

The Challenges and Supports for Career Development of Persons with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: Persons with Disabilities (PwD) are one of the groups most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The implementation of social and physical distancing made workers with disabilities have to face many challenges at work. This affects the career development of PwD. This study used a case study method to identify various challenges and support needed in the career development of PwD during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were obtained by purposive sampling method. Data collection was done by semi-structured interviews. Data analysis was carried out with a 2-step coding process. The results of this study showed the challenges for career development of PwD were their personal characteristics (e.g., type and severity of their disability), disempowering family, limited access to education and vocational training, insufficient health care and facilities, discrimination, and negative stigma at the workplace. The support needed for career development of PwD were opportunities to access higher education and vocational training, supportive family, co-workers, and workplace environment. The results of this study offer an evaluation to stakeholders thus that they can provide adequate accessibility for PwD at work.

1 INTRODUCTION

Persons with Disabilities (PwD) are one of the groups that have received inadequate accessibility in the workplace sector. This phenomenon showed the need to put more effort and attention from various parties to fulfil PwD rights. Work participation, regulations from stakeholders, social stigma, and career development are issues facing PwD in the workplace (Eltringham, 2016). According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) provision, disability is the inability to carry out activities at the level of regular human activity due to impairment conditions. As a result of damage to some or all a certain body member, it causes a person to become powerless to carry out normal human activities, such as bathing, eating, drinking, climbing stairs, or going to the toilet alone without being assisted by others.

In Indonesia, PwD are explained in Law No.8 (2016). PwD are individuals who experience physical, intellectual, mental, and sensory limitations for a long period and, when engaging in interaction with others can experience obstacles and difficulty to participate fully and effectively. As a result, the disability can cause limited participation in society.

This condition is caused by inability, loss, or abnormalities both from psychological, physiological, and anatomical structure or function (BPS-RI, 2020).

Several data related to PwD in the workplace have been published by the stakeholders. According to Statistics – Indonesia (2020), The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for PwD is far below non-PwD with a discrepancy between 20,60-24,11%. LFPR of the PwD with productive age in Indonesia tended to decrease approximately 2% from 2016 to 2019. In 2019, only 46% of PwD worked in various sectors. It means more than half of PwD were unemployed. Reduced participation of PwD in the workplace indicated a struggle for PwD in entering the labour market because of the lack of availability of decent jobs. The ratio of males and females who are in the labour force is 2:1. PwD was found more often in rural areas rather than in urban areas. Mostly, PwD worked in the agriculture, forestry, and fishery sector (44,82%). Then in the trade, transportation, accommodation, food and drinks, and services sector (38,09%) and the others worked at mining, industry, electricity, gas, water, management garbage, and construction sector (17,09%) (BPS-RI, 2020).

Data from previous studies found that PwD tended to work in lower status occupations like services, clerical, or other helping occupations, underpaid, work part-time, and have limited career advancement opportunities (Baldrige et al., 2016; Lindstrom & Benz, 2002). All these phenomena have an impact on the career development of persons with disabilities.

This article addresses the career development of PwD in unstable economic times of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 pandemic has a greater negative impact on socially disadvantaged people like PwD (Efrat et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic had triggered a significant crisis in the economy and labour markets around the world. Lockdowns and quarantines leave employees in various sectors vulnerable to massive layoffs, pay cuts, and indefinite leave (Mimoun et al., 2020). During this crisis, PwD are more likely to experience involuntary unemployment and struggle to find a new job (Mitra & Kruse, 2016). A previous study by Chandrasekaran and Fernandes (2021) also found that the incidence rate among PwD were greater, particularly for Asian people. This sociodemographic pattern was more likely to find countries with higher COVID-19 incidence rates compared to other countries.

Career development is a concept that refers to a process in which individual and other contextual factors influence change in people's careers over time (Brown, 2002; Zacher et al., 2019). The research on career development focuses on how an individual's attitude and behavior toward career and how social and environmental factors shape that attitude and behavior. Individual characteristics, family background, and workplace environment place an important role in the career development of PwD, particularly in shaping their career decision-making. Individual characteristics such as type and severity of the disability, gender, ethnicity, and educational level play a crucial role in the career opportunity of PwD (Michaels, 1997; Raudeliūnaitė & Gudžinskiene, 2016). Unfortunately, PwD have limited access to higher education. There are still a few PwD who have a minimum senior high school graduate/equivalent. The 2019 surveys recorded that only 1 in 10 persons with disabilities aged 15 years and above have a minimum senior high school graduate/equivalent in Indonesia (BPS-RI, 2020). Lindstrom and Benz (2002) also noted that individual characteristics like individual determination and motivation also influence the vocational success of PwD.

Family structure (e.g. the role of parents and family) was related to the career development of PwD. Family helped PwD shaping their occupational aspirations and supporting the process of their career

development. During the career decision-making process, positive family support encouraged PwD to have a settled career choice (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002). Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence the career development of PwD as Raudeliūnaitė and Gudžinskienė (2016) revealed, the personal and objective environmental factors related to the professional career of PwD. PwD usually received negative stigma from society about their appearance. This is caused by local culture and the "normality" concept (Widinarsih, 2019). This discrimination can be seen in the workplace. (CNN Indonesia, 2020) reported that PwD in Indonesia are still trying to get equal employment opportunities. Lysaght (2012) found that co-workers tend to give more support to PwD who have fewer limitations in work roles. This discrimination leads to PwD's difficulty to adapt to the workplace.

2 RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this research was to examine:

1. How do PwD face challenges in career development during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
2. How do the factors (internal and external) influence the career development of PwD?
3. What support is needed for the PwD to face the challenges during the COVID-19 Pandemic?

3 METHODS

A case study is used to examine the career development of Persons with Disabilities because it is a unique research approach that focuses on studying complex phenomena within a real-life context.

3.1 Sample

The sample for this study was four PwD and one labour supplier for PwD. Demographic and employment characteristics for all participants are presented in Table 1. This study used purposive sampling methods to select participants. Participants were selected by a labour supplier and a psychologist who works with them and specifically selected to meet specific purposive sampling criteria, including that they (a) are people with disabilities (sensory, physically, intellectually, or mentally) with a minimum age of 18 years old, (b) have/had been working in all employment status, and (c) willing to take part in this research.

Table 1: List of participants.

No	Initials	Age	Type of Disability	Education	Employment status
1	AM	24	Physical Disabilities	Bachelor Degree	Contract Employee
2	VN	25	Physical Disabilities	Bachelor Degree	Contract Employee
3	TM	40	Sensory Disabilities	Bachelor Degree	Self-employment
4	FJ	24	Sensory Disabilities	Senior High School	Self-employment
5	SR	31	Non-PwD	Bachelor Degree	Labour Supplier for PwD

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The methods of data collection used in this study were in-depth, open-ended interviews with the participants and key informants, for example, their labour supplier. Data collection was held via online applications, for example, google meet, WhatsApp call and voice notes. Each interview lasted 1 to 2 hours and included questions about individual characteristics, career aspirations and goals, support from family and friends, and covid-19 impact on their work and life.

The data from the interview transcripts were analyzed following a 2-step coding process beginning with the basic coding, which is to develop an initial set of descriptive codes based on relevant literature, our research questions, and the initial interview questions. Then a more in-depth, interpretive code is followed by comparing all cases to find more specific trends and patterns.

4 RESULT

Case Study 1: AMN is a 24-year-old man working as a call center officer at e-commerce. He lives in Semarang. He has a physical disability. He used seeker for his daily activities. He graduated from a public university in Yogyakarta with a major in law. He wanted to be a pilot when he was a kid, but he gave up his dream because of his limitations. When he grows up, he wants to be a civil servant. He chose his current job because this vacancy was available to PwD. He has a comfortable working environment. His co-workers were friendly, and the company provided accessibility for PwD, such as toilets and stairs (for wheelchair users). Meanwhile, he still wants to find another job that matches his interests. He also thinks that his current workplace does not provide an opportunity to have career advancement.

“My current workplace is not entirely suitable with me. I still want to find a higher position, for example as head of division. In my current

workplace, judging by the environment, my friends, my supervisor has been supportive, so I am quite comfortable here. However, I don't want to do this job forever. I want to find a more comfortable position (higher position). I still have a desire to become a civil servant, as my parents expected.”

He has worked at the company since March 2021. His parents supported him to work at the company. During COVID-19 outbreaks, he works alternately from home and the office.

Case Study 2: VN is a 25-year-old female working as a quality control officer at a multinational company at Cikarang. She was normal before, but because of the accident she got in 2008, she had a physical disability. As a result, she used prosthetic legs for her daily activities. She graduated from a public university at Semarang with a major in history. She has worked in her current company because this position was available for her condition regardless of her educational background.

“I chose this job even though it didn't suit my interests, because only this job vacancy was available for me.”

She has worked at the company since October 2020. Her parents supported her to work at the company. She works from the office regularly, and somehow, she got the night shift. By April 2021, she was infected from COVID-19, but now she recovered. Her co-workers were friendly, but the company did not provide accessibility for PwD at the office. Her career aspirations were to be an entrepreneur and an office worker. She is still looking for opportunities to work in her hometown, Cirebon.

Case Study 3: TM. TM is a 40-year-old man who is self-employed at his own home. He was diagnosed with partial blind (low vision) when he was three years old and gradually became totally blind at 36-years-old. He manages a massage therapy business in his home. In addition, he also manages a non-profit organization named Banten Creative Disability for PwD in his district. He graduated from a public university in West Java Province with a major in

public administration. Since childhood, he has always attended a regular school rather than an exclusive school for people with disabilities. During his career development processes, his family gave him full support. His parents never discriminated against his siblings. People in his neighborhood and community also consider him the same as other children. He claims that he receives much help from his family and the surrounding community.

He previously worked in several companies before opening his therapy business. After graduating with his bachelor's degree, he was employed in an insurance company as a sales officer for three years. Afterwards, he was employed in an entertainment venue as a supervisor in a billiards playground for two years. Moreover, subsequently, he became staff at a secretariat party in his district while helping his family business in a poultry slaughterhouse for about six years. He then received and followed massage training for the blind from the Ministry of Social Affairs for two years and opened his massage business after graduating from the training in 2019. During COVID-19 Pandemic, he claimed that his business experienced a tremendous impact. However, there was a decline in income due to regulations for social and physical distancing. Before COVID-19 Pandemic, there were more than 60 clients per month, but now it hardly reaches 60 clients per month. Since the opening of Banten Creative Disability, he and his friends developed other businesses such as handicrafts and culinary. They hope that these businesses can improve their income during the COVID-19 Pandemic. He plans to follow the training for national certification in massage or reflexology and continue his education for a higher degree.

Case Study 4: FJ is a 24-year-old man who is self-employed at his own home. He was diagnosed with total blindness at 11 years old when he got a high fever. Up until 11 years old, he was educated at a regular school. After that, he attended specialized school for PwD, particularly people with visual impairment. After graduating from high school, he attended massage training for the blind from the Ministry of Social Affairs for two years. He opened his massage business after graduating from the training. However, he claimed that opening a massage business is not his career aspiration. He joined the training from the Ministry of Social Affairs because he did not have money for college. However, after taking part in massage training, he began to enjoy the activity. He still enjoys working in the massage field, and even if he wants to change his career to other fields, he claims that the government and community have not been able to facilitate PwD

to work in other fields.

"Becoming a massage therapist is not my dreamed job. I joined the vocational training right after graduated from high school because I did not have money for college. After I took part in massage therapist activity, I began to enjoy it and want to pursue career in this field."

His family gave him full support for all his career choices as long as he could be independent and help his family financially. Nevertheless, the career choices themselves are not much for PwD. As a PwD who is self-employed, he needs assistance to promote his business. He also thinks that the government could provide diverse skills and education for PwD; thus, they can work on a broader type of occupation.

During COVID-19 Pandemic, he experienced a decline in his income by about 15-20% because people were afraid to use his services. He learned to use his money more efficiently to catch up. He also got another job as a chess player and got extra income during the COVID-19 Pandemic from the National Paralympic Committee. He said that the reduction of his customers is not significant because he lived in a small city, but his friends who lived and opened a massage business in a big city cannot meet their daily needs.

Case Study 5: SR is a 31-year-old female who established a platform to help PwD find a job. This platform connects job seekers with disabilities and the companies that hire employees with disabilities. The platform provides information, times, and friends for PwD and companies to discuss anything related to work. It also provides training for PwD to increase their complex skill regarding finding a job. In addition, it monitors the employees during their trial period. This platform usually holds a sharing session between human resources of a company and PwD about the positions open in their company and sharing about how to be a more work-ready person and how to adjust in a new company.

In her opinion, career choice for PwD is still limited either by the company offering or by PwD's skill. Some companies do not limit the position offered only for PwD, so PwD must compete with non-PwD to meet challenging and higher requirements for the position. Available jobs for PwD cannot fulfil PwD's interest, PwD wants wider job opportunities, but most PwD's skills are insufficient to fulfil job requirements. Most PwD have only basic skills and can only be offered basic level jobs. On the other hand, PwD with relevant skills and portfolios are still having trouble finding jobs. It could be due to COVID-19 Pandemics, or there are still stigmas against PwD.

Companies in Indonesia have to employ 2% of their employees with PwD. However, they only choose PwD with mild disabilities, so they do not have to provide additional facilities. In addition, they only recruit them for temporary employment for two years (based on former workforce law). Mostly, they do not want to recruit them for permanent positions due to doubt that PwD can work for a long term. There are many vacancies for temporary employment in the basic level of jobs for PwD, but prospective employees do not exist because they have already worked there before. This makes PwD unable to advance their career to the next level. Due to COVID-19 Pandemics, most companies must decrease their employees to reduce expenses. Employees with disabilities became the first target to be unemployed because they could not work multitasking.

5 DISCUSSION

After analyzing the case study data, the researcher found several factors that influenced PwD's career development:

Support System. All the participants in this study have a positive support system from family, friends, and the workplace. Family influence is a critical factor in career-related decisions (Fouad et al., 2015). Support from parents for career decision-making made PwD more comfortable in carrying out their current job. This situation happened because PwD tends to think more about working conditions (work environment, access for disabilities, and type of work) before working for a particular company. In addition, most participants are still responsible for families; hence they need approval from the family before deciding to take a job. In the workplace, social support contributes to a worker's ability to manage work demands and manage stress (Lysaght et al., 2012). The participants obtained positive support from their co-workers. They can empathize and provide support for PwD in the work environment. Due to the limitations of PwD, one of the co-workers gave relief to the PwD, for example, not to work on the 3rd floor and suggested to work on the 1st floor. A supportive working environment (physical environment) is also needed to improve PwD engagement with the company. Lessons from the prior study by Bonaccio et al. (2020) highlighted the need for a safe environment and health insurance for PwD, as well as non-disability people. Unfortunately, not all companies provide these accessibilities. Based on the participant's answer, the company did not

provide access for PwD, for instance, elevators and toilets for PwD.

Training and Vocational Center. Vocational training is one of the critical elements in the career development of PwD. In line with previous research (Bairamov et al., 2015; Frank, 2016; Lindstrom & Benz, 2002), 2 participants in this study also enrol in vocational rehabilitation before working on their current job. Both participated in 2-year vocational rehabilitation held by the Ministry of Social Welfare in Indonesia. One of the participants enrolled in vocational rehabilitation after graduating from high school. At the same time, other participants enrolled in vocational rehabilitation after doing a variety of previous jobs. The former initially wanted to continue his education to a higher level, but he joined vocational training to be independent due to limited costs and access. Meanwhile, the later joined vocational training because he wanted to open his own business despite the limitations.

The provision of vocational training for PwD should be based on their abilities and their interests in the job (International Labour Organization, 2016). Therefore, the government should provide extensive vocational training that can accommodate the job interests of PwD. Furthermore, extensive vocational training prepares PwD to work successfully either by acquiring job retention or assisting unemployed people in new work (Frank, 2016). Yet, Vocational training in Indonesia primarily only teaches skills for PwD to work and very rarely provides assistance to survive in the workplace.

Career Choice. Career choice for PwD is not as comprehensive as a career option for non-PwD counterpart (Sefotho, 2014). The career options they have are limited primarily due to the limited physical abilities they have. For example, persons with disabilities who have limited space for movement are given jobs with minimum movement. People with disabilities with limited sensory fields are given jobs requiring them not to use their impaired senses. This can help people with disabilities to develop their abilities optimally beyond their limitations. However, this attitude is one form of exclusion for PwD. Thus, PwD should get the job based on their ability and interest (International Labour Organization, 2016). PwD should have given broader access for what job they want to do.

Another factor in limited career choice for PwD is disempowering family, school, and workplace (Björnsdóttir & Sigurjónsdóttir, 2013). Parents should become mentors and role models for their

children's career development, and school is assumed to be the place that serves the best interest of PwD and encourages PwD to pursue different kinds of careers. Finally, a workplace with all kinds of regulations also limits career options for PwD. Employers are concerned that PwD needs a longer time to review and complete tasks within the workplace, have inadequate qualities and qualifications required for the work, or meet an equivalent standard of performance as non-PwD workers (Krisi et al., 2021). Furthermore, employers are concerned that the PwD will make social tension within the workplace. They think that PwD will find it challenging to adapt to the work environment, cause discomfort to co-workers, and trigger co-workers to demand more compensation because of the unequal distribution of labour between PwD and associates (Kosny et al., 2013).

The types of jobs offered to PwD tend to be at the basic level like sales, call centre, and quality control officer. Even though PwD already has skills at the intermediate level and completed higher education, they are still offered jobs at the minor level. 3 out of 4 PwD subjects in this study have already graduated with bachelor's degrees. Therefore, they can pursue more advanced career choices such as supervisors and managers. Nevertheless, the jobs available to them in the labour market are only at the basic level, such as call centers, sales, and quality control officers. That means they enter the workplace at a lower level and are not suitable for their educational background.

Opportunity for Career Advancement. PwD often do not get the opportunity to advance their career to a higher level (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). Employer's lack of knowledge about disability features a tremendous impact on PwD (Potgieter et al., 2017). This study found that PwD are usually recruited as contract workers and continue an equivalent career path until the contract expires. In Indonesia, based on the former labour law (2003), employers can hire contract employees for two years and extend the contract once for a total of 3 years contract period. After the contract period, employers should hire workers in a permanent position.

However, PwD was not appointed as a permanent employee and left his job when the contract was terminated. They then look for another job with the same pattern. Meanwhile, PwD who work in the creative sector are usually contracted per project. After the contract terminates, they will look for another similar job. In conclusion, there is no clear career path and opportunity for career advancement for PwD. Labour law in Indonesia has revised to a

more extended contract period to a 5-year contract period (2020). This provision is detrimental to all employees, including employees with disabilities. They are threatened with a lifetime contract without a promising career path.

Life Situation. Exposure to the Pandemic situation resulted in some employees being laid off, including PwD. The companies will choose multitasking employees (because they are considered more efficient for the company). PwD are considered not multitasking, which means that they are the first choice to be laid-off (for the company's budget efficiency reason). Two dominant factors are related to laid-off issues (particularly in the COVID-19 Pandemic context), namely direct and indirect factors. Direct factors are issues that directly influence work performance, such as assisting technology and supporting facilities. On the other hand, indirect factors include the aspects that indirectly affect workers' social integration within the organization (Krisi et al., 2021).

Another obstacle for PwD in the workplace is the COVID-19 exposure itself. One of the participants has been infected by COVID-19 because her company uses regular shifts in Pandemic situations. The European Center for Disease and Prevention Control (ECDC, 2020) reported that occupational workers are at higher risk because they work in indoor settings and are close to others (co-workers, patients, customers, etc.). Moreover, workers in many essential sectors cannot work from home, which may explain why certain occupations have been shown to have a higher risk of COVID-19 infection and mortality than others. Indonesia also became one of the populations that are more likely to have exposure by COVID-19. These findings are relevant to Chakraborty. Reported that the incidence rate among PwD is more significant, particularly for Asian people. Therefore, this sociodemographic pattern is more likely to find countries with higher COVID-19 incidence rates compared to other countries (Chandrasekaran & Fernandes, 2021).

6 IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

This study found that Indonesian stakeholders need to collaborate to expand work opportunities for PwD. Due to COVID-19 outbreaks, some adjustments need to be made to make a better work environment for PwD. Support from the microenvironment (e.g.,

Table 2: Analysis of challenges and support of disability workers during the covid-19 pandemic.

Factors	Challenges	Support
Personal Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type and severity of disability. It influences the opportunities of PwD to take a job. - Various educational levels. Not all PwD got the same opportunities to achieve higher education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing the opportunities of PwD to access higher education
Family Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disempowering family. Too high parental expectations limit career choice for PwD. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive family. Motivate PwD to achieve their aspire job.
Vocational Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to training. Not all PwD have access to vocational training to upgrade or learn new skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide various vocational training that meets the interests and abilities of PwD.
Workplace Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sufficient health care and facilities. Some companies did not provide sufficient health and safe place for PwD in their company. - Discrimination. Still, the company did not provide the same opportunities to PwD to advance their professional career. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide a healthy and safe physical workplace environment - Guideline from stakeholders related to disability workers - Mapping the severity and make a match a suitable job for PwD
Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negative stigma related to PwD - Social acceptance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusive society, supportive friends, and co-workers.

families) to support from macro sectors (e.g. companies, labour suppliers, and governments) is necessary to fulfil PwD rights in the workplace. Additionally, support can be made by providing PwD- friendly physical accessibility (i.e., elevators, toilets, eateries, etc.).

For the government, the synergy between relevant ministries (both at the central and regional levels) is needed to help providing a more inclusive working environment. The Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Education and Culture need to build good cooperation and collaboration in this regard. The Ministry of Education and Culture can begin to build an empathetic inclusive society character towards PwD. Inclusive curriculums need to be built and implemented in primary, secondary and higher education units because it is necessary to build a compassionate, inclusive society.

In addition, integration between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Manpower is needed; thus, PwD who graduated from special and regular schools can be optimally absorbed into the workplace. The Ministry of Social Affairs plays a crucial role in providing mapping of the latest PwD conditions; hence an accurate picture of the condition and needs of PwD in the work sector is obtained. Stakeholders should make an integrated roadmap to get a more inclusive workplace in the future. In the Pandemic Era, a collaboration between public health providers and

companies is needed to mitigate the COVID-19 impacts in occupational sectors.

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