

Meaningful participation of physically disabled adults in society: experiences of the target group, policy makers and professionals

Kim Paulussen – 5655064

Utrecht University: Master Social Policy and Social Interventions

Internship organization: Municipality of Breda (supervisor Richard Blankenstein)

Supervisor: Rosanne Oomkens

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Abstract

This study presents the perspectives of physically disabled adults, professionals and policy makers on meaningful labor market and leisure time participation. The study also identifies facilitators and barriers to this participation from the perspectives of the different stakeholders. Physically disabled people participate less in society than non-disabled people while participation positively affects people's quality of life, especially when it is perceived to be meaningful. There is already extensive academic knowledge on the concept of meaningful participation from a target group' perspective. This study is one of the first studies combining the perspectives of target group members, professionals and policy makers on meaningful participation. In total, 25 target group members, professionals from employment services agencies, civil and interest organizations, as well as municipal policy makers participated in the study. The results indicate that the perspective of professionals from civil and interest organizations on meaningful labor market participation is to a large extent in line with the target group' perspective. In contrast, the results indicate that professionals from employment services agencies and policy makers working in the field of labor deny the importance of meaningfulness in an occupation for people with a distance to the labor market. Furthermore, they do not recognize that physically disabled people still experience many difficulties in finding a job. With regard to meaningful leisure time participation, professionals and policy makers underestimate the importance of independency in leisure time, and policy makers seem to have a different perspective on what constitutes perfect accessibility of the environment for physically disabled people. These different perspectives might imply that current policies and services to stimulate (meaningful) labor market and leisure time participation are not completely in line with the needs of the target group. Based on the results and implications, this article provides recommendations for future research and practice.

1. Introduction

In 2012, 1.4 million Dutch citizens suffered from a moderate or severe physical disability of whom approximately 235.000 were wheelchair bounded (De Klerk et al., 2012). Due to the aging population this number is expected to increase rapidly in the coming years (World Health Organization [WHO], 2015). Physically disabled people participate less in society than non-disabled people making them more prone to experience social exclusion (Blake, 1995; Law, 2002; Van Campen & Iedema, 2007). For example, physically disabled people in the Netherlands frequently suffer unemployment and they experience difficulties in making use of public and entertainment facilities in the neighborhood. Furthermore, they are more likely to engage in passive activities in their leisure time (e.g. watching television) than to participate in active activities outside their home. Finally, disabled people tend to have less social connections with other people compared to abled people (Law, 2002; Rimmer et al., 2004; Van Campen & Iedema, 2008; Meulenkamp et al., 2015).

1.1 Benefits of active participation

Active participation in society can be beneficial for physically disabled people, especially when it is perceived to be meaningful. Participation in society leads to more and better contacts with fellow citizens, which can have beneficial effects on health and well-being (Beadle-Brown & Forrester-Jones, 2003; Heaney & Israel, 2008). Participation that matches people's needs and desires can result in improved well-being, a higher quality of life, and increased life satisfaction (Law, 2002; Hammel et al., 2008; Wallace & Pichler, 2009). When disabled people consider their participation on the labor market and in leisure time as meaningful this is associated with higher levels of happiness and well-being (Kwekkeboom & Weert, 2008). Satisfaction with active involvement in societal life is found to be associated even stronger with quality of life than the active involvement itself (Levasseur, Desrosiers & Noreau, 2004).

1.2 Increased attention towards participation

The topic of full participation of disabled people is receiving more attention worldwide. Disabled people nowadays have a so-called 'double identity' as they are seen as disabled while they are also increasingly expected to participate in society (e.g. on the labor market) (Hammel et al., 2008; Knijn & Van Wel, 2014). This tendency is also present in the Netherlands. The Dutch welfare system has been under a lot of pressure due to the aging population and the economic crisis, which resulted in a large variety of budget cuts in the

healthcare system. Hand in hand with those budget cuts, a new ideology has gained traction in which it is considered essential that all citizens participate actively in society in order to become more independent of welfare services (Jenson, 2009; Hoenderkamp, 2011). It is often argued that participation in society should have a prominent role in social policy (Oliver & Barnes, 2010; Meulenkamp, Van der Hoek & Cardol, 2013).

The new Dutch Societal Support Act (In Dutch: Wmo 2015) introduced in January 2015 clearly demonstrates the increased expectations of participation that disabled people are now confronted with. This act aims to facilitate and stimulate participation of all citizens (Rijksoverheid, 2015). Furthermore, the Dutch government ratified the VN-treaty on equal rights for disabled people in January 2016. According to this treaty disabled people should have equal opportunities to participate in society in a satisfactory manner (Sorée, 2010; Eerste Kamer [EK], 2016). As a consequence, local governments are obliged to develop a plan on how to create so-called 'inclusive policies'. Those policies should result in more opportunities for disabled people to participate in society in a meaningful way (Hammel et al., 2008; Kennes, 2011; EK, 2016). Meanwhile, one has to be aware of the criticisms on the increased expectations towards full participation for all citizens. This new 'participation society' does a high appeal upon the own responsibility of citizens, which might further increase the gap between privileged citizens and vulnerable citizens (such as disabled people). Vulnerable citizens are usually less likely to be able to participate in society and therefore it should be questioned whether they should be 'forced' to participate in society. It can also be argued that vulnerable citizens, including physically disabled ones, should only participate in society when this can be done in a personally meaningful way (De Gier, 2007). Anyway, several studies have stated that disabled citizens should receive additional opportunities and supporting services to be able to participate in society in a meaningful way (Van Loon & Hove, 2001; Schipper, Widdershoven & Abma, 2011).

1.3 Problem definition and goal of the study

In summary, full participation in society nowadays has a prominent role in Dutch social policy including the expectation that disabled people need to participate more in society. When physically disabled people participate in society in a way that is personally meaningful this can have beneficial effects on health and well-being. The national government encourages local governments and organizations to stimulate disabled people to participate in society. Local governments and organizations should develop policies and services in which they organize sufficient opportunities for disabled people to participate in society in a

meaningful way, and they should also provide disabled people with sufficient amounts of support. Policies and services should be designed in such a way that they are in line with the needs of the target group (Nyholm & Haveri, 2009; Schipper et al., 2011). To achieve this, it seems necessary to speak with citizens and important stakeholders in order to assess whether these groups have a clear and similar perspective on meaningful participation (Law, 2002; Bingham, Nabatchi & O’Leary, 2005). Local governments – together with civil organizations, interest organizations and employment services agencies – are responsible to provide the required policies, services and support to enable meaningful participation (Kwekkeboom & Weert 2008; Van Wel et al., 2012). Therefore, the current study explores the perspectives of the target group, municipal policy makers and professionals from civil organizations, interest organizations and employment services agencies on meaningful participation. In order to design effective policies and to provide adequate services, municipalities and organizations should comprehend the reasons why physically disabled people do or do not participate in society in a meaningful way (Law, 2002; Allender, Cowburn & Foster, 2006). To investigate this, the present study explores the facilitating and hindering factors for meaningful participation as perceived by the three stakeholder groups described above. The results of this study might be useful for municipalities and organizations in order to develop policies and services with a great likelihood to increase meaningful participation among physically disabled people (Nyholm & Haveri, 2009).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Elements of participation

Participation can be defined as a person’s active involvement in societal and social life and several studies have referred to active involvement in employment, education and leisure time as important elements of participation (Coster & Khetani, 2008; Kwekkeboom & Weert, 2008; Meulenkamp et al., 2013). The internship organization (Municipality of Breda) was interested in the element of employment more than in education and therefore labor market participation and leisure time participation are selected as elements for this study. Labor market participation refers to the extent to which disabled people are able to find and maintain employment. Since people with severe disabilities are not always able to take part in paid employment, they can also participate in alternative forms such as voluntary work (Kwekkeboom & Weert, 2008; Rantakokko et al., 2009). Leisure time participation refers to

the extent to which physically disabled people are able to fill in their leisure time as desired (Cloin et al., 2013).

This objective part of participation, which includes actual involvement in society, does not capture the full extent of participation since it also consists of a subjective part. This part refers to people's satisfaction with their actual involvement and their experiences of participation. More socially oriented studies have shown that the meaning people give to their own participation is considered as a crucial aspect of participation (Ueda & Owaka, 2003; Hammel et al., 2008; Maxwell, Augustine & Grandlund, 2012). Meaningfulness seems to be important both in labor market and leisure time participation. Therefore, this study focuses on the concepts of meaningful labor market and leisure time participation (Kwekkeboom & Weert, 2008).

2.2 Definition of the target group

This study focuses on people with a moderate or severe physical disability. People with a moderate physical disability perceive problems with performing 'activities of daily living', such as climbing stairs, while people with a severe disability are unable to perform such activities without assistance (De Klerk et al., 2012). Physically disabled people encounter other problems related to societal participation than people suffering intellectual, visual or hearing disabilities (Meulenkamp et al., 2015). Due to the limited time available the present study only includes physically disabled people. This group was chosen based on the needs of the Municipality of Breda.

The presence of a physical disability affects participation across all age groups (Law, 2002). Most people (56%) with a moderate or severe physical disability in the Netherlands are aged above 65 years. As described above, the Municipality of Breda needed information about factors related to labor market participation of physically disabled people. Since the Netherlands had the retirement age at age 65 until 2010, this study focuses on people with a moderate or severe physical disability between the ages of 20 and 64 years old. This age group is also a large part (43%) of the total population of people with a moderate or severe physical disability (de Klerk et al., 2012; Rijkoverheid, n.d.).

2.3 Meaningful participation

This paragraph discusses what is understood by meaningful labor market and leisure time participation. Meaningful labor market participation means that there should be balance between people's skills and the difficulty of the tasks (Law, 2002). A job that matches

people's needs and capabilities is associated with increased motivation and satisfaction (Rebeiro & Cook, 1999, Hammel et al., 2008). Meaningful labor market participation also involves experiences of pleasure on the job (Chugg & Craik, 2002). Disabled people consider their leisure time participation as meaningful as long as they experience a feeling of choice and control over their activities. Furthermore, people find it necessary to experience a high sense of pleasure in order to judge their leisure time as meaningful (Law, 2002). When people are not able to participate in leisure activities in accordance with personal preferences this will negatively influence their experiences of participation (Abbott & McConkey, 2006; Haggstrom & Lund, 2008).

The paragraph above focuses on what constitutes meaningful participation from a target group' perspective. However, other important stakeholders such as professionals and policy makers might have a different perspective on meaningful participation. Knijn and Van Wel (2014) have shown that occupational capabilities and desires of partially disabled people are not always correctly understood by professionals. Furthermore, other studies have shown that professionals might misjudge the satisfaction with participation in the lives of disabled people. Resulting, professionals might provide services to stimulate participation while this is not perceived as necessary by the target group, or it might be the case that disabled people are in need of supporting services in order to participate while in practice those services are not provided (Oliver, 1996; Kersten et al., 2000).

2.4 Facilitating and hindering factors for meaningful participation

Studies in different research fields have shown that meaningful participation can be facilitated or hindered by factors on the personal, social and environmental level (Law, 2002; Levasseur et al., 2004; Hammel et al., 2008). The following section discusses facilitating and hindering factors that are already known from academic sources for meaningful labor market participation, followed by meaningful leisure time participation.

2.4.1 Meaningful labor market participation

Several studies in the field of disability research have indicated that physically disabled people experience various personal barriers and facilitators to their labor market participation. First, physically disabled people with a higher educational level are more likely to participate on the labor market (Van Wel et al., 2012). Second, it seems vital that people are motivated to work and make enough effort to find a job in order to be satisfied with their employment status (Vornholt, Uitdewilligen & Nijhuis, 2013; Knijn & Van Wel, 2014). A third important

barrier to (meaningful) labor market participation experienced by the target group is the acceptance of the disability. People should accept their diminished capacity to work in order to find suitable and satisfactory opportunities to participate on the labor market (Rudman et al., 2006; Shier, Graham & Jones, 2009).

Most of the studies in the field of disability research have also examined the influence of social and environmental factors on meaningful labor market participation. For example, several studies found that physically disabled people often perceive a lack of available workplaces adapted to their needs (Shaw et al., 2004; Van Wel et al., 2012). Moreover, disabled people frequently have the feeling that employers judge them as less productive, and that they are regularly excluded from work because of their disability. A perceived negative attitude among employers and co-employees might have a negative impact on people's self-esteem and thus on the likelihood that physically disabled people perceive their labor market participation as meaningful (Shier et al., 2009; Vornholt et al., 2013). Finally, disabled people should receive support from organizations and professionals in order to be engaged and satisfied with their occupation (Rebeiro & Cook, 1999; Rudman et al., 2006).

2.4.2 Meaningful leisure time participation

Several personal factors have been found to influence meaningful leisure time participation of disabled people. These factors are mainly found in studies in the field of rehabilitation research. For example, people who fear to do leisure time activities are less satisfied with their participation (Renblad, 2002; Rimmer et al., 2004). Moreover, several qualitative studies have identified a lack of motivation as a barrier to leisure time participation (Kinne, 1999; Scelza et al., 2005). Furthermore, physically disabled people perceive the severity of their disability as a barrier to meaningful leisure time participation. When people notice that they lack the capabilities to perform a certain activity, frustration and disappointment causes them to be even more disinterested in performing leisure time activities (Kehn & Kroll, 2009).

Studies (in the field of rehabilitation and public health research) have found various social and environmental factors influencing meaningful leisure time participation. For example, physically disabled people find it essential that there are enough accessible facilities and activities in order to fill in their leisure time as desired. Physically disabled people commonly experience a lack of information about activities, causing feelings of helplessness (Heah et al., 2007; Kehn & Kroll, 2009). Furthermore, the perception of social acceptance by non-disabled people is seen as a critical prerequisite for disabled people to perform leisure

time activities in a satisfactory manner. Disabled people who have the feeling that fellow citizens withdraw from interacting with them are less likely to perform desired leisure time activities, causing that they will have more negative feelings about their participation (Devine & Dattilo, 2000; Rimmer et al., 2004; Haggstrom & Lund, 2008). Finally, physically disabled people who perceive limited access to supportive social networks see fewer opportunities for activities, which negatively affects people's experiences of participation (Larsson Lund et al., 2005; Haggstrom & Lund, 2008).

2.5 Stakeholder perspectives on meaningful participation

Section 2.4 focuses on facilitating and hindering factors for meaningful participation from a target group' perspective. Only a few studies have been performed in which the experiences of other stakeholders are taken into account. The few available studies are mainly published in scientific journals focusing on the impact of health policies and services. For example, Kleintjes, Lund and Swartz (2013) conducted a study in which several stakeholders, including policy makers and professionals, were asked to indicate barriers to the participation of disabled people. Those stakeholders mentioned stigmatization towards disabled people and a lack of supportive networks as important barriers. Furthermore, professionals indicated that people's disability could withdraw them from making meaningful choices about participation. Moreover, professionals perceive a lack of motivation among disabled people as another barrier to participation (Chinman et al., 1999; Linhorst et al., 2002). The factors found in those three studies are also experienced as barriers by the target group. However, a lot of other factors that are experienced as barriers or facilitators by the target group have not been examined from the perspective of other stakeholders. It is interesting to investigate whether stakeholders experience different barriers and facilitators to meaningful participation than the target group since this might imply that existing policies and services are not in line with the needs of the target group (Nyholm & Haveri, 2009).

The literature indicates that there is extensive academic knowledge on what constitutes meaningful participation and on factors facilitating and hindering meaningful participation from a target group' perspective. However, there is little knowledge available about the perspective of professionals and policy makers on the concept of meaningful participation. Exploring the perceptions of different stakeholders on meaningful participation and on facilitators and barriers to this participation can provide information that can be used to increase the likelihood that policies and services effectively stimulate meaningful

participation (Law, 2002; Nyholm & Haveri, 2009). It is often assumed that the involvement of citizens and professionals in early policy processes can lead to effective and legitimate policies and services. Conducting dialogues with citizens and stakeholders is a useful tool for developing policies and services that are in line with citizens' preferences (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Nyholm & Haveri, 2009). To combine the perspective of the target group with the perspective of other stakeholders on the concept of meaningful participation, the following research questions are formulated:

Research question 1: 'What constitutes meaningful participation of physically disabled adults according to different stakeholder perspectives?'

- What constitutes meaningful labor market participation of physically disabled adults according to different stakeholder perspectives?
- What constitutes meaningful leisure time participation of physically disabled adults according to different stakeholder perspectives?

Research question 2: 'Which factors facilitate or hinder meaningful participation in society by adults with a physical disability according to different stakeholder perspectives?'

- Which factors facilitate or hinder meaningful labor market participation by adults with a physical disability according to different stakeholder perspectives?
- Which factors facilitate or hinder that adults with a physical disability can fill in their leisure time as desired according to different stakeholder perspectives?

3. Methods

3.1 Study design

In this qualitative study interviews were conducted to gain insight into the concept of meaningful participation and facilitators and barriers to this participation. Meaningful participation is a complex phenomenon that encompasses more than only active participation in society, and which requires that people's individual experiences and perceptions are considered. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth insight into these experiences and perceptions (Ueda & Owaka, 2003; Allender et al., 2006; Haggstrom & Lund, 2008; Maxwell, 2012). The concept of meaningful participation has not reached sufficient understanding from the perspective of important stakeholders such as professionals and policy makers. This study is one of the first studies combining the perspectives of target group members, professionals and policy makers on meaningful participation and qualitative

methods help to illustrate how different stakeholders perceive this participation (Haggstrom & Lund, 2008; Maxwell, 2012). The current study was performed as a case study within the Municipality of Breda. Dutch municipalities are still struggling to understand how to promote participation of disabled people in society (Marangos et al., 2010). The results of this study are also useful for other municipalities with a similar size and demographic composition as Breda (Ferguson, 2004).

3.2 Study population

As described in paragraph 1.3, the process of stimulating meaningful participation of physically disabled people involves actions from different stakeholders, such as municipal policy makers and professionals from civil organizations, interest organizations and employment services agencies (Kwekkeboom & Weert, 2008; Van Wel et al., 2012). As a result of the Wmo 2015, municipalities should develop policies that take into account the opportunities of disabled people to participate in society (Kennis, 2011; EK, 2016). Furthermore, municipalities - together with civil organizations, interest organizations and employment services agencies - should create facilities and services that enable disabled people to participate in society. Those organizations should also provide support that is needed for disabled people to participate in society in a satisfactory manner (Koops & Kwekkeboom, 2005). Therefore, this study also investigated the perspective of professionals and policy makers on meaningful participation, in addition to the target group's perspectives.

For this study 25 participants from three different stakeholder groups were interviewed. First of all, ten adults with a moderate or severe physical disability were interviewed. Second, ten professionals participated in this study: three professionals from the local interest organization for disabled people, two employees from two employment services agencies, four professionals from four different civil organizations, and the chair from the local voluntary organization. Two of the involved civil organizations deliver care to disabled people while the other two civil organizations, as well as the voluntary organization, provide guidance to people with disabilities in finding a suitable job or leisure time activity. The third stakeholder group consisted out of five municipal policy makers. One policy maker from the department of economics, culture and education, which focuses on the execution of the Participation Act and offers guidance to people with a distance to the labor market, participated in the study. Furthermore, the department of community affairs, which is responsible for making the community attractive in such a way that (disabled) citizens can participate, delivered three policy makers to participate in this study. Finally, one policy

maker from the department of city engineers participated in the study. This department is responsible for the physical design of public spaces and public facilities.

Employees within the Municipality of Breda and professionals from civil organizations, interest organizations and employment services agencies, who were potential candidates for an interview, were contacted for introductory meetings. Subsequently, interviews appointments were scheduled. The involved organizations had contact with the target group thus representatives from these organizations were asked to provide people from the target group with information about the study. When physically disabled people indicated to be interested to participate they were approached via e-mail or by phone.

3.3 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all stakeholder groups by the same interviewer and lasted approximately 50 minutes. The participants signed a consent form and permission was asked to record the interview¹. The interviewer guided the interviews using an interview guide with open-ended questions about the definition of meaningful labor market and leisure time participation, and about experienced facilitators and barriers to this participation (Appendix 1). The participants were specifically asked about the experienced influence of personal (e.g. personal attitude), social (e.g. the presence of a social network) and environmental factors (e.g. the availability of accessible facilities) on their participation but participants had sufficient room to influence the content of the interview. The content of the interviews was slightly adapted to the position of the participant. For example, the interview with the professional from the Employment Activation Agency (UWV) focused particularly on meaningful labor market participation.

3.4 Data analysis

Verbatim description of interview data was the first step in the data analysis. In order to organize the collected data the interviews were analyzed using Nvivo 11. The method of analysis chosen was a deductive analysis, in order to examine whether factors described in the theoretical framework are experienced as facilitators or barriers to meaningful participation according to different stakeholder perspectives (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). With the deductive approach codes and sub codes were created based on the research questions and theoretical exploration and the interview data was analyzed using these codes (Appendix 2a). During this process of coding, new insights were gained and new codes and sub codes were

¹ One of the participants did not give permission to record the interview. During the interview, as many notes as possible were written down.

identified. The codes and sub codes discovered from this coding process can be found in Appendix 2b.

4. Findings

4.1 Meaningful labor market participation

This paragraph describes what constitutes meaningful labor market participation according to target group and stakeholder' perspectives.

4.1.1 Target group perspective

Based on the interviews, physically disabled people want to participate on the labor market in the same way as non-disabled people. According to their experiences, meaningful labor market participation consists out of three aspects. First, most target group members consider their labor market participation as meaningful when their job gives them the feeling that they are part of the society. In order to achieve meaningfulness in a job, participants want to perform tasks that matter, as illustrated by the following quote:

‘‘You want to do something. I can decide to only drive around in my wheelchair, or to watch television, but that is not what makes me happy. I want to contribute, so I am asking the community to give me the opportunity to do what is expected from every citizen: to create added value’’. [Participant 4 target group]

The way in which target group members want to create added value differs per person, but the majority want to perform tasks that are societal relevant and with which they help other people. Participants who need to do things for others receive recognition for their work, which improves their feelings about labor market participation, as illustrated by one of the participants:

‘‘Sometimes, when I drive around in the city, children recognize me and they tell their parents: That guy provided education on our school about disabled people. They remember me and the information I gave them, and that is the reason I want to give those lessons, that gives me such a good feeling’’. [Participant 2 target group]

Second, disabled people want to perform a job in which they experience pleasure and in which they are able to perform tasks in line with personal preferences. Third, a job needs to be challenging, which is demonstrated by the fact that participants who are not able to

perform a job that matches their educational level feel very disappointed and unfulfilled with their labor market participation.

4.1.2 Stakeholder perspectives

The majority of professionals and policy makers argue that meaningful labor participation means the same to disabled people as to non-disabled people, with the only difference that the job needs to take into account the disability. Social workers from civil organizations, and employees from the interest organization for disabled people recognize most of the components of meaningful labor market participation as experienced by the target group. For example, a few social workers argue that experiencing pleasure on the job and having a job in line with educational level are important components of meaningful labor market participation. Social workers and employees from the interest organization argue that physically disabled people should only be active on the labor market when they can perform a job that takes into account their capabilities, and which gives them a pleasant feeling. The opinion of these stakeholders is in line with the opinion of the target group. In contrast, employees from employment services agencies, an employee from a voluntary organization, and a policy maker working in the department of economics, culture and education do not recognize the importance of meaningful labor market participation for all citizens with a distance to the labor market, including disabled citizens. Among these stakeholders the feeling prevails that disabled people, as well as other unemployed citizens, should be active on the labor market, but not that they should perform suitable and personally meaningful work, as illustrated by the following quote:

“If the government arranges a job for you, you should not mind to perform a job which you do not like. As a local government, you organize things in the interest of a whole group, which means that you cannot satisfy everyone. Because there is public money invested to increase labor market participation, you are allowed to expect that people accept every single job”. [Professional 6, chair voluntary organization]

4.2 Facilitating and hindering factors (meaningful) labor market participation

This paragraph describes factors experienced as facilitating or hindering to meaningful labor market participation by the target group, professionals and policy makers.

4.2.1 Target group perspective

There are several personal factors influencing the labor market participation of physically disabled people. Physically disabled people argue that they should have a strong character and positive attitude in order to find a job. In order to achieve meaningfulness in a job people state that they should take responsibility and search for suitable possibilities on the labor market themselves. It seems to be the case that the disability itself hinders people's ability to actually find meaningful labor market possibilities. Furthermore, not having accepted the disability, and the resulting diminished capacity on the labor market, is also perceived as a barrier by the target group. Disabled people who have not accepted their diminished capacity on the labor market often restrain from searching suitable jobs. Resulting, they experience difficulties to find their way on the labor market, and especially to find a way on the labor market that is personally meaningful and which leads to increased happiness.

Target group members perceive that they do not have equal opportunities to participate on the labor market for several reasons. Participants experience that potential employers have a negative attitude towards disabled people and that employers are often not aware of the fact that physically disabled people can be valuable employees. Participants have the feeling that most employers are not willing to hire physically disabled people, resulting in the fact that people find it difficult to find a job and to fulfill a role on the labor market in line with personal preferences, as illustrated by the following quote:

“Some employers might be willing to hire disabled people. However, if you tell them that you need assistance with a few things, such as taking off my jacket, they do not want to hire you anymore. I am sitting in a wheelchair and I need a few adaptations, but employers do not help you with that. You can make use of day time activities, that is what they regularly say. But that is not what I want to do”. [Participant 2 target group].

Participants are often afraid to search and apply for jobs and they experience a lack of appropriate assistance and guidance during job search. These anxious feelings and the lack of assistance decreases the likelihood that physically disabled people start to apply for jobs and in the end find a personally meaningful job.

4.2.2 Stakeholder perspectives

Most interviewed professionals and policy makers agree with the target group that a person's character strongly influences labor market participation. Furthermore, stakeholders working in civil organizations and the interest organization believe that not every physically disabled

person is able to find a meaningful place on the labor market. They agree with the target group that the physical disability itself can be a large barrier to labor market participation, as illustrated by an employee from the interest organization:

“I do not believe that everyone is able to find a suitable job with their disability, so those people do not have to work. When you force them, you turn their complete life upside down and that will never make a person happy. Those people can and should participate in the society on a completely different level, for example with a pleasant leisure time”. [Professional 3, employee interest organization for disabled people]

In contrast, a municipal policy maker and employees from employment services agencies mention that a physical disability does not have to be a barrier to labor market participation. They state that physically disabled people often have the capabilities and opportunities to find a job on their own, in which it should be noted that they talk about finding a job in general and not about finding a meaningful job. Furthermore, professionals from employment services agencies and policy makers presume that employers are quite often willing to hire physically disabled people and they also argue that physically disabled people often do not need to receive large amounts of guidance and assistance during their job (search).

4.3 Meaningful leisure time participation

This paragraph describes what constitutes meaningful leisure time participation according to target group and stakeholder’ perspectives. The topic of meaningful leisure time participation was not discussed with all participants, but only with the target group, professionals working in civil and interest organizations, and the policy makers working in the departments of community affairs and city engineers.

4.3.1 Target group perspective

According to the target group, meaningful leisure time participation can be defined as having the opportunity to perform desired leisure time activities. In order to achieve meaningfulness in leisure time, three components need to be present. First, disabled people want to experience pleasure and they want to fill in leisure time in line with personal preferences. Second, having social contacts and being surrounded by other people is considered as an important prerequisite for meaningful leisure time participation by the target group. Third, experiencing a sense of independence while filling in leisure time is often mentioned as a

component contributing to a more meaningful leisure time participation, as the following quote shows:

‘I only go the home matches of NAC(soccer club). Because I can go there by myself in my wheelchair. I always go with my friends, but the feeling that I could also go there alone is very pleasant’. [Participant 2 target group]

4.3.2 Stakeholder perspectives

Professionals working for civil and interest organizations, policy makers working in the departments of community affairs and city engineers recognize the concepts of having pleasure and social contacts as important components of meaningful leisure time participation. They also state that meaningful leisure time participation means the same to disabled people as to non-disabled people. However, these professionals and policy makers rarely recognize that physically disabled people experience the need to be able to perform activities independently and they presume that disabled people are satisfied when they can perform their desired activities with assistance.

4.4 Facilitating and hindering factors meaningful leisure time participation

This paragraph describes factors experienced as facilitating or hindering to meaningful leisure time participation by the three stakeholder groups.

4.4.1 Target group perspective

Target group members recognize several personal factors influencing the meaning they attach to their leisure time. Participants mention that their personal attitude and mentality strongly influences the possibility to fill in leisure time as desired. Disabled people should have a mentality in which they focus on possibilities rather than impossibilities, in order to find satisfactory leisure time opportunities and to actually perform these activities. Focusing on impossibilities can lead to sadness and even desperation and it decreases the likelihood that people experience their leisure time as meaningful. Furthermore, the disability itself can hinder people’s ability to fill in leisure time as desired, due to the fact that as a result of the physical disability a lot of leisure time activities are beyond the possibilities of the target group.

Although participants argue that personal factors influence their ability to fill in leisure time as desired, the social environment can also strongly affects this ability. Participants perceive the ability to perform activities independently as an important

component of meaningful leisure time participation, but they also acknowledge that in some leisure time occasions they are dependent upon other people. As a result of this dependency, people can experience it as difficult to fill in leisure time as desired because they do not always have the feeling that fellow citizens are willing to help them. For example, shopping cannot be done independently if the seller is not willing to help a disabled person. This perceived unwillingness can lead to feelings of helplessness. Illustrated by the quote below, target group members do not always feel accepted by fellow citizens and they are not always treated in the way they would like to be treated. As a consequence, they have difficulties to socialize with other people, while they define having social contacts as an important component of meaningful leisure time participation.

“Imagine that you are with two people, one disabled person and one non-disabled person, you will notice that the non-disabled person will be always addressed by other people. And that is for me really a barrier in my participation and dealings with the world”. [Participant 4 target group]

Since assistance in leisure time activities can also be provided by friends and family target group members agree that the presence of a social network increases the likelihood that they can perform their desired leisure time activities. The presence of a social network is important to receive assistance, but disabled people also experience their leisure time participation as more meaningful when they have enough friends and family to perform their desired activities with. In addition to the social environment, the design of the physical environment causes that physically disabled people experience difficulties to fill in their leisure time as desired. Especially the poor accessibility of cinemas, shops, restaurants and public transportation is perceived as a barrier to meaningful leisure time participation. Poor accessibility especially influences people’s ability to perform activities independently, while this is recognized as an important element of meaningful leisure time participation.

4.4.2 Stakeholder perspectives

Most of the interviewed professionals and policy makers agree with the target group that a positive attitude and having accepted the disability can contribute to a more meaningful leisure time participation. Most professionals and policy makers assume that disabled people realize themselves that they cannot perform every desired activity, but when disabled people also experience a lack of assistance from friends, family and other fellow citizens they have even less opportunities to perform their desired leisure time activities. Furthermore,

professionals working in civil and interest organizations, as well as policy makers working in the departments of community affairs and city engineers, notice that the society not always accepts disabled people and that non-disabled fellow citizens do not always treat disabled people in a proper way. Professionals and policy makers have the idea that physically disabled people do not always feel welcome in the society, which can withdraw them from performing leisure time activities outside their house together with other people. This feeling is also present among the target group. This feeling of unacceptance by the society seems to be just as an important barrier to leisure time participation as the poor accessibility of the environment. Professionals from the interest organization and civil organizations argue that as long as the accessibility is not arranged in a proper way disabled people will withdraw from participating and even when the physical accessibility is arranged disabled people will only use the accessible facilities if they feel welcome. In contrast with the target group's experiences, some stakeholders do not experience the lack of accessible buildings and surroundings as a large barrier for meaningful leisure time participation. They seem to have a more positive image than the target group about the accessibility of public buildings and surroundings in the city of Breda. The interviews show that policy makers might have a different perspective than target group members on what constitutes perfect accessibility.

‘‘There is an elevator in that cinema and the hallways are wide. So they can go there very easily’’. [Policy maker 4, project leader at the department of community affairs].

5. Discussion and conclusion

This chapter discusses the findings of this study, as well as the implications of these findings. The findings of meaningful labor market participation are provided first, followed by the findings on meaningful leisure time participation. This chapter also discusses the limitations of this study and some recommendations for future research and practice.

The topic of full participation has received more attention in Dutch social policy during the last decade and disabled people are increasingly expected to actively participate in society (Jenson, 2009; Hoenderkamp, 2011). However, participation rates among physically disabled people are still lower than participation rates among non-disabled people (Meulenkamp et al., 2015). Active participation in society that is perceived as meaningful can have positive consequences for health and well-being (Levasseur et al., 2004). Different stakeholders, such as professionals from civil organizations, interest organizations and employment services agencies, as well as policy makers from the local government should

develop policies and provide services to enable physically disabled people to participate in society (in a meaningful way). Those policies and services should be in line with the needs of the target group. In order to achieve this, it is considered as a useful first step to assess whether target group members and important stakeholders have a similar perspective on the concept of meaningful participation (Kwekkeboom & Weert, 2008; Nyholm & Haveri, 2009). Therefore, this study is one of the first studies combining the perspectives of target group members, professionals and policy makers on the concept of meaningful participation and on facilitators and barriers to this participation.

5.1 Conclusion and implications meaningful labor market participation

The first aim of this study was to assess whether different stakeholder groups have a clear and similar perspective on what constitutes meaningful labor market participation. Target group members and employees from the interest organization and civil organizations agree on the importance of meaningfulness in an occupation, and they also have a quite similar perspective on what constitutes meaningful labor market participation. These stakeholders agree with the findings from previous studies, which have found that disabled people basically find the same core values in work important as non-disabled people. Having pleasure, having a challenge and having the feeling to be part of society are such important core values (Christiansen et al., 1999; Law, 2002; Hammel et al., 2008; Chugg & Craik, 2002). In contrast, professionals working in employment services agencies as well as a policy maker working in the department of economics, culture and education underestimate the importance of meaningfulness in an occupation for people with a distance to the labor market. This is in line with the findings of Knijn and Van Wel (2014), who found that professionals from the employment activation agency have a different perspective on occupational desires of disabled people. The distinct perspective of these stakeholders on the concept of meaningful labor market participation seems to be turned into practice in the Dutch Participation Act introduced in 2015. In this act, a suitable job is defined as a job in line with people's possibilities, work experience and educational level. A suitable job is slightly different than a meaningful job, in which it is also important that a job is in line with personal preferences and interests. The aim of employment agencies and local governments is in the first place to guide people towards a suitable job. However, after six months, all unemployed citizens (including disabled ones) should accept every job, and a job does not need to be suitable anymore, and definitely not meaningful (Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen, 2015). This trend might cause that people with a distance to the

labor market, including physically disabled people, remain inactive on the labor market, resign earlier from a job, or perform a job that is not personally meaningful. Thus, it is likely that few physically disabled people participate on the labor market in a meaningful way, causing that the quality of life of this group will not increase substantially (Levasseur et al., 2004).

The study also aimed to identify facilitating and hindering factors for meaningful labor market participation according to the different stakeholder' perspectives. All stakeholder groups agree with the findings from previous studies, which have found that a person's personality and the disability strongly affects meaningful labor market participation (Rudman et al., 2006; Knijn & Van Wel, 2014). Target group members, social workers and employees from the interest organization have a quite similar view on facilitating and hindering factors. Among these participants, the feeling prevails that physically disabled people have few prospects to participate on the labor market because they believe that potential employers have stigmatized feelings towards disabled people as employees. The findings from these stakeholders also indicate that physically disabled people need extra guidance in order to find a job (Rudman et al., 2006; Shier et al., 2009). However, employees from employment services agencies and the local government deny that physically disabled people have difficulties in finding a job, which might imply that they overestimate the occupational capabilities and possibilities of physically disabled people (Knijn & Van Wel, 2014). This contradictory finding can also be explained by the fact that these stakeholders do not want to recognize that still not enough employers are willing to hire disabled people. As a result of this perspective within employment services agencies and the local government, there are few extra support possibilities available for physically disabled people and the current policies are services are thus not in line with the needs of the target group (Levasseur et al., 2004; Nyholm & Haveri, 2009). The lack of extra support might result in the fact that people become less enthusiastic and sometimes even demoralized about becoming active on the labor market. Providing them with extra assistance and guidance might reduce these feelings and therefore might increase the likelihood that physically disabled people become active on the labor market (Rebeiro & Cook, 1999; Rudman, 2006).

In short, employees from civil and interest organizations have a quite similar perspective on the concept of meaningful labor market participation as the target group. In contrast, professionals from employment services agencies and policy makers from the local government deny the importance of meaningfulness in an occupation for people with a distance to the labor market (including disabled people), and they also deny that physically

disabled people experience many difficulties in finding a (meaningful) job. These perspectives are visible in the Dutch Participation act, in which every job is considered as suitable after six months of unemployment. Within this act, the concept of meaningful labor market participation is not even taken into account. Furthermore, according to the Participation act, extra support and guidance to find a place on the labor market is not considered as necessary for physically disabled people. Those trends in social policy might result in the fact that few physically disabled people feel themselves enabled to participate on the labor market in a meaningful way.

5.2 Conclusion and implications meaningful leisure time participation

The third aim of this study was to assess whether different stakeholder groups have a similar perspective on what constitutes meaningful leisure time participation. The majority of professionals working in civil and interest organizations, as well as policy makers working in the departments of community affairs and city engineers have a quite similar view as the target group on what constitutes meaningful leisure time participation. The findings of this study support the idea that physically disabled people want to be able to perform as many of their desired leisure time activities as possible (Abbott & McConkey, 2006; Haggstrom & Lund, 2008). However, the results also partly support the findings from other studies, which have shown that professionals might misjudge the needs of disabled people (Oliver, 1996; Kersten et al., 2000). Namely, among the professionals and policy makers involved in this study the importance of experiencing feelings of independence in leisure time, as perceived by the target group, is underestimated. Current social policies mainly focus on the fact that disabled people should be able to participate in society, but not on the fact that disabled people should be able to participate in an independent way. Resulting, current policies and services often focus on providing disabled people with support from volunteers to perform activities in their leisure time, in the so-called ‘buddy-projects’ (Boer & Klerk, 2013). Those type of projects do not contribute to increased feelings of independence, and the findings of this study imply that therefore those projects might be ineffective in improving the meaning that physically disabled people attach to their leisure time.

The study also aimed to identify facilitating and hindering factors for meaningful leisure time participation according to the different stakeholder’ perspectives. The findings of this study point out that the perspective of professionals and policy makers is to a large extent in line with the perspective of the target group. In general, the findings are in line with previous research since all stakeholder groups agree that a person’s personality and the

disability itself influences people's likelihood to fill in leisure time as desired (Scelza et al., 2005; Kehn & Kroll, 2009). Furthermore, all stakeholders recognize that an unpleasant treatment by non-disabled fellow citizens, and the lack of a social network decreases the meaning that people attach to their leisure time (Larsson Lund, 2005; Haggstrom & Lund, 2009). As other studies already discussed, the poor accessibility of the environment is considered as one of the most important barriers to meaningful leisure time participation (Heah et al., 2007; Kehn & Kroll, 2009). The only difference in perspectives between the different stakeholders on facilitating and hindering factors for meaningful leisure time participation lies in the fact that some municipal policy makers seem to have a different idea than the target group on what constitutes perfect physical accessibility of the environment. This finding can be explained by the fact that non-disabled people are not always aware of accessibility problems that physically disabled people encounter (Kennes, 2001; Iwarsson & Stahl, 2003). Proper accessibility of the environment will contribute to increased feelings of independence and thus the findings of this study imply that appropriate accessibility projects will contribute to meaningful leisure time participation. The Municipality of Breda and other parties have already performed various activities to improve the physical accessibility of the city, but the difference in perspective between policy makers and the target group might be a reason for the fact that accessibility of the environment is still not arranged in a proper way.

In short, the perspective of professionals and policy makers on meaningful leisure time is to a large extent in line with the perspective of the target group. However, professionals and policy makers do not recognize the importance of experiencing independency in leisure time for physically disabled people. Furthermore, policy makers seem to have a different perspective on what constitutes perfect accessibility of the environment and they overestimate the accessibility of the environment. These differences in perspectives might imply that so-called 'buddy-projects', and projects to improve the accessibility of the environment without the involvement of the target group are less effective in stimulating meaningful leisure time participation among physically disabled people.

5.3 Limitations of this study and recommendations for future research

The current study has some limitations. First of all, some target group members were afraid that their interview information could negatively affect their relationship with the Municipality. Although the interviewer tried to take away this fear, it might be the case that participants gave socially desirable answers. Furthermore, seven out of the ten target group members were (voluntary) employees from several involved organizations. Despite the fact

that not all these people were satisfied with their current labor market participation, the study mainly included target group members who are quite active in society. In order to identify barriers to meaningful participation in a more efficient way, it is recommended for future research to include disabled people with lower participation rates.

Moreover, this study did not investigate the perspective of employers, while their attitude and behavior seem to have a large influence on meaningful labor market participation of physically disabled people (Shier et al., 2009). Thus, it is recommended to investigate the experiences and perceptions of employers in a future study on the concept of meaningful labor market participation. The findings of this study imply that there exist different perspectives on meaningful participation between stakeholders which can lead to services and policies that are not in line with the needs of the target group (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Nyholm & Haveri, 2009). In order to provide hard numerical data and strong evidence for the existence of these different perspectives additional quantitative research should be performed (Neuman, 2005). Additional quantitative research also increases the likelihood that results can be generalized to other Dutch municipalities (Schofield, 2002).

Despite the limitations, the current study is still one of the first studies combining the perspective of target group members, professionals and policy makers on the concept of meaningful participation. An important strength of the current study was the large amount of people that were interviewed and the fact that almost all organizations and departments in Breda involved in the participation of disabled people participated in the study.

5.4 Recommendations for practice

Based on this study some recommendations for practice can be provided. The overall recommendation in order to effectively stimulate (meaningful) labor market and leisure time participation of physically disabled people is to involve the target group in the development, execution and evaluation of policies and services. Professionals from employment agencies and municipal policy makers from the department of economics, culture and education should open the discussion with physically disabled people and employers. Such a discussion might be useful to share the different perspectives, to estimate the exact needs and wishes of the target group, and finally to provide the required support to this group. Such a meeting can also be helpful to increase the awareness among employers about the value of physically disabled people on the labor market and eventually to increase their willingness to hire them.

As described above, the findings of this study imply that so-called ‘buddy-projects’ might be ineffective in improving meaningful leisure time participation among physically

disabled people, and that improving the physical accessibility of the environment might have stronger effects. Therefore, to effectively stimulate meaningful leisure time participation, it is recommended to shift the focus in policies and services and to pay more attention towards improving the physical accessibility (Boer & Klerk, 2013). While doing this, it is important to involve physically disabled people in the development, execution and evaluation of accessibility projects, in order to guarantee that the accessibility is improved in line with the needs of the target group.

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Appendix 1a: Interview guide target group

Kennismaking

- Voorstellen, uitleg geven over het onderzoek en bespreken toestemmingsformulier

Persoonlijke informatie participant:

- Zou u mij kunnen vertellen wat voor beperking u heeft? In welke mate ervaart u dit als een beperking?

Vragen met betrekking tot werk:

- Heeft u op dit moment een betaalde baan of doet u vrijwilligerswerk? Bent u tevreden met deze situatie? Waarom wel/niet?
- Wanneer heeft u het gevoel dat u op een zinvolle manier deelneemt op de arbeidsmarkt?
- Indien ontevreden: hoe komt het volgens u dat u niet de rol kan vervullen op de arbeidsmarkt zoals u dat zou willen?
- U heeft nu een aantal factoren benoemd die van invloed zijn op uw arbeidsmarktparticipatie en uw tevredenheid hiermee, zou u kunnen aangeven welke factoren u daarin als belangrijkste ervaart?

Vragen met betrekking tot vrije tijd:

- Zou u mij iets kunnen vertellen over de manier waarop u uw vrije tijd momenteel invult en welke voorzieningen u daarvoor gebruikt? Bent u tevreden met deze situatie? Waarom wel/niet?
- Wanneer heeft u het gevoel dat u op een prettige manier uw vrije tijd besteed/wat verstaat u onder een prettige manier van vrijetijdsbesteding?
- Indien ontevreden: Hoe komt het volgens u dat u uw vrije tijd niet op de manier kan invullen waarop u dat zou willen?
- U heeft nu een aantal factoren benoemd die van invloed zijn op de manier waarop u uw vrije tijd invult, zou u kunnen aangeven welke factoren u daarin als belangrijkste ervaart?

Afsluiting

- Heeft u nog aanvullende zaken die u zou willen bespreken?

Appendix 1b: Interview guide professionals & policy makers

Kennismaking

- Voorstellen, uitleg geven over het onderzoek en bespreken toestemmingsformulier

De volgende vragen zullen worden aangepast aan de werkzaamheden van de organisatie/afdeling

Vragen met betrekking tot werk:

- Wat verstaat u onder zinvolle arbeidsmarktparticipatie voor mensen met een fysieke beperking?
- Wat zorgt er volgens u voor dat mensen met een fysieke beperking niet de rol op de arbeidsmarkt kunnen vervullen zoals ze dat graag zouden willen?
- U heeft nu een aantal factoren benoemd die volgens u van invloed zijn op de arbeidsmarktparticipatie van mensen met een fysieke beperking, en hun tevredenheid hiermee, zou u kunnen aangeven welke factoren u daarin als belangrijkste ervaart?

Vragen met betrekking tot vrije tijd:

- Wat verstaat u onder een prettige en waardevolle vrijetijdsbesteding voor mensen met een fysieke beperking?
- Wat zorgt er volgens u voor dat mensen met een fysieke beperking hun vrije tijd niet op de gewenste manier kunnen invullen?
- U heeft nu een aantal factoren benoemd die volgens u van invloed zijn op de manier waarop mensen met een fysieke beperking hun vrije tijd invullen, en hun tevredenheid hiermee, zou u kunnen aangeven welke factoren u daarin als belangrijkste ervaart?

Afsluiting

- Heeft u nog overige zaken die u zou willen bespreken?

Appendix 2a: Code tree 1

Code
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful labor market participation (MLMP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Experienced balance between task and skills ○ Match with personal needs and wishes ○ Experienced pleasure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal factors influencing MLMP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Educational level ○ Motivation ○ Acceptance of disability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social factors influencing MLMP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Experienced attitude of the society ○ Experienced social support ○ Experienced employer discrimination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental factors influencing MLMP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of accessible workplaces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful leisure time participation (MLTP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feeling of choice and control ○ Experienced pleasure ○ Personal preferences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal factors influencing MLTP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fear of being in society ○ Motivation ○ Experienced severity of disability ○ Acceptance of the disability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social factors influencing MLTP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Experienced acceptance in the society ○ Experienced social support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental factors influencing MLTP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of accessible facilities and activities ○ Lack of information

Appendix 2b: Code tree 2

Code
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful labor market participation (MLMP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Experienced balance between task and skills/challenge in the job ○ Job in line with education ○ Match with personal needs and wishes/experienced pleasure ○ Social contacts ○ Making a contribution to the society/being part of the society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal factors influencing (M)LMP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Motivation ○ Acceptance of the disability ○ Severity of the disability ○ Personal character
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social factors influencing MLMP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Experienced attitude of the society ○ Experienced social support ○ Experienced employer discrimination ○ Hassles for the employer ○ Awareness among the employer ○ Perceived support and guidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental factors influencing MLMP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of accessible workplaces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful leisure time participation (MLTP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feeling of choice and control ○ Experienced pleasure ○ Personal preferences ○ Social contacts ○ Feeling of independence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal factors influencing MLTP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Motivation ○ Experienced severity of disability ○ Acceptance of the disability ○ Attitude ○ Financial problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social factors influencing MLTP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Experienced acceptance in the society ○ Experienced social support ○ Willingness of the society to help ○ Presence of a social network

○ Experienced treatment of the society
● Environmental factors influencing MLTP
○ Lack of accessible facilities and activities
○ Lack of information
○ Lack of accessible transportation