

Inclusive Opportunities: Vocational Training and Employment for Women with Disabilities in My Tho City, Tien Giang Province

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Abstract: In Vietnam, the number of persons with disabilities constitutes a significant proportion of the total population. The unemployment rate among women with disabilities is particularly high. Access to employment for women with disabilities is a social problem that needs to be addressed due to its long-term effects on individuals, their families, and their communities. This paper describes the characteristics of women with disabilities in My Tho City, Tien Giang Province before examining vocational training programs designed for individuals with disabilities and explores the pathways through which women with disabilities in this locality can access employment. In addition to secondary sources, this study collected primary data in 2022 through 33 semi-structured in-depth interviews with women with disabilities, representatives of local government from Ward 5, Ward 6, Dao Thanh and My Phong, a representative of the Women's Union, and a representative of Department of Labor, Invalid, and Social Affairs from within the city. Based on the research results, the paper offers several recommendations to enhance employment opportunities for this group, contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; Women with Disability; Employment; Vocational Training.

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1. Introduction

In 2020, approximately 472 million persons of working age were identified as having disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region (UN ESCAP 2020a). Access to employment for persons with disabilities was two to six times lower than that of non-disabled persons; in which women with disabilities were employed at about half the rate of men with disabilities (UN

ESCAP 2018). Persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities were even more disadvantaged in finding employment due to their multiple disabilities (UN DESA 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities in seeking employment because many businesses have suffered losses or gone bankrupt. In addition, according to UN ESCAP (2020b), factors affecting the employability of persons with disabilities include inadequacy of suitable employment opportunities, job insecurity,

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access to public job information, lack of assistive technologies, and discrimination.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), persons with disabilities make up 10% of the Vietnam's population (Lam 2021). In My Tho City, an urban area of Tien Giang Province, there were approximately 5,011 persons with disabilities of working age (representing 3% of the city's workforce), of which women with disabilities account for about 55% (My Tho City Department of Labor 2022). This report further highlighted the local government's efforts to enhance social protection for individuals with disabilities. These initiatives encompassed financial assistance, the provision of gifts to ten individuals facing challenging circumstances on International Day of People with Disabilities, and the identification of specific difficulties encountered by both persons with disabilities and their families. In response, the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs collaborated with local wards and communes to facilitate the participation of individuals with disabilities in vocational training programs organized by the provincial Association for the Protection of Poor Patients, Children, and People with Disabilities.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, is a common plan for peace and prosperity for persons and the planet, now and into the future. At its core are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent an urgent call to action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership (UN DESA 2015). In response to this call, on September 25, 2020, the Government of Vietnam issued a Resolution on Sustainable Development

applicable in the country until 2030 (Government of Vietnam 2020). Among these goals, the objectives related to the labor and employment issues of women with disabilities include: Goal 1: No Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Goal 10: Reduced Inequality. Therefore, supporting women with disabilities in gaining access to employment will effectively contribute to achieving these SDGs.

This research, grounded in a human rights-based framework, seeks to explore both the opportunities and challenges faced by women with disabilities in accessing employment. Subsequently, it will analyze the current state of vocational training programs and accessibility to employment of women with disabilities in My Tho City, Tien Giang Province and offer a series of suggestions to facilitate their participation in the workforce.

2. Theoretical Approach

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a cornerstone document in the annals of human rights, was promulgated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 (United Nations 1948). The UDHR were ratified by countries between the mid-1940s and the late 1960s but did not initially address persons with disabilities. Until the 1970s, when the severe disadvantages faced by persons with disabilities, such as social exclusion and discrimination, were recognized, these legal documents began to address the rights of persons with disabilities. The International Labor Organization (ILO) issued the first recommendation regarding employment services such as vocational training and employment orientation (Recommendation

No. 71 on Employment, 1944) in 1944. Section X, from paragraphs 39 to 44 of this document, presents the issue of employment of persons with disabilities. The ILO proposed that, where appropriate, persons with disabilities should be trained together with others as well as work under the same conditions and be paid the same salary. Furthermore, for persons with disabilities who are employable, they need to be trained until they can secure a job in the field or the occupation for which they have been trained. One year after the implementation of the Global Action Plan on Disability and two years after the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1983, the ILO adopted Convention No. 159 (Article 1.2, 1944) and Recommendation No. 168 (1944) on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities.

The Convention requires ratifying countries to develop national policies and implement positive measures to effectively realize the principles of equal opportunity for all workers, including persons with disabilities and between men and women with disabilities. This concept is once reaffirmed through the notion of functional rehabilitation associated with employment: *“Helping persons with disabilities find suitable employment, maintain and advance in that job, and thus better integrate or reintegrate into society”* (80, Articles 1-2) (ILO 2004).

Overall, international legal documents clearly express the spirit of supporting persons with disabilities, especially in the field of labor and employment, fostering self-reliance among these people. It is worth noting that the concept of the rights of persons with disabilities in international law has shifted, from a humanitarian approach to human rights-based one. This

shift is expressed through specific references to persons with disabilities in charters, conventions and human rights initiatives ratified since the 1980s (ILO 2004) and in a growing number of (often non-mandatory) international legal instruments adopted by organizations such as the United Nations and the European Commission. Accordingly, persons with disabilities are entitled to basic human rights and should be treated equally like other members of the community. Moreover, due to their physical impairments, they also have the right to special care and protection as a particularly vulnerable group of persons, recognized and protected by international law as well as national law.

On November 28, 2014, the National Assembly of Vietnam ratified the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (National Assembly of Vietnam 2014). This convention reflects Vietnam’s view on respecting the human rights of persons with disabilities. In 2019, Vietnam further ratified Convention No. 98 on Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining, Convention No. 88 on Employment Services, and Convention No. 159 on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons (ILO 2020).

More importantly, Vietnam promulgated the Law on Persons with Disabilities on June 17, 2010 (National Assembly 2010) and so far, the legal system on persons with disabilities is gradually improving to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities, promote their participation, and enhance their access across all areas of life. Additionally, Vietnam has developed a set of national technical standards for the construction of buildings, including specific standards for

housing, public works, stations, and ports, to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. However, these legal documents or regulations are only based on the differences between non-disabled people and people with disabilities and do not specify the differences between men and women with disabilities.

3. Research Methodology

In addition to the collection of secondary data from diverse sources, this study employed 33 semi-structured in-depth interviews to analyze the employment accessibility of women with disabilities. The findings from this primary data collection were subsequently used to develop recommendations aimed at enhancing the capacity of this marginalized group to reduce their reliance on family support and achieve self-sufficiency, thereby gaining recognition within their families and communities.

The secondary data sources employed in this research primarily originate from local reports pertaining to individuals with disabilities and their employment prospects. The quantitative data sources facilitated the authors' analysis of the fundamental demographic characteristics of persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities in the local context, as well as their participation in vocational training and job-seeking endeavors. Qualitative sources, on the other hand, contributed to an understanding of the programs designed to support individuals with disabilities. Given the limited collection of crucial socio-demographic data on individuals with disabilities at the local level, the analysis of secondary data sources was constrained. Consequently, this study can only

categorize the number of women with disabilities, their educational attainment, and the type of disability they experience. This limitation is acknowledged within the scope of the research.

The approach to sampling follows the snowball sampling and purposive sampling methods. Snowball sampling is a technique that typically begins with an individual possessing the desired characteristics. This individual then leverages their personal connections to recruit others with similar characteristics, as described by Sadler, Lim, and Fullerton (2010). Purposive sampling is strategically utilized to select respondents who are most likely to provide relevant and valuable information (Kelly 2010: 317). This method effectively identifies and selects cases that optimize the use of limited research resources (Palinkas et al. 2015).

The researchers first initiated contact with the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, requesting their assistance in recruiting eligible female participants for the study. Through these efforts, several women with disabilities were interviewed. Subsequently, the research team was introduced to additional individuals who met the established sampling criteria, encompassing factors such as being of working age, diversity in employment status, occupation, income, type of disability, and disability status. The selection of a sample of typical cases helps the study show the outstanding characteristics of each group or social class (Nguyen 2012). Therefore, the study selected a number of research samples according to typical cases – persons who meet the before mentioned criteria. After interviewing several women with disabilities, the researchers were introduced to more persons who met the

sampling criteria. More specifically, the interviewees included 20 women with differing categories of disability aged from 18 to 55 years old (working age range). The individuals with disabilities participating in the study, primarily presented with motor impairments (n=9), including congenital, childhood polio, and accident-related disabilities. Additionally, eleven participants reported other disabilities, including exposure to Agent Orange, tumors, strokes, and uterine cancer. Notably, none of the participants exhibited Cerebral Palsy, Down syndrome, or Autism, ensuring their full mental clarity and self-behavioral control during

their involvement in the study. The primary criterion for encouraging an individual with disabilities to participate in an interview was their mental capacity. The participant must be fully capable of providing accurate information and actively engaging in the interview process.

Additionally, 10 representatives of local governments at ward (4), commune (4) and city (2) levels including an official from the Women's Union and an official from the Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs of city level. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were undertaken with three employers who had recruited individuals with disabilities.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Female Participants with Disabilities

		Ward 5	Ward 6	Dao Thanh commune	My Phong commune	Total
Number of samples		5	5	5	5	20
Disability level¹	Severe	5	5	5	5	20
	Movement	2	4	2	1	9
Types of disability	Hearing	0	0	1	1	2
	Vision	1	1	0	3	5
	Others	2	0	2	0	4
	Illiterate	0	0	1	1	2
Educational level	Primary school	2	1	1	1	5
	Secondary school	2	4	2	2	10
	High school	1	0	1	1	3
Age	25 to under 35	0	0	1	1	2
	35 to under 45	4	3	2	1	10
	45 to 55	1	2	2	2	7
	Over 55	0	0	0	1	1
Marital status	Single	0	0	3	2	5
	Married	4	4	1	2	11
	Divorced	1	1	1	1	4

¹ Decree 28/2012/ND-CP defines disability levels as follows: individuals with extremely severe disabilities, individuals with severe disabilities, and individuals with mild disabilities. The assessment of the participant's disability level is determined by local authorities.

The research was conducted in two communes (My Phong and Dao Thanh) and two wards (Ward 5 and Ward 6) within My Tho City, Tien Giang Province. These specific locations were selected due to their high concentration of individuals with disabilities and their designation as priority areas by the city government for economic, cultural, and social development initiatives. Despite these efforts, the availability of employment opportunities for rural workers, particularly those with disabilities, remained limited in these localities. The

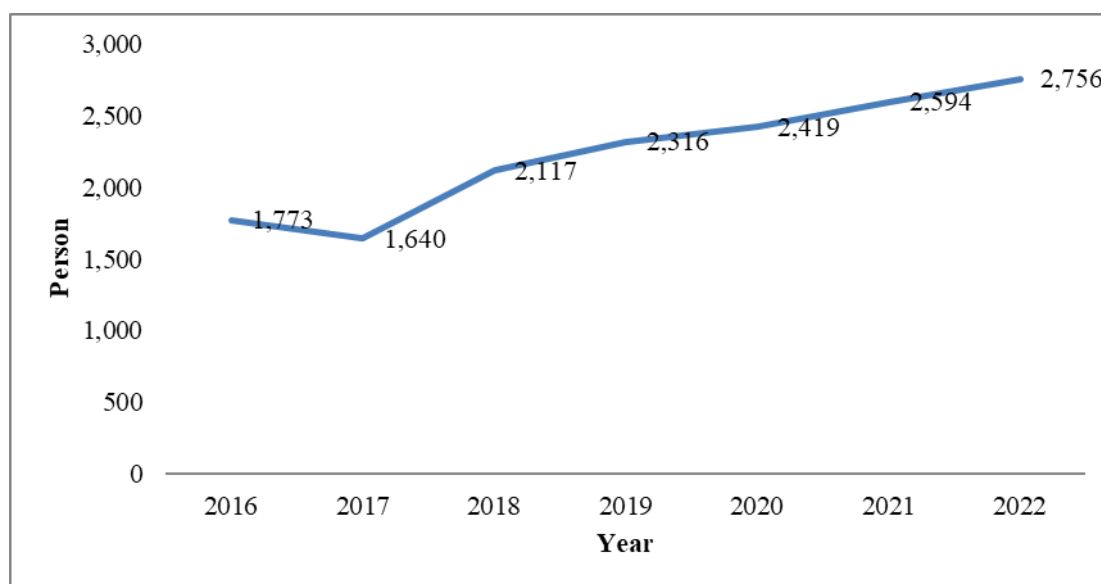
data collection was carried out in 2022 and updated in 2023.

4. Research Results

4.1 Characteristics of Women with Disabilities in My Tho City

The number of women with disabilities residing in My Tho City is significant and has increased over the years (see Figure 1).

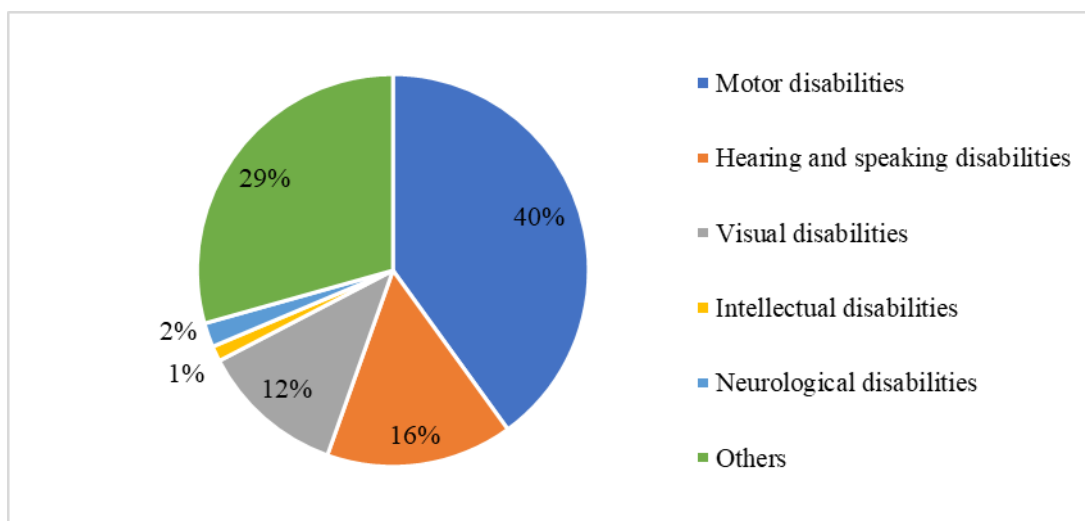
Figure 1: Number of Women with Disabilities in My Tho City, 2016-2022



Source: Compiled from the annual reports of the Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Tien Giang province in 2016-2022

In 2016, the city population included 1,773 women with disabilities of working age with this number increasing to 2,756 in 2022, a growth of more than 1.5 times in a period of six years. The causes of disability are very diverse, such as polio fever (causing leg atrophy and arm lameness), Down Syndrome, intellectual disabilities, or genetic diseases like spinal

muscular atrophy and muscular dystrophy (which are diseases of the muscles and nerves). The prevalence of women's disabilities in this locality is characterized as a diverse range of needs encompassing motor impairments, hearing and speaking disability, and other conditions primarily attributed to the historical effects of Agent Orange exposure, accidents, or diseases.

Figure 2: Types of Disability in Women

Source: My Tho City Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (2022)

Figure 2 shows that motor disabilities account for the highest percentage at 40% (motor disabilities here include limb loss, polio-induced limb difficulties), with other causes accounting for 29% (due to cancer, stroke, and the aftermath of a cerebrovascular accident), while hearing and speaking disabilities (16%), visual disabilities (12%), neurological disabilities (2%), and intellectual disabilities (1%) make up the lower percentages. The chart illustrates that the disability of women in the locality due to disease is quite high. The level of disability of women in the city is currently severe (60%) and extremely severe (40%) (My Tho City Department of Labor 2022). The high number of women with disability greatly affects the family and the mental and material lives of people with disabilities, especially women who are married and have children. This report also identified that more than 70% of women with disabilities belong to financially and/or socially disadvantaged households. Poor women are more likely to be disabled because they often live and work in unsafe environments with poor sanitation conditions and have limited access to education and employment. The

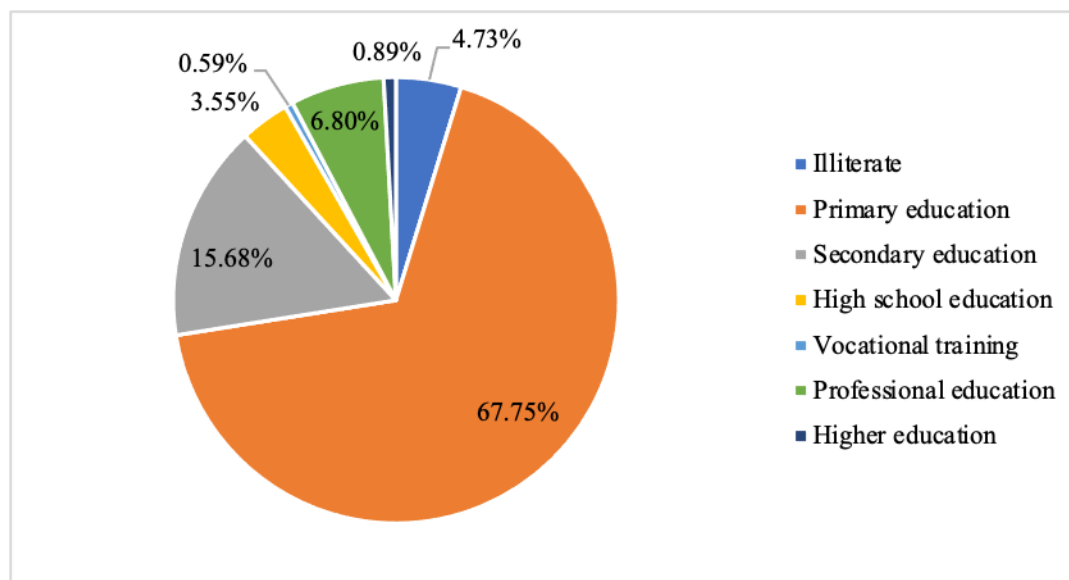
type of disability and the severity of the disability are important factors to consider as they have a great impact on access to jobs for female workers with disabilities.

In accordance with the sampling criteria established for primary data collection, participants were selected based on the exclusion of individuals exhibiting any form of neurological or intellectual disabilities. Primary data from this study shows that (see Table 1) among the female participants, nine individuals reported mobility impairments, two had hearing impairments, five experienced visual impairments, and four exhibited other types of disabilities. Within the population exhibiting motor and other disabilities, a significant proportion attribute their conditions to accidents or illnesses encountered during developmental stages rather than genetic factors. More specific causes leading to disability are traffic accidents, unexploded ordnance from the war or labor-related incidents. Additionally, other causes of disabilities include illnesses such as stroke, cancer, spinal degeneration, and tumors. These types of disabilities create many challenges in their lives of women with disabilities.

Access to vocational education and training is an opportunity for persons with disabilities to change their perception and improve their professional qualifications; thereby developing positive views on life

and increasing opportunities to access jobs. However, the survey showed that local women with disabilities had relatively low levels of education.

Figure 3: Educational Level of Women with Disabilities



Source: My Tho City Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (2022)

Figure 3 shows that, in general, women with disabilities in the locality have a low level of education; the majority have completed primary education (accounting for 67.75%), and the percentage of those who have graduated from college or university is low (0.89%). The percentage of persons who graduated from high school, vocational training and vocational high school also accounted for only 10.9%. According to the participants in this research, in addition to personal causes such as “no longer wanting to study”, “want to have a job”, their families also have a significant impact on their access to education for reasons such as “poor health”, “difficult circumstances”, “difficulty in mobility”, and “no one to take them to school”.

The primary data were aligned with those of the secondary data, revealing that none of the 20 female participants possessed

educational attainment beyond the high school level. The majority of participants had completed secondary education (50%), while a smaller group had completed their primary school education (25%). Notably, two individuals were identified as illiterate. In general, physical impairments, poor health, and limited educational attainment are the main reasons leading to difficulties in accessing jobs.

4.2 Vocational Training for Persons with Disabilities

The majority of women with disabilities surveyed indicated a lack of awareness regarding vocational training and employment policies implemented by the central as well as local governments. Furthermore, a common desire expressed among these women was for the commune government or local organizations to

establish inclusive employment policies that would actively accept individuals with disabilities who are currently unemployed. This sentiment stems from the prevailing reality that factories and other workplaces rarely extend employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities. As highlighted by a 39-year-old disabled woman residing in a Dao Phong commune, “Persons, and particularly women, with disabilities can hardly be employed by factories or any other companies”.

In My Tho City, authorities at all levels have demonstrated a keen interest in implementing financial support policies for individuals with disabilities to facilitate job creation. A notable example is the case of a rural woman, 57 years old, residing in My Phong commune, who lost an arm and a leg due to a wartime bomb and mine accident. The researchers recounted a personal experience of accompanying this woman on a hot afternoon while she was selling lottery tickets and recorded her story. At the age of 11, the woman stepped on a forgotten mine in her garden, resulting in her disability. Subsequently, she discontinued her education but later, with encouragement from her family, resumed her studies until the ninth grade before withdrawing again. For over three decades, she has been earning a livelihood by selling lottery tickets. Initially, she relied on crutches for mobility, but her condition deteriorated, necessitating the use of a motorbike taxi to travel from her commune to the city center. As a child of a martyr, she receives a monthly allowance of over 1.6 million VND (equivalent to around USD\$60). The commune government has extended financial assistance to her, including a business capital loan to support her children. She has also benefited from a low-interest loan

from the Bank for Policies, initially borrowing 10 million VND, then 15 million VND, and ultimately repaying the full amount of 20 million VND. Currently, her son has established a stable career in the Public Security industry. However, she continues to borrow money primarily to maintain a reserve of capital for trading purposes, rather than relying on her children for financial support. Furthermore, the study findings indicate that a majority of women with disabilities interviewed expressed a desire to access loans from the Bank for Social Policies at “low interest rates” to support their employment endeavors.

Data from the survey shows that in recent years, the Provincial Women’s Union has provided various forms of support for local groups of women with disabilities such as regular social welfare activities, financial support, rice, and necessities for households with women with disabilities in difficult circumstances. They have also introduced disabled women to low-interest loans for business purposes, and provided them with livelihood tools such as wheelchairs and lottery ticket vending machines. Similarly, the Youth Union, the Red Cross, the Association for Victims of Agent Orange, and the Blind Association have also provided similar forms of support to women with disabilities. Annually, the Association of the Blind opens basic vocational training classes. However, due to limited funding (due to its dependence on sponsorship), the beneficiaries are mainly for visually impaired members. The Youth Union supports disabled youth (including disabled young women) by providing livelihood tools such as sewing machines, hairdressing tools, and wheelchairs, as there is no longer a form of loan support for youth start-ups. The Red

Cross and the Association for Victims of Agent Orange mainly distribute gifts to members, including disabled individuals, in difficult circumstances during holidays or provide interest-free loans, but the loan amount is limited to one to two million VND, which is insufficient to cover vocational training expenses.

Data from the My Tho City Blind Association (2022) indicates that, from 2016 to 2022, the number of persons with disabilities receiving vocational training was not high (no more than 12 trainees per year). There were significant differences between the types of training attended by men and women with disabilities. Men with disabilities primarily attend floor brush-making classes, while women with disabilities tend to learn how to massage and grow bean sprouts because this disparity is rooted in societal perceptions that these occupations are more suited to the perceived physical capabilities of women. Additionally, every year, the Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs in wards and communes organizes vocational training classes for rural workers, including encouraging people with disabilities to participate, but many women with disabilities in the study reported that these classes “do not suit their type of disability” as they are mainly organized by the Blind Association for visually impaired members. The manager of the vocational training class said that the type of this disability has affected the learning ability and mobility; therefore, over many years, the “Basic vocational classes are predominantly male, with no or very few women with disabilities join the classes”. City-level officials also have a similar opinion, stating that it is more challenging to encourage women with disabilities to attend vocational classes

than men due to reasons such as “lack of transportation service for blind people or assistance from the family”. They also noted that women with disabilities often have more “psychological hesitation” than their male counterparts. The organizers of these training classes have to persuade people for many days, combining propaganda with “attaching benefits” to get them to attend classes, such as “having to hire a motorcycle taxi to take them to school every day for 2 to 3 months”. In-depth interviews revealed that 15 women with disabilities mentioned that the health of women is not guaranteed when accessing government-supported vocational training courses. For example, floor brush-making classes are generally more suitable for men’s health because women “struggle with their limbs”, “are slow at broom-making”, and “do not make brooms tightly and beautifully due to lack the strength”. As a result, they “just try to sell lottery tickets”. Therefore, many local women with disabilities choose to work as freelancers, without contracts or insurance, or create their own jobs at home.

Despite advancements, according to the authorities, societal stigma persists regarding women with disabilities. If a woman with disabilities gets married, they are believed to be “lucky person” and are expected to take domestic work responsibilities, prioritizing the care of their husband and children rather than pursuing employment. Most married disabled women also reported that after marriage, they had to quit their apprenticeship or not be allowed to work but staying at home to take care of their families because of the prejudice of society that they must perform their duties as wives and mothers in the family and therefore have to live “submissively”.

Consequently, they lose the opportunity to participate in vocational training courses.

For a multitude of reasons, women with disabilities often underutilize vocational training programs offered by local organizations, thereby limiting their access to gainful employment that necessitates specific professional qualifications.

4.3 Employment Access for Women with Disabilities

The Labor Code of 2019, specifically Section 4 on Labor with Disabilities, Article 158, outlines the State's policies for employees with disabilities. These policies mandate State sponsorship of labor rights and job creation for individuals with disabilities, as well as the adoption of appropriate incentive and preferential measures for employers engaging in job creation and accepting employees with disabilities in accordance with disability-related laws.

The survey revealed that when questioned about State policies designed for their benefit, all women with disabilities responded identically, "receiving monthly subsidy". Individuals with disabilities recognized by competent authorities are entitled to a disability certificate. This certificate grants them access to free or reduced public transportation, social services, and priority treatment in healthcare. However, local authorities said that not only individuals with disabilities, but also some officials involved in this area, have not fully grasped the significance of this certificate in ensuring the rights of people with disabilities and creating opportunities for them to access social services and State policies. A majority of individuals with disabilities are not fully aware of the

benefits and roles associated with this certificate, but primarily focusing on the "subsidy" they receive and the "cost paid from the health insurance card". Moreover, some participants in the study highlighted the local authorities' slowness in issuing disability certificates, hindering individuals with disabilities in their healthcare management and consequently limiting their working capacity, thereby affecting their access to employment and higher-income opportunities.

Research on local annual reports on job creation indicates that the number of individuals with disabilities participating in job creation loans remains limited, and the proportion of women with disabilities borrowing capital is notably low, predominantly consisting of men with disabilities. According to research conducted by the trust fund managers of Local Bank for Social Policies, the limited access of people with disabilities to loans is attributed to "procedural barriers to loans" stemming from the requirement to be a member of the Women's Union or the Association of the Blind. Additionally, the loan or subsidy amounts are often insufficient to serve as adequate trading capital. Some families exhibit an excessive degree of protection for women with disabilities, discouraging them from pursuing capital-intensive job creation ventures, while men with disabilities are granted greater opportunities to start their own businesses, reflecting the lingering influence of the "men as the head of the family" notion in certain households. Local social-political associations have also expressed concerns regarding the potential inability of people with disabilities to repay the principal amount when due. As a result, financial constraints further hinder the opportunities for women

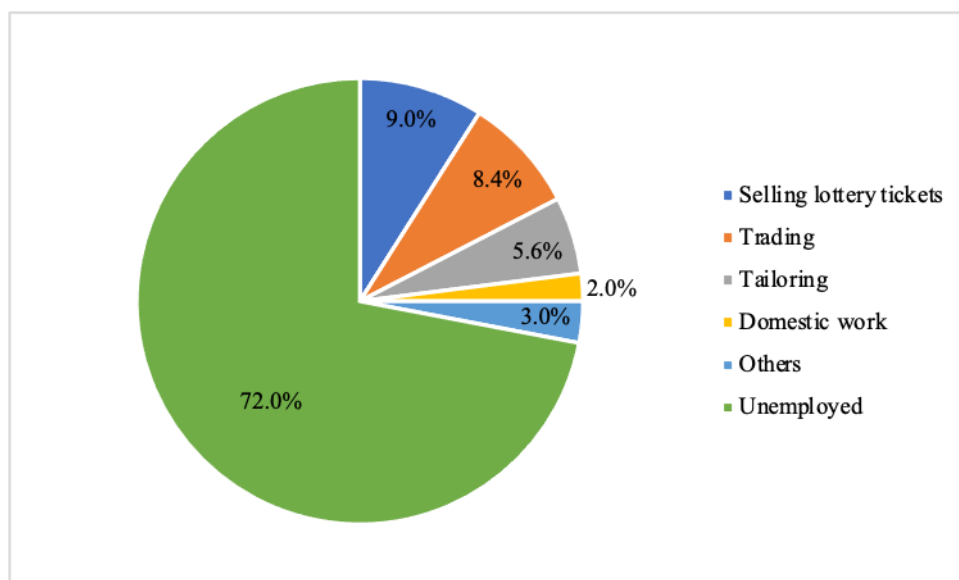
with disabilities to access employment, and the implementation of support measures for these women to create jobs in the locality remains limited compared to their counterparts without disabilities and men with disabilities as shared via information from local authorities.

The research results show that there are three main reasons why women with disabilities face difficulties in accessing employment: poor health, stigma and discrimination, and lack of information and knowledge about employment. These causes are more clearly shown according to the sharing of some disabled men, “women with disabilities are not as healthy as men”. Therefore, for some jobs such as knitting, broom-making and floor brush-making, “women cannot do them, or if they do, they do them very slowly”. A business owner in My Phong commune

noted that “if men with disabilities are bold in bringing products to the market, women hesitate to go out”. This quote extended into “So currently, brooms made by men with disabilities are very popular in and outside the province, while some women with disabilities who have learned broom-making have started their own businesses but cannot sell their products”.

According to the women with disabilities who participated in the study, all of them wish to have a job that generates income to, first, take care of themselves and then of their families. An official of the My Tho City Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs stated that the department has only been able to compile statistics on a few common occupations for people with disabilities and has not yet detailed the jobs in other categories.

Figure 4: Types of Employment of Women with Disabilities



Source: My Tho City Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (2022)

Figure 4 shows that the percentage of women with disabilities who are unemployed accounts for more than two-thirds (72%) of those who identify with a disability. The number of women with disabilities is highest among lottery ticket

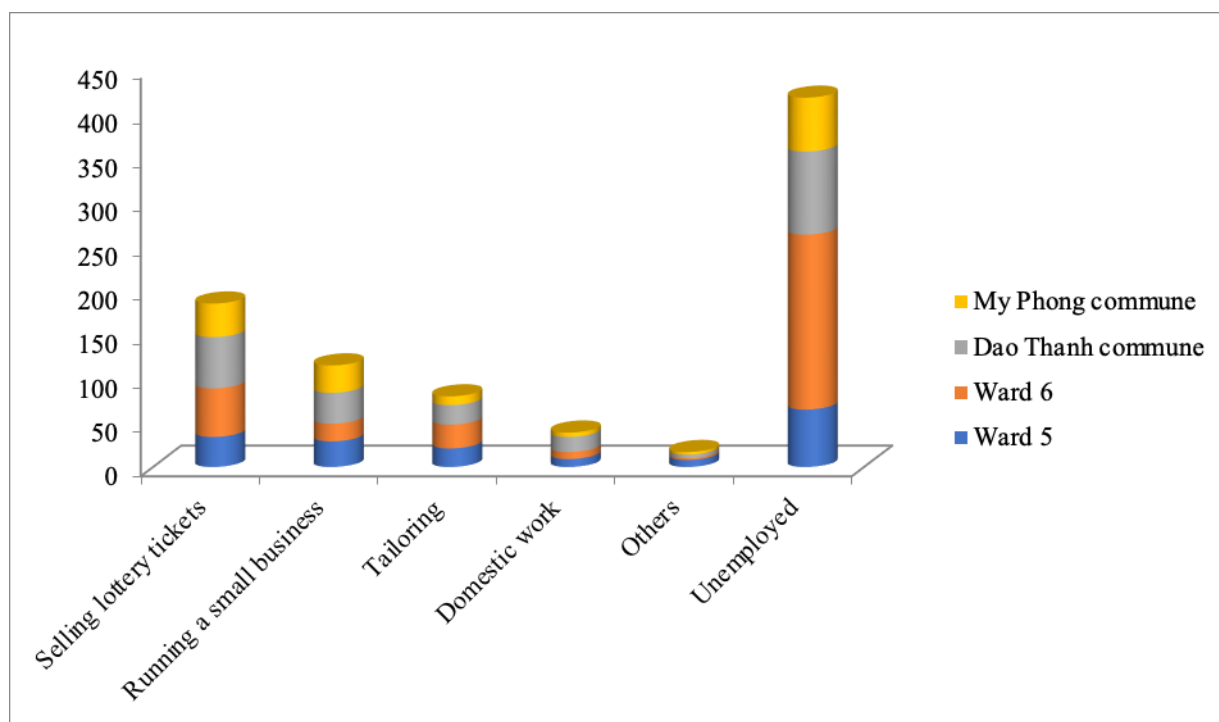
sellers. Women with disabilities mainly choose untrained occupations such as selling lottery tickets, street vending, and helping with domestic work for relatives or residents in their communities, as these are familiar people who make them feel more

secure. One disabled woman in My Phong Commune shared: “I feel ashamed, so I don’t go outside; my relative called me to help her do housework, so I tried to help her”. Additionally, their access to work also impacts on their family. A family member shared that “she is disabled, how can I entrust her to others, so I feel sorry for her”. This shows that many women with disabilities, despite their desire to step out into society and participate in basic social interactions such as going to school and working like normal people, face obstacles from their families due to overprotection, with reasons such as

“people will take advantage of her, and it would be hard to take care of her”. All the women with disabilities in this study expressed a desire to work depending on their health conditions, as long as they are healthy enough to work every day and take good care of themselves.

The secondary data shows that Ward 6 has the largest number of women with disabilities in My Tho City with 310 persons and most of whom have severe disabilities. This locality also has the highest percentage of unemployed women with disabilities.

Figure 5: *Employment of Women with Disabilities in the Surveyed Areas*



Source: My Tho City Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (2022)

In My Phong and Dao Thanh communes, the number of unemployed women with disabilities is lower, and most employed women choose freelance work (running a small business, selling lottery tickets) as their primary source of income. In contrast, men with disabilities have a higher number of people engaged in other occupations compared to disabled women

(massage, floor brush-making, broom-making - these are basic occupations supported by the government with vocational training). A comparative analysis of the two wards and two communes revealed a higher propensity for disabled women to engage in lottery ticket sales (89 and 96 individuals, respectively) compared to other occupations such as

trading (115), tailoring (80), housekeeping (39), and miscellaneous categories (17). Furthermore, the unemployment rate among disabled women in the two wards (163) was observed to be slightly higher than that in the communes (155).

The description and analysis of primary and secondary data above provides a picture of the employment status and opportunities for women with disabilities in My Tho City, Tien Giang Province. As observed by a representative of Department of Labor, Invalid and Social Affairs, the number of women with disabilities is significant and continues to increase due to causes such as illness, accidents, and genetics, leading to economic difficulties and low educational attainment. These are important factors influencing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, as a substantial number of local employers remain unprepared to recruit women with such impairments. The research data points out that women with disabilities wish to have stable jobs that generate income to support their living. They primarily choose unskilled occupations, while men with disabilities tend to choose jobs for which they have received basic vocational training.

5. Discussion

This study, grounded in a rights-based theoretical framework, investigates the challenges faced by women with disabilities in accessing vocational training and employment opportunities within My Tho City. By examining the research findings, the study contributes to existing scholarship on the employment prospects of this marginalized group.

Mwachofi (2009) found that in the U.S., interventions aimed at improving employment outcomes for women with disabilities often yielded limited results. In Canada, women with disabilities perceived employment assistance programs as largely ineffective, criticizing the government's current support measures, such as wage subsidies (Chouinard 2010). Conversely, studies conducted in South Korea identified several factors that positively influenced employment opportunities for women with disabilities, including education, qualifications, health status, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Kim 2020). While developed countries have implemented various policies to support individuals with disabilities, particularly women, the enforcement of such policies in other regions, such as Saudi Arabia, has been reported to be inadequate, accompanied by widespread negative attitudes. Participants in these regions demonstrated resilience in their job searches, relying on familial and emotional support, but often lacked instrumental assistance (Peter, Alem and Knabe 2018). In China, significant gender disparities in employment among individuals with disabilities have been documented, with men being more likely to secure employment (Wang and Li 2018). In low- and middle-income countries, women with disabilities confront numerous challenges in education, employment, and motherhood due to factors such as discrimination, stigma, lack of support, and poverty (Tefera et al. 2018). Collectively, these studies underscore the systemic and cultural barriers, as well as ineffective policy implementations, that hinder the employment prospects of women with disabilities across diverse geographical contexts.

The International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in March 2007, explicitly addresses the right to work for individuals with disabilities. Member states are obligated to recognize the labor rights of persons with disabilities on an equal footing with others. This right encompasses the opportunity to earn a living through work chosen or accepted by the employee in the labor market, within an open and accessible working environment for people with disabilities. Despite Vietnam's acknowledgment of the vulnerabilities faced by individuals with disabilities, specific legal protections for women with disabilities remain inadequate. While Vietnam has implemented numerous policies for people with disabilities in general, the focus on women with disabilities and their specific employment challenges is notably absent.

In comparison to other countries mentioned above, Vietnam has prioritized providing social security benefits for individuals with disabilities. However, the state-provided subsidies and other socio-political resources are often insufficient to ensure a secure livelihood for these individuals, as evidenced by the research findings. Given the limitations of state support, individuals with disabilities must actively seek strategies to cope with their circumstances. However, their low educational levels and lack of working skills pose significant barriers to securing suitable employment, particularly for women with disabilities. Therefore, drawing upon the research findings, several practical implications are proposed.

6. Practical Implications

My Tho city is the central urban area of Tien Giang province; thus, taking care of the disadvantaged alongside the socio-economic development of the locality is an urgent issue. However, local reports that the unemployment rate among women with disabilities in the locality is still quite high, with most living in sub-standard conditions, primarily relying on social protection. From the standpoint of human rights as they intersect with development, the present paper offers several recommendations grounded in the research findings.

Policy plays an important role in society. Despite concerted efforts undertaken by both central and local governments to facilitate the integration of individuals with disabilities into the labor market, current employment support policies and employment access regulations for women with disabilities are still lacking, resulting in limited effectiveness at the local level. Local authorities need to pay more attention to implementing support policies for people with disabilities in general and women with disabilities in particular. Equally there needs to be further study and the development of livelihood support models for people with disabilities to help stabilize their lives. Alongside this, the organization of job fairs that focus on women with disabilities as well as encourage employers to demonstrate social responsibility by hiring workers with disabilities in general and women with disabilities in particular, giving them opportunities to access employment. Local governments should prioritize the needs of women with disabilities residing in rural areas, as these individuals often encounter more limited

access to resources compared to their counterparts in urban settings.

In addition, job creation loan support for people with disabilities in general and women with disabilities in particular needs to consider the loan limits, loan procedures, and the need to make it easier and more convenient for workers to access funds while expanding the scope to include people with disabilities who are not members of associations. Moreover, current media plays an important role in creating job access opportunities for people with disabilities, so there should be diverse and appropriate communication forms to provide information on vocational training and employment for different types of disabilities. Vocational training centers or associations need to design and implement programs that support education and vocational training to help women with disabilities meet professional standards to ensure that women with disabilities can secure equal labor rights in society.

The research shows differences in access to vocational training and employment between men and women with disabilities. Women with disabilities have the opportunity to access employment, but they mostly choose jobs they can find themselves or engage in unskilled labor such as selling lottery tickets, domestic work, or running a small business. While men with disabilities tend to choose jobs for which they have received basic vocational training, primarily in fields such as massage, broom-making, and floor brush-making or trading. The type and level of the disability condition are also important factors influencing the employment access of women with disabilities. Therefore, basic vocational training courses for persons with disabilities need financial support from the

state budget to expand the target groups beyond just members of associations. Training courses also need to be more compatible with the types and health conditions of women with disabilities, giving them equal opportunities with men in vocational training.

Stereotypes and prejudices from family members also create invisible barriers that reduce employment access opportunities for women with disabilities. Families need to trust the abilities of the women with disabilities in their lives. Depending on the type and severity of the disability and their health condition, they should encourage and support these persons in studying and improving their skills to increase employment access and enable them to generate income and have a better life. Furthermore, families should support their health care, assign reasonable household chores, and take care of their children to allow them to go out and work in society.

Women with disabilities themselves must strive to overcome self-stigma about disability and gender to be confident in their abilities. They need to make efforts to access education and study to improve their qualifications to facilitate access to employment, change their negative thinking about disability and realize their self-worth.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This exploratory study delves into the international and national legal frameworks governing the rights and employment of individuals with disabilities, with a particular focus on women. While numerous international and Vietnamese legal documents acknowledge

the need to respect and support individuals with disabilities, often marginalized in society, the specific regulations and support mechanisms, especially those pertaining to livelihood preparation and employment access, remain limited.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, several limitations are inherent. Methodologically, the small sample size conducted in a few localities restrict the representativeness of the research findings, providing only a preliminary overview of the issue. Future studies would benefit from employing a large-scale quantitative survey to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in accessing employment opportunities across various regions.

In terms of content, the study primarily focuses on providing a legal and theoretical foundation for analyzing the educational levels, vocational training, and job-seeking endeavors of women with disabilities in the locality. While factors such as laws, policies, community dynamics, family influences, and the attitudes of women with disabilities themselves have been introduced, they have not been subjected to in-depth analysis. Subsequent research could delve deeper into these factors to gain a more nuanced understanding of their impact on the career preparation and employment prospects of individuals with disabilities.

8. Conclusion

The number of persons with disabilities in general and women with disabilities in particular in the city is increasing. Women with disabilities need jobs and self-employment opportunities to alleviate

life's difficulties rather than relying solely on the state's welfare system. Based on the analysis results, it can be concluded that the access to employment of women with disabilities in My Tho City has become a social problem in which these women do not have many opportunities to prepare for approaching employment opportunities and later can access well-paid employment.

Currently, there are advantages in access to employment for women with disabilities provided by the local Women's Union as well as local government, but there are still gender prejudices towards disabled people, particularly women with disabilities. Additionally, there are vocational training courses that are not suitable for women with disabilities. Despite concerted efforts, numerous women with disabilities continue to grapple with societal stigma and gender-based stereotypes perpetuated by their families, communities, and their own internalized beliefs, which collectively impede their access to employment opportunities. The labeling of this prejudice on women with disabilities makes them feel inferior, lower their self-worth when compared to able-bodied persons in society. The participation of women with disabilities in vocational training courses is constrained by several factors, including the limited scope of training programs offered by local organizations, the specific types of disabilities, and the prevailing traditional belief that women with disabilities should not be burdened with the need to earn a livelihood, especially after marriage. In terms of access to employment, women with disabilities continue to face a heightened risk of employment rejection due to their disability status and gender.

Factors that impede their access to employment encompass their skill levels, poor health conditions, societal stigma, and discouragement from their families.

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