**Title of the project: The myth of asexuality? Disability stigma as a barrier to sexual relationships in South Africa**

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

The project will investigate the prevailing myths and attitudes towards the sexuality of people with physical disabilities among a sample general population in South Africa, as well as through the experiences of people with physical disabilities. There is an increasing recognition that sexual health is a human right, yet, research evidence suggests that people with disabilities may be generally excluded from living fully sexual and sexually healthy lives. A major social barrier previously identified is the myth of asexuality; that is that persons with disabilities (such as physical disabilities) are assumed to be asexual, and thus not perceived as sexual persons. The project aims to:

1. investigate the attitudes of the general population towards the sexuality of people with disabilities in South Africa;
2. explore the experiences of stigma and barriers to fulfilling sexual relationships among people with disabilities in South Africa;
3. raise public awareness about the intersection between disability stigma and sexuality;

The project will use mixed methods for research, including an online survey questionnaire, and participatory qualitative methods with persons with disabilities.

**Duration :** 2 years

**PARTNERS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT**

This project results of a collaboration between:

Universities:

* University of East London, UK. - Dr Poul Rohleder, senior lecturer and academic tutor in clinical psychology and a research assistant,
* Stellenbosch University in South Africa - Prof Leslie Swartz. Professor of Psychology and a master student
* SINTEF Technology and Society, Department of Health - Mrs. Stine Hellum Braathen, social scientist with a background in anthropology and community health (Based in Stellenbosch University South Africa).

Non-governmental organization (NGO):

* Southern African Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD), a non-governmental organization - Mr. Mussa Chiwaula, is the Director General. As the DPO partner, SAFOD is a key player on this project and has collaborated on the development of the research proposal and will be involved in research design, takes responsibility for the recruiting of people with disabilities as active participants on the project. SAFOD will also provide expert advice on the project, the interpretation of results, write-up and dissemination of findings.

**EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

This project aims to challenge the negative attitudes and prevailing myths about the sexuality of people with physical disabilities by raising public awareness, and highlighting the lived experiences of people with disabilities themselves. The project will be conducted with the direct collaboration of a prominent Disabled People’s Organization (DPO) in the region. This is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Guiding Principles, in that the aims and outcome of the project will make a contribution to:

* Increasing public respect for the inherent dignity, individual autonomy and freedom of choice of people with disabilities in terms of living a fully sexual life
* Challenging discriminatory attitudes and through this promote non-discrimination with regards to sexual health issues.
* Promoting full and effective participation and inclusion in society as a sexual person
* Promoting respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
* Highlighting the need for equality of opportunity in matters of sexual health
* Highlighting gender-related issues with regards to sexuality and sexual health, and thus promote equality between men and women

**“MATERIAL” REALIZED TO DISSEMINATE AND PROMOTE THE KNOWLEDGE PRODUCED BY THE RESEARCH**

Academics publications:

1. Publication of at least 2 articles in academic journals. Relevant journals that we will consider include Disability and Rehabilitation, Sexuality and Disability and Culture, Health and Sexuality
2. Different academic conference presentations: Relevant conferences which shall be considered are the Disability Studies conference at Lancaster and the Nordic Disability Studies conference.
3. A stakeholders conference will be held at the end of the project. Twenty key stakeholders will be identified with the assistance of SAFOD. These will include members of disability and heath organizations in South Africa. The conference will be held at Stellenbosch University, and will involve the presentation of the project results, and opportunities for discussion among stakeholders.

The project’s leaders propose also to produce the following **materials** from the research intended to the field stakeholders:

1. Publication of a book. Participants will be actively involved in the production of the book’s contents. HSRC Press in South Africa will be approached as publishers of the book, as they have a policy of making electronic books available as a free download. This will make the book accessible to a wide audience. .
2. A short video documentary will be produced. This will involve brief interviews or two participants on the project (one female and one male participant, who have a physical disability). The video will capture their reflections of experiencing themselves as a sexual being, their experience of perceived and actual stigma related to their disability, and experience of accessing sexual and reproductive health care. The production of the video will be dependent on participants giving their informed consent to be filmed for educational purposes. If requested, the individual’s identity will be disguised by blurring their face on the finished video clip. The video will be produced and edited by a member of the media team at Stellenbosch University.
3. A brief report of the study, including two case studies of two participants (one male and one female) will be produced in text and in Braille.

Ce document a été réalisé par la FIRAH sur la base des documents du porteur de projet.

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