Impact of Social Support and Psyco-Social Problems of Visually Impaired

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Abstract

In the present paper an attempt has been made to explore the psycho-social implications of visual impairment and the factors which contribute significantly in the personality formation, self-identity and self-confidence. Visual impairment is one of the most distressing conditions and it needs various kinds of adjustments to overcome its implication. Visual impairment can be congenital or acquired at any time in life. It influences almost all the aspects of person's life i.e. education, employment, communication etc,. The findings of the study revealed that those visually impaired persons who faced negative behaviour, dejection and lack of rehabilitative opportunities are more prone to psycho-social problems as compared to those who do not face any kind of negative behaviour, supported, are exposed early to rehabilitative measures and are fully accepted in the family and communityIt had also been found that visually impaired persons, who received sufficient amount of family support, were socially integrated and well-adjusted in life and are less prone to psycho-social problems. Hence, it can be concluded that social isolation, attitude of people, lack of communication, less recreational activities and lack of family interaction and support are the major factors which generate the feelings of loneliness, stress and lack of satisfaction among the visually impaired persons.

Thus, the present paper stresses the need for social support and more accessible opportunities of communication, education, employment and rehabilitation to visually impaired persons.

 Key Words: Psycho-Social Problems, Adjustments, Visual Impairment, Blindnessand Social Support

Introduction

Historically, visually impaired have been viewed as inferior. Often, they are perceived as people who are helpless, resentful, bitter, and unhappy. In literature, blind characters are often depicted either as cursed individuals or people with supernatural powers. Many are detectives who are not brilliant because of their knowledge but because of a sixth sense and magic that blind people have (Jernigan 1999). Hallahan and Kauffman (1991) have described that in ancient times blindness was considered as a punishment for sins, either one's own or one's ancestors. Sisay (1996) has also indicated that blind people are perceived as hopeless, miserable beggars and one who deserves pity as well as sympathy, one who is to be compensated for loss of vision. In addition, Arega (1999) argues that society looks at disabilities in general as being caused by evil spirit, God wrath, punishment for sin and curses by somebody. It is in this context some have advocated that blindness itself does not create emotional disturbance, instead, it is the societal prejudice that causes emotional distress. People who are blind concurred that the misconceptions

others have about blindness, and not the loss of vision or the need for adaptive skills, is what causes anxiety (Cutsforth, 1951; Jernigan, 1969). Blind and visually impaired person, thus, face several challenges which makes them prone to powerlessness, inability to participate in decision making and development programmes that affect them and their fundamental rights.Consequently, this marginalization makes them more prone to psycho-social problems. But many researchers have also reported that with support from the family and community many educated visually impaired persons are accepting their disability, becoming self-confident, have higher self-esteem and wider social networks.

In the present paper an attempt has been made to investigate the psycho-social problems faced by persons with visual impairment and what are the factors which contribute in overcoming these challenges and making them self-reliant, self-confident and have higher self-esteem.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the psycho-social problems of persons with visual impairment and the factors which contribute in becoming them more confident and and persons with high self-esteem.

Methodology

A simple random sample of 200 educated visually impaired persons with varying degrees of impairment in the age range of 20- 45 years both male and female was selected from the five special institutions of Punjab and U.T. Chandigarh namely Institution for the Blind, Amritsar; Vocational Rehabilitation Training Center, Ludhiana; Government Institute for the Blind, Jamalpur (Ludhiana); Institute for the Blind, Chandigarh; National Association for the Blind, Chandigarh. For the present study, a structured interview schedule was used to collect data.

Results:

Acceptance of Visual Impairment

Acceptance of one's disability (Sneadand and Davis, 2002) is necessary for successful rehabilitation. Acceptance of the situation helps the visually impaired person to reconcile himself/herself to living with his impairment. In fact, acceptance brings him/her to the threshold of exploring ways and means to see how best he/she can carry on living without feeling utterly helpless and frustrated. In fact, blindness is the most feared affliction, because sight is viewed as the most important sense (Wagner & Oliver, 1994). It has been found that loss of vision affects the sufferer physically as well as mentally. Problem of acceptance occurs mainly with those who lose their sight after birth. Researchers have also reported that adventitious blind is severely affected by the problem of acceptance than the congenital blind. Adventitiously visually impaired is a person who was blessed with a gift of sight earlier and has now been rendered blind due to medical or some other reasons, has to undergo a traumatic phase of life. Factors such as educational opportunities, degree of usable vision, and expectations of family and friends can powerfully shape a blind person's attitudes toward, and acceptance of, blindness (Roy and MacKay, 2002; Schroeder, 1996). An attempt has been made to procure the views of respondents regarding the acceptance of visual impairment.

Table No. 1 Distribution of Respondents Showing Acceptance of Visual Impairment

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	172	86.0
No	28	14.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

The data indicate that a majority of the respondents i.e., 86 percent reported that they had accepted their visual impairment as a permanent condition. There were 14 percent of the respondents who didn't accept their visual impairment. Further probing of these respondents reveals that they were still hopeful of gaining their sight back. These respondents were adventitious blind and were continuing their treatment. Results coincide with the findings of Dodds et al., 1991; Sneadand and Davis, 2002.

Mastery over Daily Living Skills

Daily living skills (DLS) are the skills needed for a visually impaired to carry out day-to-day activities without assistance or with minimum assistance. DLS hold lot of importance in the life of visually impaired these skills help them by making them capable of living independently and confidently in this world. Generally, sighted children learn daily living skills by observing others. However, a child with no vision does not have the opportunity to learn and observe these natural skills like sighted child. "What is learned naturally through visual experience in living skills becomes a planned systematic programmed activity for blind children." (Carroll, 1961) described that daily living skills are critical for the well-being and self-concept of blind children.

There are many steps in the achievement of this interaction and one major component is the involvement of family members in training of daily basic skills. These are routine skills performed daily by the visually impaired like personal hygiene and good grooming that includes bathing, brushing of teeth, washing, care of hair, care for nails, oral hygiene, etc. Additionally, the blind are trained to get involved in social interactive skills; their mannerisms, body language etc. should be such that they do not feel embarrassed while interacting with others. Thus, community involvement skills like making and keeping friends, etiquette and manners are also important for visually impaired. The performance of these activities helps in restoring the self-confidence, self-esteem and decreases the chances of psycho-social problems of the visually impaired. Hallahan and Kauffman (1991) have described that the most important ability for the successful adjustment of blind children is their mobility. Mobility is the ability to move around the environment safely, independently, and efficiently (Dodds, 1988). Mobility skills depend to a great extent on spatial ability (orientation). Orientation shows knowing one's position in space and in relation to objects in the environment. Tuttle (1986) has stated that the level of independence in mobility has a direct relationship to the development of self-esteem and the participation of blind children in different social activities and later to obtain employment. By supporting the above idea Hill (1986) has pointed out that orientation and mobility have psychological, physical, social, and economic value for blind children.

In order to see how many visually impaired respondents can perform their routine functioning independently, information has been procured.

Table 2 Distribution Showing Mastery over Daily Living Skills By the Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	200	100.0
No	0	0.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

The data reveals that all the respondents reported that they had mastery over daily living skills. Although these visually impaired respondents were at times dependent on others yet they were able to lead an independent life. In the present study, focus is on visually impaired adults of working age, who had attendant special institutions either for education or vocational courses, where they learn basic daily living skills as a part of curriculum and orientation programme. They have learnt efficiently as how to carry out their daily life independently and some of the respondents were living alone in the hostel for higher studies or as a requirement of their job. Further probing to these respondents revealed that mastery over these skills had made them more independent. Without feeling utterly helpless or dependent on others, they were able to manage their life comfortably. 22.5 percent of the respondents expressed that their mastery over the living skills had enhanced their personality. People in their surrounding environment appreciated their dressing style, personality, communication skills etc. They reported that they don't have to cut a sorry figure in front of others. This gave them acceptance in the society as normal human beings. Hence it can be concluded that mastery of daily living skills is one of the most important tools, which helps visually impaired to get integrated in the society by making them capable individual who can lead an independent life. Results endorse the findings of (Dodds, 1988; Hallahan and Kauffman 1991; Hill 1988).

Feeling of Insecurity

Insecurity is a feeling of being not good to meet the challenges you face in life. In other words it is a sense of helplessness in the face of problems, conflict or concerns. Feelings of inadequacy, is often associated with disabled people. The process of adjusting to a disability is a lifelong process of growth, not a static one (Tuttle, 1984; Dodds et al., 1991, 1993, 1994). According to Singh (1984) blind persons are more concerned about their future and had uncertainties related to their rehabilitation. Visually impaired suffer from different types of insecurities such economic, social, psychological etc. It has been found that individuals who lack parental support in their earlier years develop negative feelings which results in insecurity. The disability is simply one of the personal attributes, some representing strengths and others representing limitations, with which the individual faces life's challenges (Tuttle, 1984). Insecurity results from the sense of being unacceptable, disapproved or rejected. Due to fears of being rejected by society visually impaired often question their personal competency. In the

present study an attempt has been made to find out whether respondents had feelings of insecurity.

Table No. 3 Distribution of Respondents Showing the Feeling of Insecurity

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	132	66.0
No	68	34.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

Data reveal that 66 percent felt insecure in many situations where as 34 percent lacked such feelings. It is important to mention that respondents who were not suitably employed and successfully settled in their married life continued to feel insecure because of their visual impairment. On the other hand, those who had sufficient support and well-adjusted in life both economically and socially did not feel insecure. Results endorse the findings of Roy and MacKay, (2002) and Schroeder, (1996) who report that educational opportunities, degree of usable vision, and expectations of family and friends shape a blind person's attitudes toward blindness.

Out of these who have the feeling of insecurity, there were 20.5 percent of the respondents who had economic insecurity. Although many of them, were employed but were not satisfied with their jobs, followed by 17.5 percent respondents who had fear of public places due to the inaccessible physical environment. They feel insecure while crossing roads, during rush hours. There were 12.5 percent respondents who felt insecure due to the fact that their impairment is congenital and may be passed on to the next generation. The remaining 5.5 percent respondents had fear of public speaking due to lack of confidence. These respondents were those who didn't receive any kind of support from their family. Their parents had negative attitude towards them and they were treated as burden to the family. The respondents were not able to develop their competent skills. Negative attitude and lack of support left greater impact on them which crushed their self-confidence resulting in increased insecurity.

Feeling of Loneliness

Loneliness is an emotional state in which a person experiences powerful feelings of emptiness and isolation. For visually impaired person loneliness is a feeling of being cut off, disconnected and alienated from other people. Visually impaired people find it difficult to develop some form of meaningful human contact. Due to their absence of sight, this feeling of loneliness is experienced as a subjective sense of inner emptiness. It is well documented amongst the literature that 'sight loss can lead to depression, loneliness, and anxiety' (Hinds et al., 2003,). It has been argued that this experience of loneliness is due to lack of visual cues to read the emotions and intentions of those around them. Non-verbal cues (i.e. hand gesticulations, facial expressions, etc.) play a vital role in everyday communication. In the present study, an attempt

has been made to procure information that how many respondents experienced the feeling of loneliness.

Table No. 4 Distribution of Respondents Showing Experiencing Loneliness by The Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	94	47.0
No	106	53.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

From the above table it can be noted that 47 percent of the respondents experienced loneliness. Due to the visual impairment, they feel disconnected from the sighted world. Loneliness is therefore not a conscious choice and is unwilling solitude. Similarly in close relationships where there is anger, resentment or lack of communication resulting in loneliness, tends to set in interpersonal relationships. However, a majority of respondents did not feel lonely and were leading a normal life. They had received sufficient amount of social support and wider social networks. They were communicating with their friends and family members.

Reasons for Feeling Lonely

Loneliness can be felt due to many reasons. Sometime one feels lonely in a group but at other times one is all alone and still enjoys the company of friends through his vivid imagination. There are moments when a visually impaired person left alone, feels rejected, discriminated, or ignored in the social gathering and they feel alone. This social isolation could be due to many reasons. Sometimes, visually impaired persons themselves hesitate to mix up in gatherings and at other times, society is not empathetic enough to socialize with them. In the present study, there were 47 percent of the respondents who experienced a feeling of loneliness in different situations. An attempt has been made to find out the reasons or circumstances, which made these respondents, feel lonely.

Table No. 4.1 Distribution of Respondents Showing Different Reasons For Loneliness

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
NA	106	53.0
Lack of recreational activity	24	12.0
Social isolation	44	22.0
Lack of support	22	11.0
Childlessness	4	2.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

The data reveal that out of 47 percent respondents who felt lonely, 22 percent said that they feel lonely even in gatherings because when they are not attended properly, they feel left out. A few respondents reported that when the sighted people treat them as inferior, socially inadequate, less skillful, and discriminated against them, they felt abandoned. There were 12 percent respondents who felt lonesome due to lack of inclusive recreational activities for them. Due to the absence of vision, these respondents were not able to spend their time in a creative way. Data also shows that, there were 11 percent of the respondents who felt lonely because they lack any support system. Majority of these respondents did not have family support.

Sharing Private Moments

The sharing of private moments by the visually impaired is of great importance. Visually impaired person interacts with others for sharing their views, experience, and private matters. Various studies have shown that visually impaired have smaller social networks than sighted individuals. They interact with their family members like parents and siblings, peers and friends, colleagues and if married then with their spouse and children. In some cases, where the parents and family members have a negative attitude, they ignore their visually impaired child. Such children do not develop their communication skills. They do not share their personal matters, experiences, or problems with anyone. An attempt has been made to study the interaction of visually impaired respondents.

Table 5 Distribution of Respondents Showing   Sharing of The Private Moments

Response	Frequency	Percent
Parents and siblings	13	6.5
Spouse	29	14.5
Friends, colleagues	82	41.0
Parents, Spouse and Friends	66	33.0
With no one	10	5.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

The above data reflect that 41 percent of the respondent had a strong social network of friends and colleagues. They shared their personal matters with their friends and colleagues, followed by 33 percent who shared with their parents, siblings, friends and spouse depending upon the situation. There were 14.5 percent of the respondents who shared their personal matters only with their spouses and all these respondents were females. Data also reveals that there were 5 percent of the respondents who never shared their feelings or views with anyone. These respondents were those who faced negative behavior of their parents and didn't have family support. Their parents didn't teach them communicative skills and as a result they were less confident. They became introverts and kept their personal feelings to themselves.

Thus, it can be concluded from the above findings that educated visually impaired had good social relationships with their friends. The findings of the present study coincide with the findings of Kef (1999), who concludes that many visually handicapped receive social support from their friends.

Satisfaction with Achievements

Satisfaction is an overall assessment of feelings and attitudes about one's life at a particular point in time ranging from negative to positive. Every individual, whether physically healthy or differently able, can attain satisfaction in life only when he learns to appreciate his achievements. Individuals, who are visually impaired, must struggle more to fulfill their basic needs and to achieve their goals. Due to lack of awareness, absence of support, discrimination, disabling environment, and limited opportunities, visually impaired find it difficult to fulfill or gratify their needs and desires which lead to dissatisfaction. An effort has been made to ascertain the satisfaction of visually impaired respondents with their achievements.

Table No. 6 Distribution Showing Satisfaction with Their Achievement by The Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	104	52.0
No	96	48.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

Data show that out of 200 respondents, 52 percent reported that they were happy with their achievements. They revealed that they had been recruited in the Government departments, assigned duties and were getting salaries as per the Government scale. Also, they had support of their family members, friends and colleagues and were leading a successful and contended life. While the 48 percent of the respondents said that despite all their efforts and struggles, they were not satisfied with their achievements. It can be concluded that, if the capabilities and potentialities of the visually impaired are properly rewarded, they are able to lead a life that any normal individual wishes for. But at the same time, they do have to overcome various barriers with strong determination to achieve success and be contended with their life.

Awareness about Potentialities of Visually Impaired

With educational interventions and assistive technology even the visually impaired can perform as well as their sighted counterparts do. Most of the people, in general, are unaware

about the potentialities of the visually impaired. People consider them intellectually incapable and dependent. The attitudes of the sighted public toward blindness exert a great impact on how blind persons shape their own perceptions, whether vision loss is congenital or acquired (Wells-Jensen et.al, 2005; Hudson, 1994; Roy and MacKay, 2002). Public attitudes toward blindness also influence policymaking and budgeting priorities in blindness programs (Wells-Jensen et.al., 2005).   But, when these people come in closer contact with visually impaired, then only they recognize their abilities. In the present study some of the respondents were computer programmers, good musicians, efficient lecturers and teachers, telephone operators, good writers etc. People become aware of the potential of these differently able people when they are sincere towards their work. When people read about them in the newspapers or read their publications, they regard their hidden talents and potentialities. An effort has been made to explore information about the awareness of general public regarding the potentialities of visually impaired respondents.

Table No.   7 Distribution Showing the Perceptions of The Respondents On Society's Awareness About Potentialities of The Visually Impaired

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	113	56.5
No	87	43.5
Total	**200**	**100.0**

The above data indicate that 56.5 percent respondents were of the opinion that people in their surroundings have adequate awareness of their potentialities. People of their surroundings observed them while performing their daily functioning, their intellectual ability and competency. Data also show that 43.5 percent respondents reported that generally people around them were not aware of their capabilities. Majority of these had lower level of education and were engaged in the lower occupations. Their employers and colleagues had negative attitude towards visually impaired and they never got any opportunity to perform any skilled work. Some of the respondents also reported that visually impaired themselves are the major source of creating awareness among the general public regarding their potentialities. Thus, it can be concluded that those visually impaired who are socially active, participate in all the social activities and take initiatives for the communication and interaction only then their potentialities are recognized.

Social Recognition

Social recognition means that one is recognized as an individual and that one's expertise and input are appreciated by the others. For visually impaired, it is difficult to attain social recognition easily as they have to work hard than the sighted individuals. Their hard work is rewarded when they get awards, prizes, and their performances are appreciated by the general

public. For the most part, people who are blind would prefer to be recognized as a whole person, rather than being identified by the one facet that is lacking (Boman, 2002; Garcia, 2003; Mairs, 2004). Many visually impaired renowned personalities are Helen Keler, Louise Braille, poets like Milton, Surdas who are remembered for their immense contributions in their respective fields. The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has been giving National Awards since 1969 on the International Day of Disabled Persons on 3rd December every year. These awards are honored to individuals and institutions who have overcome the enormous odds posed by their disabilities to excel in various fields. Many visually impaired are also honoured at the state and district level for making outstanding achievement with their strong determination, hard work and enthusiasm. It is in this regard views of respondents were collected.

Table No. 8 Distribution Showing the Perception ofthe Respondents on Social Recognitions

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	104	52.0
No	96	48.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

The data show that 52 percent respondents admitted that they got social recognition. Some of these respondents reported that they have been recognized at the State as well as National level as good teachers, poets, writers, researchers, sports person and so on. Some of the respondents were recipients of state and national awards for their best teaching, poetry, invention of special software for visually impaired and for immense contribution for the employment of visually impaired persons. There were many respondents who reported that they were doing their duty efficiently and sincerely, they were always ready to help others as a result they were often appreciated by their superiors, colleagues and friends. Some of the respondents were members of various organizations, which are working for the education, employment, and welfare of visually impaired. There were however, 48 percent of the respondents who reported that they did not receive any social recognition. Majority of them were from rural background, had received low level of education and were engaged in occupations at lower and middle level they were not very active socially. Results show that visually impaired have to establish themselves only then people become aware about the capabilities and their immense contribution towards society is socially recognized. These findings further highlight the present status of visually impaired in the society.

Main Factors of Achievement
There are various factors which contribute significantly in the achievements of a visually impaired person. All these factors have a conducive as well as detrimental effect on the personality formation of an individual and developing them as potent human resources with self-identity and self-confidence.

Table No. 9. Distribution Showing the Perception Of The Respondents About Major Enhancing Factors For Achievements In Life

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Economic and family support	42	21.0
Social support	54	27.0
Equal opportunity	28	14.0
Awareness of welfare schemes	16	8.0
All the above	60	30.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

Data reveal that 51 percent of the respondents gave importance to combination of various factors for achievement. According to them, these entire factors have their own value and significance. They need financial as well as social support, equal opportunities, good guide and awareness of welfare schemes. There were35 percent respondents who gave more importance to social support. They were of the opinion that despite all these efforts social support is the major element in achievement which is needed for social acceptance, only then the visually impaired can get their rightful place in the society. All these respondents who gave more importance to social support were highly educated and many of them were above the age of 45 years who had more experience with society. There were 14 percent of the respondents who felt that equal opportunities are very important for the visually impaired to achieve success in life. Further probing to the respondents revealed that those who had received equal opportunities in life as well as social from the family and society were less prone to the psycho-social implications of visual impairment. These factors helped in the formation of their self-identity, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze the perception of visually impaired respondents about the psycho-social problems and the factors which contribute in the formation of their personality, self-identity, self-esteem and self-confidence.The findings indicated that a majority of the respondents had accepted their visual impairment, mastered their daily living skills, learnt mobility skills employed and are leading a successful family and social life. Majority of them had made satisfactory social and psychological adjustment and well-integrated in the society. They had wider social network, interacting with their family and friends. They were capable enough to take their own decisions and had become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Some of the respondents who didn't receive support from the family and community were more prone to psycho-social implications of visual impairment like they felt insecure, lonely, frustration and inferiority complex but were able to cope by using different strategies. They were using both traditional as well modern multi-media channels like using computer with screen reading software, surfing internet, listening to news, music, writing poetry and interacting with

their friends. Many of the respondents were the members of national and state welfare organizations working for the education and employment of visually impaired. Many of them were the office bearers of managing bodies were able to advocating the rights of visually impaired. Some of the visually impaired who were social activists, writers, poets computer programmer and sportsmen have also received state, national and international honors for their immense contribution in the society. There were others who were not satisfied with their achievements because of the limited opportunities and lack of support. People, who were in close contact with them, recognized their abilities. Majority of the respondents believed equal opportunities, social support, family support, financial support and awareness of welfare schemes and facilities are the main factors which contribute significantly in their personality formation, self-identity and self-confidence. Thus, it can be concluded that negative behavior and lack of support have detrimental effect on the well-beingof the life of visually impaired persons which leads to their poor adjustment in various life situations.

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