

## IPS-DPA Roundtable: Employment Discrimination Against People with Disabilities

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On 27 July 2017, the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and the Disabled People's Association (DPA) conducted a roundtable on employment discrimination against people with disabilities. The purpose of the roundtable was to share the findings of a landmark participatory research project by IPS and DPA, in which people with disabilities were trained to take on the role of researchers in the project. The research has been reported in [The Straits Times](#).

Simple steps were taken to ensure that the roundtable session was disability-friendly; there was wheelchair access, and a sign language interpreter from the Singapore Association of the Deaf was present to ensure that those with a hearing impairment could participate in the discussions.



### Participatory methodologies: "Nothing about us without us"

"Nothing about us without us" is a slogan often used to suggest that no policy should be decided without the full direct participation of members of a marginalised group affected by

the policy. It has been adopted by many in the disability movement globally to emphasise that people with disabilities should have a voice of their own.

The participatory research methodology chosen for the study attempts to embody this ethos. Of the project's nine research volunteers and two research participants, eight of them have a disability. They were highly involved in the entire research process; from recruitment of respondents, to the collection of data, analysis, and writing of the findings. IPS' role was minimal and specific: Dr Justin Lee provided research expertise and guidance, to ensure rigour in methodology and analysis.

One of the research participants, Mr Timothy Ng, was called upon to share with the audience his research journey. While many respondents were initially keen to focus on the positives, and felt that "not every day was a bad day", he later found respondents who shared stories that moved him greatly.

"They had some really sad experiences... Some are sad, some are angry, some will really make me reflect about the society that I am in..." he said.

### Research Findings



Dr Marissa Lee, Executive Director of DPA, stated that the intention of the study was not to "name and shame" employers, whether they were from the private or even public and charity sectors. Discrimination often happens unknowingly, and is sometimes perpetuated by even those with the purest intentions.

She described the various forms of discrimination uncovered in the study, from serious ones like manipulation and maltreatment, to more moderate forms like paternalistic attitudes, which can stem from good intentions, or plain inaction. By walking through the entire

employment journey that many people with disabilities go through, she identified the many stages at which discriminatory actions have been made against people with disabilities.

Dr Marissa Lee later explored individual and organisational-level causes of such discriminatory acts, and its effects on people with disabilities. She also identified reasons as to why discrimination is hard to detect. More details of the findings will be shared publicly in due course.

Mr Ng reflected, at the end of the research process, that “there is hope... hope is there to change our society for the better... I hope when we go home, return to our workplaces, we will take action; we will build a more inclusive workplace for each and every one of us.”

### **Policy Co-creation and Disability Policy Network**

The idea of a disability policy network was also mooted during the discussion session, as a way to mobilise the community to contribute to the knowledge gaps in the sector. A platform like the [Social Collaborative](#) Wikipedia site can facilitate the collective understanding of the needs of people with disabilities. This includes taking stock of existing communal resources, assessing service and policy gaps, investigating reasons for those gaps, and discussing possible solutions. More details on the Social Collaborative can be found [here](#).

As a follow-up to the roundtable, a policy co-creation session will be held in mid-October. Invited participants will engage with the findings of the IPS-DPA study, and collectively contribute to solutions. Its primary focus will be on solutions to discriminatory practices at the workplace.

If you have any queries regarding the policy co-creation session or the disability policy network, please contact Dr Marissa Lee at [ed@dpa.org.sg](mailto:ed@dpa.org.sg), or Dr Justin Lee at [justin.lee@nus.edu.sg](mailto:justin.lee@nus.edu.sg).

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