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Women with disabilities in leadership: The challenges of patriarchy

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In Africa women with disabilities remain marginalised and struggle to claim their fundamental human rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. This focus explores the experiences of women with disabilities in leadership positions in disabled people's organisations (DPOs) in Zimbabwe. A group of eight women leaders with disabilities in DPOs in Harare and Bulawayo were interviewed for the study over a period of three months during 2011. This article focuses on the core themes that emerged. Discussion of their challenges and experiences reveals the complexity of the interface between disability and culture, which created dynamic intersections between patriarchy and the gendered power relations experienced by the participants. Their experiences suggest that patriarchy continues to restrain full participation of women in leadership in DPOs in Zimbabwe, which is consistent with the global trend. Implications for exercising of leadership by women with disabilities who are active in the disability movement are also considered.

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