

An Analysis of Employment Policies for Disabled Persons in the Post-epidemic Era in China

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Abstract: People with disabilities are a special social disadvantaged group, facing more difficulties and obstacles in employment compared to the general population. Although the government has been continuously innovating and improving employment policies for people with disabilities since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, they still face obstacles such as employment difficulties and limited choices. This study analyzed the development process of employment policies for people with disabilities using the incrementalist model. It examined the employment environment and social barriers faced by people with disabilities under the current policies, as well as the issues related to inadequate organizational and resource support and limitations in preferential incentives during policy implementation. Based on these findings, new recommendations such as building an Equal Employment Environment, strengthening assistance mechanisms, improving Preferential Policies will be proposed to adapt employment policies for people with disabilities to the requirements of the new era and address the needs of this special group.

Keywords: disabled individuals, employment policy, progressive model of public policy

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global public health crisis that has had a profound impact on the world economy, leading to a rise in unemployment rates [1]. As a special social disadvantaged group, people with disabilities face more difficulties and obstacles in employment compared to the general population [2]. On April 8, 2022, the General Office of the State Council issued the "Three-Year Action Plan to Promote Employment for People with Disabilities," which sets a goal of creating one million new employment opportunities for people with disabilities in urban and rural areas from 2022 to 2024, aiming to promote diversified employment for people with disabilities. On the one hand, the government encourages disabled individuals to utilize the digital economy to create new employment opportunities, enabling them to work from home and avoiding the commuting difficulties and costs associated with retrofitting workplace facilities in traditional industries, which hinder their employment [3]. On the other hand, it is necessary to strengthen the responsibility of the public sector, provide guidance and support for disabled entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals, establish connections with job opportunities, offer employment and entrepreneurship training, as well as employer training services, in order to ensure offline employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Even in the face of increasingly improved and enriched policy support, the employment

situation for people with disabilities remains grim. Although China's work on disabled employment is still progressing, with new disabled individuals securing job opportunities every year, both the number of newly employed disabled individuals and the total number of disabled individuals employed are significantly insufficient compared to the over 85 million disabled individuals in China [4].

According to comprehensive research on employment policies for disabled individuals both domestically and internationally, the studies on disabled employment are relatively abundant. They have revealed the problems faced by disabled individuals in employment and provided detailed explanations of the advantages and issues related to various forms of employment for disabled individuals, including concentrated employment, proportional employment, and flexible employment. Furthermore, they have explored themes such as barriers to disabled employment, employment willingness, rehabilitation services, social welfare, and social security. But few scholars have compared the current employment situation of disabled individuals through online and offline channels, and based on this, proposed policy recommendations to promote their employment. Therefore, this study will investigate the employment of disabled individuals online and offline in the post-pandemic era, analyze the convenience and difficulty of their employment, understand the strengths and issues of current policies, explore the employment situation of this special group in the post-pandemic era, and propose new suggestions for disability employment policies that meet the requirements of the new era and respond to the needs of this special group.

The study will adopt a progressive model to examine the development of employment policies for disabled individuals in New China since its establishment. It aims to clarify how these policies have adapted to changes in different eras and analyze the problems that exist in current disability employment policies through the method of literature analysis. Based on this analysis, policy recommendations will be presented.

2. Core Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

According to the definition in the "Law on the Protection of Disabled Persons," disabled individuals refer to those who have lost or have abnormal functioning of certain organs, systems, or body structures, resulting in partial or complete impairment in their ability to engage in certain activities in a normal manner, whether psychological, physiological, or in terms of physical structure. Disabled individuals include those with visual, hearing, speech, physical, intellectual, mental, multiple disabilities, and other impairments [5]. Disability employment refers to the behavior of disabled individuals of working age, who have labor capacity and engage in labor to earn rewards and income.

The progressive model emphasizes that new policies are meant to supplement and revise existing policies, requiring policymakers to uphold commitments to previous policies. Policy formulation should be based on current policies without starting from scratch, ensuring policy continuity. Policymakers need to pay attention to the shortcomings of existing policies and make modifications and supplements to address their deficiencies and limitations.

3. The Policy Context of Disability Employment

3.1. Early Stage of Disability Employment Policies in China

Since the founding of the people's republic of China, disability employment policies have continuously evolved in response to the demands of the era and disabled individuals. At the beginning, the focus of disability employment policies in New China was primarily on ensuring the basic livelihood of disabled individuals. In 1951, the "Regulations on Labor Insurance of the People's Republic of China" stipulated that if a worker or employee becomes disabled due to illness or non-work-related injuries and completely loses their ability to work, their sick leave wages or non-work-

related injury relief funds would be discontinued. Instead, they would receive relief funds from the labor insurance fund for non-work-related disabilities. This policy ensured the basic livelihood needs of workers disabled due to work-related reasons.

At the same time, the disability employment policies during this stage focused on the establishment of specialized care institutions such as rehabilitation centers, welfare homes for disabled veterans, and other facilities. This ensured that disabled individuals who were unable to engage in employment could obtain essential material resources for their basic survival. However, although these transfusion-type policies changed the living conditions of disabled individuals and provided basic support for their daily lives, they lacked protection for their right to employment. There was a deficiency in terms of employment training and support, and failed to meet the self-development needs of disabled individuals.

3.2. Period of Major Adjustments in Disability Employment Policies During the Reform and Opening-up

Since the reform and opening-up period, the rapid development of the socialist market economy has transformed disabled individuals and welfare enterprises from solely welfare-based entities to valuable human resources and market resources within the market economy. The disability employment market has been significantly influenced by economic development and has entered a phase of rapid transformation and adjustment. During this period, the government put forth the goal of “promoting concentrated employment and expanding and strengthening welfare enterprises.” Additionally, proportional employment of disabled individuals was encouraged in government agencies, social organizations, public and private enterprises, and urban and rural economic organizations. Flexible employment opportunities for disabled individuals were also promoted. The establishment of the China Disabled Persons’ Federation in 1988 provided a strong organizational safeguard for protecting the rights of disabled individuals. In the same year, the “Five-Year Work Plan for China’s Disabled Persons” was released, marking the completion of the basic construction of the policy system for disability employment. The rights of disabled individuals, represented by the right to work, obtained legal protection. Under the guidance of the combined policy of concentrated employment and dispersed employment, a diverse employment pattern for disabled individuals was officially formed. Disabled individuals not only had the autonomy to choose their own employment positions based on their personal circumstances but could also engage in self-employment either individually or in voluntary organizations. The government’s attention to disabled individuals transcended material and financial aspects, focusing on safeguarding their rights to development and social dignity. However, challenges such as the inflexible welfare enterprise system, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of funds made the survival environment for welfare enterprises difficult. Additionally, inadequate supervision resulted in the persistence of “nominal employment,” and insufficient evaluation indicators led to superficial and formal assistance for disabled individuals.

3.3. After the 21st Century: The Diversity Adjustment of Disability Employment Policies

Today, with the increasing awareness of civil rights, disabled individuals are increasingly eager for social equality and respect. The government’s guarantee of disability employment is gradually integrated into the improvement of employment service systems, with policies leaning towards creating a fair and just employment environment and presenting more assistance and support. In the “Regulations on Employment of Disabled Persons” issued in 2007, the state encourages and supports disabled individuals in autonomous job selection and entrepreneurship. For disabled individuals engaged in self-employment, tax incentives should be provided in accordance with the law. Relevant departments should provide assistance in terms of business premises, and administrative fees related

to management, registration, and licensing should be exempted as stipulated. The government also provides support for disabled individuals engaged in autonomous job selection and entrepreneurship, such as offering small loans for a certain period of time. Supporting measures, such as tax and financial incentives, are employed to create a more favorable employment environment for disabled individuals. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, online employment has demonstrated significant advantages and potential in terms of flexibility, convenience, and being unaffected by spatial limitations. The “Three-Year Action Plan for Promoting Employment for Persons with Disabilities” issued in 2023 sets the goal of achieving one million new employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in urban and rural areas from 2022 to 2024, aiming to promote diversified employment for persons with disabilities. Leading online platforms, e-commerce, and courier companies have been organized to meet the employment needs of persons with disabilities. This reflects the government’s commitment to building a new pattern of online employment for people with disabilities. When constructing new community public service points such as postal newspaper and magazine retail kiosks, a certain percentage of positions should be reserved specifically for employing persons with disabilities. The government should appropriately reduce and waive booth fees and rental fees for persons with disabilities, and provide free storefronts for them in places where conditions permit.

4. Problems and Reasons Analysis in Policy Implementation

4.1. Barriers in Employment and Social Environment

The barriers of attitudes and perceptions that disabled individuals face in employment have been an overlooked factor in the policy implementation process. Previous disability employment policies primarily focused on the disabilities of individuals, aligning employment policies with their physical and mental impairments and labor capacity. However, social, cultural, market environments, and societal inclusiveness all impact disability employment. Research conducted by scholar Wang Sanxiu indicates that many disabled individuals have experienced various forms of discrimination during their employment journey [6]. People with disabilities face many challenges in the employment process due to objective limitations in their conditions. Currently, many employers still have a low acceptance of hiring disabled employees and have concerns about their work efficiency and professional image. The social acceptance of people with disabilities still needs to be improved. Based on analysis using stereotype content models, Xu Zhonggeng examined the implicit stereotypes that non-disabled individuals have towards people with disabilities [7]. It was found that at the implicit level, non-disabled individuals hold negative stereotypes of low competence and low warmth towards individuals with disabilities who have low abilities [7]. This reflects the shortcomings of disability employment policies in terms of human care and social education. On one hand, these policies still fail to meet the dual needs of disabled individuals, both in terms of material and psychological support. On the other hand, there is a lack of mechanisms to cultivate social public awareness. Despite social advocacy for caring and assisting disabled individuals, there still exists cognitive bias towards people with disabilities, leading to employment discrimination against them in regular employment settings.

4.2. Insufficient Organizational and Resource Support

Implementation of disability employment policies faces challenges in terms of lacking strong organizational and resource support. Public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified the unemployment crisis, which calls for greater diversification in employment approaches. In the past, support for disabled individuals’ employment primarily focused on offline opportunities, constrained within the framework of sheltered workshops and limited to fixed pathways such as “blind massage”. However, with the continuous development of internet technology, online

employment has gradually emerged as a new landscape for facilitating employment due to its low barriers, high flexibility, and independence from time and space restrictions. Although policies demand the promotion of a new digital-enabled employment framework for disabled individuals, there is a lack of corresponding supporting measures. Based on the theory of social support networks, Yang Ruiqi argues that the current mechanisms to promote disability employment are inadequate, resulting in limited integration of social resources for disabled individuals' participation in employment [8]. The management system of the disabled labor market is insufficiently detailed, leading to the inability of employment service agencies for disabled individuals to fulfill their corresponding roles and functions [8]. For example, there is inadequate investment in training for disabled individuals, and they are unable to access comprehensive and systematic guidance on internet-based employment methods, neglecting their capacity to learn. The opportunities for employment training and the training system lag behind, failing to provide disabled individuals with sufficient channels and platforms for learning and personal growth. For instance, a survey conducted by Zhou Linqiang found that even if disabled individuals have participated in vocational training, it is difficult for them to accept the training content without the support of cultural and technical knowledge [9]. Due to the large and widespread disabled population in China, the implementation of targeted assistance measures relies on the efforts of grassroots autonomous organizations. However, during the implementation process, grassroots autonomous organizations are responsible for numerous people and heavy workloads. Their service capacity is limited, and the availability of social resources is constrained, which prevents them from being able to adequately address the needs of disabled individuals. While policies are designed based on the needs of disabled individuals, the subsequent supporting measures often fail to effectively follow up, creating a barrier between top-level design and grassroots implementation.

4.3. The Incentive Capacity of Preferential Policies is Limited

The implemented tax incentives policies designed to promote employment of disabled individuals do not effectively incentivize companies to hire them. For businesses, their primary focus is to achieve their own profitability before considering their social responsibilities. However, research shows that for larger-scale enterprises, such as those with a total of 1,000 employees, they need to employ at least 250 disabled individuals to be eligible for tax incentives. This imposes additional costs on the companies. Therefore, even with the implementation of preferential policies to encourage the hiring of disabled individuals, if the tax incentive conditions are too high and not met, companies cannot enjoy the tax benefits. Moreover, businesses often need to weigh whether the benefits received from employing disabled individuals outweigh the costs. Combined with the existing employment discrimination against disabled individuals, companies may choose to pay fines rather than hire disabled individuals. For example, in Zhou Linqiang's survey, it was found that the five expenses, including salaries and social insurance and housing fund contributions for employees, are approximately equal to the costs of hiring a disabled individual and paying disabled employment security funds. However, companies still face factors such as living subsidies and obstacles in the workplace when employing disabled individuals [9].

5. Suggestions and Prospects for Policies

5.1. Shifting Policy Perspective and Building an Equal Employment Environment

When formulating policies, the government needs to shift its focus from solely concentrating on the disabilities of individuals, and instead consider disabled employment within the broader context of the nation, society, and market. Promoting the employment of disabled individuals is not only the responsibility of the government but also of society and businesses, which cannot shirk their duties

in this regard. The government should eliminate social discrimination against disabled people through enhancing public opinion guidance and social education. It should create a fair and equitable employment environment and emphasize that all sectors of society need to provide assistance to disabled individuals according to their abilities. At the same time, it is important to shift the policy perspective from viewing disabled individuals solely as a vulnerable group in need of support and assistance, to recognizing their value from a strengths-based perspective [9]. It is crucial to acknowledge and commend disabled individuals for their efforts in acquiring material resources through their own endeavors. This requires changing the stereotypical notions held by employers that disabled individuals would negatively impact the image of their businesses. Encouraging the development and progress of disabled individuals and guiding a shift in societal perceptions is essential.

5.2. Strengthening Assistance Mechanisms and Refining Support Content

Grassroots autonomous organizations such as communities, trade unions and sub-district offices have a large number of staff and will have a better understanding of the actual situation of disabled workers [10]. In the implementation of policies, it is important to emphasize the role of grassroots autonomous organizations and urge them to continuously strengthen their service capabilities. Disabled employment services should be a key focus of assessment, acting as a communication bridge between higher-level administrative agencies and the disabled labor force. In policy design, a reasonable needs assessment of disabled individuals is necessary to understand and analyze their genuine requirements based on different categories of disabilities. Corresponding policy improvements should be made in response to their specific needs. In terms of material resources, there should be increased investment in disabled education to enhance their cultural levels and employability, helping them accumulate learning experiences and social skills. Additionally, policy support should be strengthened to facilitate disabled individuals' use of the internet for employment purposes. This includes providing internet employment guidance, establishing online information platforms, and organizing regular activities by social organizations and volunteer teams to assist disabled individuals in accessing employment information and engaging in online job opportunities such as operating online shops or working as online broadcasters.

5.3. Improving Preferential Policies and Strengthening Incentive Effects

In policy formulation, it is important to utilize incentives such as tax benefits to encourage companies to provide employment opportunities for disabled individuals. This can be achieved by implementing a tiered system of preferential tax benefits, where companies that achieve higher proportions of disabled employment will enjoy greater tax incentives. Additionally, it is beneficial to transition from a single tax approach to a diversified model that combines various incentive policies, such as "tax benefits, financial subsidies, and exclusive product sales." By adopting this multifaceted approach, a combination of different incentives can be optimized to effectively encourage companies to hire disabled individuals [11]. Priority funding support should be provided to companies that employ disabled individuals, in order to address any financial difficulties, they may face. The government can prioritize purchasing from businesses that actively hire disabled individuals through public procurement, thereby creating revenue for these companies through purchases instead of relying solely on direct assistance.

6. Conclusion

Looking at the development process of disability employment policies, it is in line with the requirements of the times, from meeting their basic needs to meeting their developmental needs. With

economic development and the awakening of citizens' rights awareness, there is a greater pursuit of social justice and equality while meeting material needs, and disabled individuals also need fair treatment from society. At the same time, public emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the development of the internet have posed new requirements for improving disability employment policies. Society still harbors discriminatory attitudes towards disabled individuals, making it difficult to implement disability employment policies. The construction of a fair employment environment and insufficient support from disability employment organizations and resources, as well as a lack of targeted implementation, all contribute to the problems in disability employment policies. The setting of incentive policy thresholds is unreasonable, resulting in limited incentive capabilities. Therefore, the government should change its policy perspective, strengthen social education, and construct an equal employment environment during the policy design process. Employment support should be implemented at the grassroots level, with targeted online employment training to enhance the employment capabilities of disabled individuals. Adjustment of incentive policies should encourage more voluntary participation from businesses in supporting disabled individuals' employment. This study is based on the current disability employment policy and explores the challenges faced by policies in the post-pandemic era. It proposes how to make joint efforts from multiple aspects to overcome the employment difficulties faced by people with disabilities. Due to the large and widespread population of people with disabilities in China, it is not possible to include all situations in the study. However, as the research deepens, it will focus more on the analysis and solution of specific issues in the future, contributing to the development of disability employment.

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