ability demonstrates effective adaptation despite the environment not always being supportive of his disability.

H's expressive communication skills developed through encouragement from friends and independent practice. He chose verbal communication without using sign language, because he wanted to be able to communicate directly with interlocutors who did not understand sign language. This is in accordance with the theory of Mustika, (2017), which states that individuals with hearing disabilities can develop verbal communication through practice [16]. In the work environment, H uses simple sentences and shows flexibility in adjusting to verbal communication needs. H's academic achievements that reach the Minimum Completion Criteria (MCC) level also demonstrate his ability to overcome hearing barriers in the context of education.

H demonstrated high adaptability when applying for a job at a cafe. She found the job opening through social media and underwent both oral and written interview processes. When lengthy questions were asked, H chose to answer in writing, demonstrating her communication flexibility. H's success in going through this process demonstrates her initiative, adaptability and good communication skills, enabling her to overcome the challenges of the job application process and adapt to the communication needs of the workplace.

3.2 Resilience in Employees with Hearing Disabilities Against Discrimination in the Work Environment

Discrimination in the workplace is a major challenge for employees with disabilities, especially people with hearing disabilities. Work environments that are not inclusive often create barriers in the form of unfair treatment, inappropriate tasks, and verbal abuse. However, individuals with hearing disabilities have great potential to build resilience, which is the ability to recover, survive and thrive amidst challenges. Through stages supported by factors such as spirituality, financial motivation, and skill development. With the support of an inclusive work environment and effective coping strategies, they can overcome discrimination, maintain psychological well-being, and increase their contribution to the workforce.

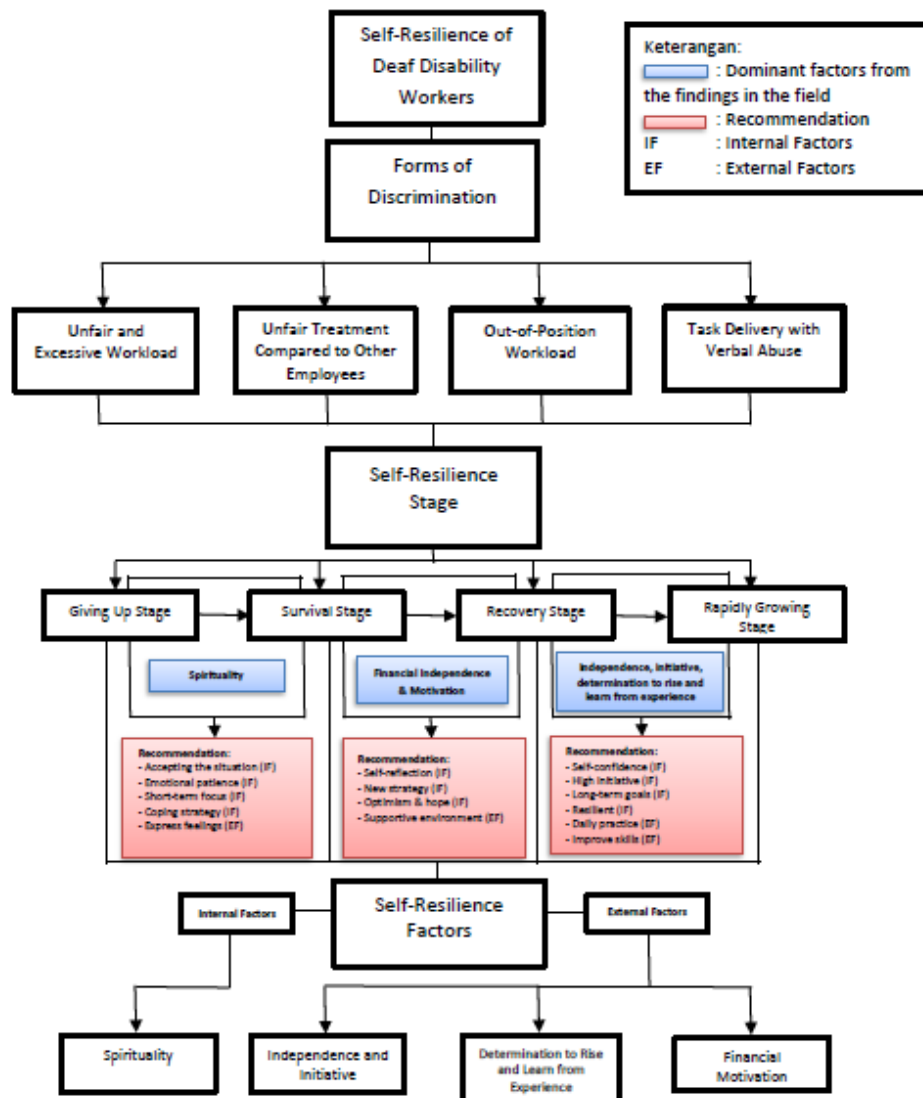


Fig. 1. Resilience of individuals with disabilities against discrimination in the work environment

3.2.1 Forms of workplace discrimination

Deaf workers' cases often involve not only visible acts, but also through workload, unfairness and unequal treatment. Interviews with H revealed several forms of discrimination experienced, which included excessive workload, unfair treatment compared to other employees, and verbally abusive treatment. Each of these aspects provides a clear picture of how discrimination can affect the well-being of employees, especially those with physical limitations.

The discrimination experienced by H can be attributed to the views of several experts who discuss the importance of fair treatment and support for workers with disabilities, as well as the negative impact of discrimination in the work environment. According to Green, (2020), work environments that do not provide appropriate support for employees with disabilities tend to create inequalities that can interfere with their psychological well-being [17]. In H's case, the lack of adaptation and excessive workload reflects the management's lack of understanding of the importance of treatment tailored to the needs of employees, especially those with hearing impairments. This is in line with the opinion of Snyder et al. (2019) which states that management that does not pay attention to the

match between tasks and employee abilities can create excessive pressure and work stress that has a negative impact on employee productivity [18].

Furthermore, when H is treated unfairly compared to other new employees, this indicates direct discrimination that can create structural injustice, as stated by Ashforth & Mael, (2022) They explain that this structural discrimination occurs when management policies and actions place certain groups at a disadvantage in the workplace [19]. Inequity in task sharing creates a clear difference in workload between H and her coworkers, which can lead to frustration, demotivation, and negative perceptions of the work environment.

In addition, additional tasks that are irrelevant to H's role as a waiter, such as being a cashier, barista, or cleaning toilets, indicate a lack of reasonable accommodation for workers with disabilities. Stone & Colella (2018) state that reasonable accommodations are essential for disabled workers to maintain productivity [20]. H's situation of being required to perform various roles that are far from her job description indicates a denial of reasonable accommodation, which can ultimately interfere with her performance and put physical and psychological stress on her.

Task assignments accompanied by verbal violence can also adversely affect the psychological well-being of employees, especially employees with disabilities. As revealed by Einarsen & Hoel, (2019) verbal violence in the workplace can result in stress, anxiety, and feelings of insecurity [21]. In H's case, harsh treatment in the form of yelling and anger from superiors in the delivery of tasks reflects a work environment that does not support mental well-being. Einarsen and Hoel assert that this kind of harassment is a form of bullying that can create an unhealthy work climate and hinder employee performance.

These expert opinions highlight that the forms of discrimination experienced by H, whether in unfair workloads, inappropriate treatment, or verbal abuse, reflect unprofessionalism and lack of support from management. All of this demonstrates how a discriminatory work environment can be detrimental to employees with disabilities, both in terms of productivity and mental well-being, and points to the need for more inclusive and fair accommodation policies in the workplace.

3.2.2 The self-resilience stages of deaf workers in facing workplace discrimination

This study reveals the resilience process of H, a worker with a hearing disability, in the face of discrimination she experienced in the work environment. This resilience process is broken down into four stages: succumbing, surviving, recovering and thriving. Each stage provides an in-depth look at how H dealt with the discriminatory situation and how she was gradually able to recover and develop herself.

- i. **Surrender Stage:** The individual will feel pressured by discrimination, so he feels like giving up. However, the subject tries to hold back and be patient. At this stage, the dominant factor to emerge is spiritual factors. According to Southwick et al. (2019), early resilience in individuals often includes a period of "vulnerability", where they feel weak or anxious in the face of extreme pressure [22]. At this stage, individuals often feel alienated or unable to cope with the situation. H exhibits this initial resilience response, albeit limited to coping without intervention or concrete solutions. This also reflects the views of Manne et al. (2021), who identified that the first phase in resilience can be filled with feelings of isolation that need to be overcome through external support [23].
- ii. **Survival Stage:** Individuals feel resigned (have no other choice) and choose to survive despite discrimination, besides that individuals do not get support from people around them, and at this stage, the motivation to survive appears, namely financial motivation. At this stage, the

dominant factor to emerge is the financial motivation factor, in line with the findings of Feder et al. (2020), that individuals in vulnerable conditions often rely on basic endurance to maintain stability, although perhaps only with minimum needs [24]. They refer to this phase as the “initial adaptive phase,” where individuals learn to adapt to stressors passively. H's choice to wait for his salary and continue working due to financial need reflects this passive coping mechanism, which allowed him to survive despite the absence of emotional support. This is also supported by the opinion of Schoon & Henseke, (2019), which states that the limitation of social support in the early stages of resilience often makes individuals only focus on meeting basic needs as a temporary form of adaptation [25].

- iii. Recovery Stage: Individuals begin recovery from the toxic environment, take lessons from previous experiences to develop themselves, prepare strategies for life and work balance, and build optimism. At this stage, the dominant factor to emerge is the determination to rise and learn from experience. According to Ungar & Theron, (2021), resilience includes not only resilience but also the ability to develop from negative experiences, through a process called “transformative resilience.” They mentioned that individuals going through the recovery stage actively seek to adapt better through the experiences they have undergone [26]. H trying to find a new job and reducing her overthinking is evidence of this positive adaptation, where she is trying to adjust to new ways of dealing with future stresses.
- iv. Rapidly Developing Stage: Individuals will use experiences as life lessons, become more interactive in work and life, focus on long-term achievements, be independent and ready to face all challenges. At this stage, the dominant factor to emerge is the determination to rise and learn from experience as well as independence and initiative, in accordance with the concept of “post-traumatic growth” proposed by Tedeschi & Calhoun, (2019), They state that individuals with traumatic experiences who successfully pass through difficult times tend to show more positive personality and skill development, including in their ability to face new challenges [27]. H began to adapt to technology and develop new ways of seeking information that aided in the management of stress and distress, reflecting increased resilience and stronger adaptation skills. In line with this, Liu et al. (2020), suggest that the development of resilience in post-crisis individuals involves “adaptive learning,” where adverse experiences become a catalyst for the development of a more resilient person [28].

H's stages of resilience show adaptive and flexible developmental dynamics according to the situations he experiences. This process reflects that resilience is not only the ability to survive, but also the capacity to learn and develop from experience, so that individuals like H can respond to challenges in a better way in the future.

3.2.3 Factors affecting resilience of deaf workers in facing discrimination in the work environment

The results of this study show that there are four main factors that influence the resilience of H, a deaf worker, in facing discrimination in the work environment: financial motivation, determination to rise and learn from experience, independence and initiative, and spirituality as a source of emotional strengthening. These four factors contributed in shaping H's mental strength to survive and rise despite facing a situation that was not ideal.

i. Financial Motivation

Financial motivation as a major factor in decision-making to persist in a discriminatory work environment is in line with the concept of “survival needs” in resilience theory discussed by Luthar et al, (2020). They state that individuals who are in unstable economic conditions often

have to maintain their jobs despite facing emotional and physical stress [29]. The decision to persevere in a non-ideal situation, as experienced by H, reflects that financial needs can override other priorities such as psychological comfort or even mental health. This confirms the view that economic aspects are often the main driver for individuals in marginalized groups such as workers with disabilities.

ii. Resilience and Learning from Experience

The determination to rise up after experiencing discrimination in the workplace and learn from the bad experience is closely related to the concepts of self-efficacy and growth mindset often discussed by Dweck, (2020). Dweck emphasizes that individuals who have a growth mindset believe that they can continue to learn and develop despite failures or challenges [30]. This is in line with the findings in this study, where H continues to strive to rise and seek new opportunities despite experiencing discrimination. Bandura, (2018) also highlighted the importance of self-efficacy in resilience, which allows individuals to feel confident in the face of adversity, and this was evident in H who did not give up despite facing major challenges [31].

iii. Independence and Initiative

The independence and initiative shown by H in finding a new job through social media and without relying on others is closely related to Ryff & Singer's (2018) views on psychological resilience and self-determination. According to them, the ability to take initiative independently in the face of challenges indicates high psychological resilience, especially in the midst of existing limitations [32]. H's initiative to contact the job openings directly is also in line with self-determination theory, which emphasizes the importance of personal control in life decisions. This reflects that H has high resilience to try to improve her life situation, even without social or external support.

iv. Spirituality as a Source of Emotional Strengthening

The use of spirituality as a tool to maintain emotional balance in the face of discrimination is relevant to Pargament's (2019) findings regarding the role of spirituality in coping. Pargament asserts that spirituality can be an important source of coping with emotional distress, helping individuals to remain calm and focused, and facilitating acceptance of life's challenges [33]. This is also consistent with Koenig's research, (2020) which found that individuals who rely on spirituality have higher levels of resilience, as they have strong internal resources to deal with stress and adversity. In this case, H relied on prayer and worship to overcome the emotional difficulties faced in a discriminatory workplace [34].

Financial motivation, determination, self-reliance, initiative and spirituality all play an important role in shaping the resilience of disabled workers in the face of discrimination in the work environment. Recent theories on self-efficacy, growth mindset, self-determination, and spiritual coping provide relevant perspectives to understand how these factors interact in helping individuals to survive and thrive despite great challenges.

From the stages and resilience factors that have been identified, it can be concluded that in order to achieve higher levels of resilience, individuals need to go through each stage with appropriate support. These resilience factors are highly dependent on the type of problem or discrimination faced by the individual. The forms of discrimination experienced by employees with disabilities often affect each stage of their resilience development. So, to get to a higher stage and individuals can be said to be resilient, there are several things that must be done, including:

- i. From the relenting stage to the defending stage, what individuals with hearing disabilities must do include;

- a) Accepting the situation without blaming oneself
 - b) Increase patience and emotional resilience
 - c) Seek social support, such as joining a community
 - d) Focus on short-term goals, such as financial motivation
 - e) Learn to express feelings wisely
 - f) Develop coping strategies
- ii. From the survival stage to the recovery stage, what individuals with hearing disabilities must do include;
 - a) Self-reflection, evaluation of experiences and recognizing strengths and weaknesses.
 - b) Building a supportive environment such as expanding social networks
 - c) Devising new strategies, such as practicing effective communication skills
 - d) Building optimism and hope
- iii. From the recovery stage to the thriving stage, what individuals with hearing disabilities must do include;
 - a) Applying what has been learned to daily life
 - b) Building strong self-confidence
 - c) Improve skills at work, such as learning new things
 - d) Having high initiative in the workplace
 - e) Focus on long-term goals
 - f) Being independent and resilient
- iv. To prevent discrimination against employees with disabilities, strategic steps are needed, before seeking or accepting employment, including:
 - a) Understand your rights as a disabled employee
 - b) Ensure employment contracts are in writing and clear
 - c) Find out about the work environment, such as (has it ever accepted disability, is it inclusive? etc.)
 - d) Apply for additional training to improve skills. Thus, creating an inclusive and supportive work environment can help employees with disabilities achieve optimal self-resilience, which will ultimately improve their productivity and well-being.

However, this theory cannot be applied in general because the research findings are based on the specific problems of one subject. This theory is only relevant when applied to subjects with similar characteristics and problems, namely:

- i. Women aged 18-25 with hearing loss, reflecting young adulthood with particular challenges in the transition to independence.
- ii. Have experienced discrimination in the neighbourhood, such as at home or school, which can affect confidence and adaptability.
- iii. Have receptive and expressive communication skills, which means the individual is able to understand and convey information despite the hearing loss.
- iv. Facing discrimination in the workplace, which is one of the main factors in building self-resilience.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that the resilience of deaf workers, as exemplified by H, is formed through struggles with discrimination in the work environment involving disproportionate workload, unfair treatment, and verbal abuse. With financial motivation as the main drive, H demonstrated the ability

to persevere in difficult situations, learn from experience, and independently seek new and better opportunities. H's success in developing communication skills, overcoming professional barriers, and utilizing spirituality to maintain emotional balance reflects high resilience and adaptability. Despite the challenges faced, H was able to turn the experience of discrimination into valuable learning, develop herself, and build confidence to face future challenges. This confirms the importance of inclusive support in the work environment to maximize the potential of workers with disabilities.

In addition, companies and work environment managers can make efforts to build a more inclusive work environment for employees with hearing disabilities, including; First, companies need to increase awareness and understanding of disabilities through training for managers and employees to reduce discrimination and increase empathy. Second, create an inclusive work environment by adopting anti-discrimination policies, providing communication accessibility such as sign language interpreters or assistive technology devices, and adjusting work tasks to individual abilities. Third, provide psychological support through counseling services or dedicated mentors for employees with disabilities to help them cope with psychological stress and obtain emotional support. Finally, companies need to provide relevant training when workers with disabilities are placed in new positions, with customized methods such as visual media, videos, or work simulations so that they can more easily understand their duties and responsibilities.

This study has limitations in generalizability because it focuses on one subject, so the findings are more specific to H's experience and may not be universally applicable. Therefore, to improve clarity, it should be emphasized that the results of this study are contextual in nature. In addition, in recommendations for future research, it is recommended to explore similar cases in different industries or compare the experiences of other people with disabilities to gain a broader and more comprehensive understanding.

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