

# **“They Do Not Perceive Us as People”: Women with Disabilities’ Access to Key Social Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Zimbabwean Case Study**

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## **Abstract**

This study sought to discover how women with disabilities (WWDs) fared at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to access to key social services. Fieldwork was conducted in April 2022 among 104 women in three low-income areas of Caledonia, Epworth, and Hatcliffe within Harare Metropolitan Province. The key social services studied are information, water, health, education, and protection from gender-based violence (GBV). The study utilises the structural violence and social suffering theoretical lenses to analyse the institutionalised marginalisation of women with disabilities in relation to access to basic social services during the COVID-19 era. Findings reveal that the pandemic amplified the marginalisation, inequities, exclusion, and challenges confronted by persons with disabilities (PWDs) in general and, specifically, gender and social class inequalities faced by poor women in the Zimbabwean society. The intersection of vulnerabilities arising from gender, social class, disabilities, and the pandemic itself created insurmountable challenges for WWDs. Resolving these challenges is important to creating an inclusive environment for WWDs to thrive. The government, local authorities, and NGOs need to mainstream disability issues in service provision regardless of whether or not there is a pandemic.