

Social Entrepreneurs with Disabilities: Reasons for Participation and Barriers Faced

People with disabilities are self-employed at higher rates than general population. In the past it was assumed people with disabilities participated in self-employment and entrepreneurship because they had limited opportunities in the traditional workforce – it was believed they entered entrepreneurship because of need. However, this assumed people with disabilities were not motivated to participate in entrepreneurship because of their unique skills, interests, and passions – because of opportunities. While disability employment policy has focused on need-based reasons for entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship policy has focused on opportunity-based reasons for entrepreneurship. Meaning entrepreneurs with disabilities often find themselves having to choose between the two, and are not fully served by either separately.

Research has not adequately explored the reasons people with disabilities enter social entrepreneurship. This study examined why people with disabilities decide to become social entrepreneurs. Because attitudes about disability can result in employment discrimination and negatively impact people with disabilities' employment opportunities this study also asked social entrepreneurs with disabilities if they faced negative attitudes and if this affected their social entrepreneurship.

Attitudinal barriers to entrepreneurship for people with disabilities:

- Attitudes about disability can serve as barriers to traditional employment. They can also make it harder for people with disabilities to get funding and financing for entrepreneurship.
- Low expectations for people with disabilities make it more difficult to start and grow businesses.
- Another barrier social entrepreneurs with disabilities face is incorrect assumptions that people with disabilities cannot start and own businesses.
- Some social entrepreneurs with disabilities felt pressure to hide their disabilities because they did not want to be discriminated against.

Reasons for becoming social entrepreneurs:

- Most people with disabilities become social entrepreneurs because of passion for a project.
- Being a social entrepreneur provides people with disabilities the opportunity to be creative.
- People with disabilities were also motivated by the lack of opportunities they had in the traditional workforce.

Although people with disabilities can face discrimination both in traditional forms of employment and entrepreneurship projects, social entrepreneurship can provide them with the opportunities to be financially successful while also participating in projects that are important and of interest to them. However, for those people with disabilities on public benefits it can be hard to balance becoming a social entrepreneur with not losing benefits and services.

Caldwell, K., Parker Harris, S., & Renko, M. (2016). Social Entrepreneurs with Disabilities: Exploring Motivational and Attitudinal Factors. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 5(1), 211-244.



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