

Perception Of Visually Impaired Persons About Social Support System: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

In the present paper an attempt has been made to study the perception of visually impaired persons about social support systems. Three support systems have been included i.e. family, educational institutions, work place as well as society in general. Support from the family, educational institutional (both special schools and institutions of higher education) and work place is positively linked with the success of a visually impaired person. Those visually impaired persons who received sufficient amount of support from their parents, family members, teachers, peers, employers, colleagues and general public achieved higher status in the society and successfully adjusted in the family and society. They are well integrated and have a wider social network, are more confident, have no anxiety or frustration. They feel more secure both economically and socially. Those visually impaired persons who didn't receive support from their parents, family members, teachers, peers, employers are not well adjusted, are disintegrated, had lack of confidence, more frustrated and are least successful. Some of the visually impaired persons achieved success in life without the support but they faced more challenges, were less confident and had more economically and socially insecure. Their path of struggle was very hard. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine the perception of educated visually impaired persons about the social support systems in their lives.

Key words: Visual Impairment, Blindness, Perception, Social Support, Challenges,

Introduction

Disability, whether physical or mental, hinders the full participation of an individual in the society. People with disabilities have to struggle hard to become independent and integrate in the society. But for the visually impaired persons it is too difficult to overcome the challenges of impairment. The past experiences show that many visually impaired persons have achieved excellence in different walks of life with multifarious developments in the field of education, vocational training, employment and rehabilitation. These individuals are also the integral part of the society. If the opportunities are given to them, they can equally participate in all the domains of family, social, economic and political life. Since childhood, human child is dependent on others, be it a family, educational institution or state. This dependency becomes more profound in the case of visually impaired. Support system is manifested through various dimensions like family, peer group, educational institutions,

economic institutions, religious institutions, political institutions etc. Various welfare services like health, insurance and transport fall under the purview of the state are helpful support institutions. Various research studies have shown that those who received sufficient amount of support from these support systems have achieved excellence in their life and are leading a successful life. Goffman (1963) has shown that parents suffer due to the stigmas attached to their off springs. The stereotypical view of the society highly influences the attitude of parents and children. According to Bhalerao (1983), “education is an important indicator of social acceptance for disabled. She observes that the educated blind are invited to social functions and are socially recognized. Literacy is one of the critical factors that decide the status of the visually impaired in society”. National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, states that people with disabilities have the same human rights as other citizens. The main objective of education is to prepare people with visual impairment for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence. Ramdas and Mishra (1987) have found that the most prevalent view of disability is to see the impairment as an outcome of the past Karma. Based on the Hindu belief of reincarnation, the birth of the disabled child is seen as the punishment for sins committed in previous life. Arega Kassa (1990), argued that society looks at disabilities in general as being caused by evil spirit, God wrath, punishment for sin and curses by somebody. According to Loijas (1994) negative attitude and prejudices towards individuals with a handicap are often result of earlier experiences and inadequacy or lack of knowledge about the nature of the visual impairment. This stereotype attitude is directly related to acceptance or rejection of visually impaired person in the family as well as in the society. Sisay Kebede (1996), 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. Cimarolli and Boerne (2005) have explored multiple aspects of social support and their links to the well being of working age adults with visual impairment. Instrumental help from family members is most frequent type of positive support that is received and underestimation of the participant’s capabilities is the most frequent type of negative support that is received.

According to WHO reports of (2011) there are 285 million people who are visually impaired worldwide and out of which 39 million are blind and 246 have low vision. About 90% of the worlds visually impaired live in developing countries. Globally, uncorrected refractive errors are the main cause of visual impairment; cataracts remain the leading cause of blindness in middle- and low-income countries. According to Census of India (2011) there are 2,68,10,557 differently disabled persons in India; among them 50,32,463 are the visually impaired ones out of which 2,638,516 are males and 2,393,947 are females who literally struggle for their survival and sustenance due to several reasons like not allowing them to exercise fully their rights to property, family, marriage, education, employment and emancipation. Though the Constitutions of India ensures equality, freedom, justice and dignity to all its citizens and thus tries to promote the process of establishing an egalitarian and inclusive society, the reality doesn’t seem to be so. In the light of this, the present study has been under taken.

Objectives:

1. . To understand the importance of various support systems in the lives of visually impaired persons.
2. To explore the factors which contribute significantly in their success.

Methodology:

A simple random sample of 200 educated visually impaired persons who were either employed or pursuing higher education with varying degrees of impairment in the age range of 16-55 years both male and female was selected who had passed minimum matriculation 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 the data.

➤ Results:**➤ Family Support:**

Like a sighted person, family is equally important for a visually impaired person. Family is the supporting pillar for the success of the rehabilitation process of visually impaired children as it fulfills their educational, recreational, social and cultural functions. Support of parents is very significant in the life of an individual in general and visually impaired in particular because it helps them in becoming emotionally amicable, economically independent and socially adjusted in the society. Most Visually Impaired adolescents report that their relationships with parents are close and their family members are important source of social support (Kef 1999; Kent, 1983; Nemshick et.al. 1986; Wolffe & Sacks, 1997). Cimarolli and Boerne (2005) have explored that instrumental help from family members is most frequent type of positive support that is received and underestimation of the participant's capabilities is the most frequent type of negative support that is received." In the present study, an attempt has been made to procure information whether the respondents received support from their parents in order to fulfill their needs or not. The following table shows the response of the respondents:

Table No. 1 Distribution of the respondents showing parental support received by them.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	178	89.0
No	22	11.0
Total	200	100.0

The findings presented in the above table indicate that a majority of the respondents, i.e. 89 percent, had received support from their parents. This clearly shows that parents put their best efforts in fulfilling the needs of their visually impaired children. On the other side, 11 percent of the respondents reported that they did not receive any kind of support from their parents. Further probing to those respondents who received support from their parents and family

members reported that that their parents helped those in their educational, financial, psychological and social needs.

- **Reasons for not providing parental support**

Table No. 2 Distribution of respondents showing reasons for not providing support by the parents

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
N.A.	178	89.0
Lack of awareness, poverty, illiteracy	08	4.0
Biased attitude	14	7.0
Total	200	100.0

There were 11 per cent of the respondents who didn't receive any kind of support from their parents. Out of these 7 percent of the respondents suffered only because of the biased attitude of their parents and family members. The parents treated them as a stigma and liability on the family. There were 4 percent of the respondents who didn't receive any kind of support because their parents were poor, illiterate and had lack of awareness regarding the welfare schemes, educational as well as employment opportunities and special needs of their disabled child.

FACED NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR

Table No. 3 Distribution of respondents showing negative behavior faced by them.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	46	23.0
No	154	77.0
Total	200	100.0

The findings presented in the above table indicate that a majority of the respondents i.e. 77 per cent didn't face any kind of negative behavior like discrimination abusive language or beating etc, but there were 23 per cent of the respondents who were many times abused and blamed for their disability as well as discriminated even for their daily needs.

Impact of negative behavior and lack of parental support

Support of family is important in the life of every child but visually impaired child need much more care and support. In the present study, an attempt was made to study the impact of lack of family support on the well being of visually impaired respondents.

Table No. 4 Distribution showing impact of negative behavior and lack of parental support on the well being of respondents.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
NA	154	77.0
Additional Challenges	24	12.0
Personality Disorders	22	11.0
Total	200	100

Out of the total 200 respondents 23 per cent of the respondents faced negative behavior in family due to their visual impairment. The further probing to these respondents revealed that, 12 percent respondents felt that negative behavior affected the development of their personality leading to feelings of loneliness, lack of confidence, emotional instability and insecurity. Whereas 11 percent respondents faced additional challenges like they were deprived of basic and educational needs. As a consequence some of the respondents remained dependent on the charity for their basic daily needs as well as financial and educational needs.

Educational support:

- **Type of support provided by Special Institutions**

Special educational institutions can play very significant role in imparting competent skills necessary for the visually impaired to become confident and skillful. Basic readiness skills are required to integrate in society. All these special schools are expected to make visually impaired students trained persons to deal with sighted people. These institutions not only provide education to congenitally impair but also render rehabilitation services to those who get impaired later in life. These institutions provide special trainings such as guidance and counseling, training in mobility and orientation, introduction of Braille, and imparting of other vocational skills. Moreover, the adventitious visually impaired persons are exposed to other visually impaired who are successful and leading their life independently. Therefore, providing encouragement and creating a positive impact on the adventitious blind and helping them to accept their impairment.

An effort has been made to find different type of support provided by the special institutions to the visually impaired respondents which are shown in the following table.

Table No. 5 Distribution showing the type of support provided by the Special Educational Institutions.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
NA	12	6.0
Basic skills, education, financial independence	121	60.5
Basic skills, vocational skills and employment	35	17.5
Basic skills and vocational skills	32	16.0
Total	200	100

The above data reflect that a majority of respondents, i.e. 60.5 per cent, had received all type of support from their special institution. They received basic education, learnt daily living skills, communication, orientation and mobility skills, which helped them to attain higher education and to become financially independent. While 17.5 percent respondents learnt daily living skills, vocational skills and got suitable employment due to their institutions. The remaining 16 percent acquired basic daily living skills and vocational skills out of which some were adventitious visually impaired and were rehabilitated in these institutions. They learnt to accept the trauma of disability and cope with the new environment, learnt to use their hidden talents and capabilities. They also learnt Braille reading-writing skills, mobility and orientation and obtained trainings in computers courses, telephone operations and stenography in Braille.

Difficulties while pursuing HIGHER education

Table No. 6 Distribution showing the types of difficulties faced by respondents while pursuing education

Difficulties	Frequency	Percentage
NA	75	37.5
Lack of study material, problem of reader-writer	80	40.0
Lack of trained teachers, insufficient opportunities and indifferent attitude	25	12.5
Absence of family support, study material, reader and writer	20	10.0
Total	200	100.0

The data show that 40 percent of the respondents had faced difficulties due to the non-availability of study material in the alternative formats and arrangement of readers-writers for their examination. While, 12 percent respondents had faced difficulties due to the non-cooperation of teachers, lack of study material and insufficient educational opportunities. Further probing of these respondents reveals that after passing out from the special schools, the higher authorities of the college or university were not interested in giving them admission both in the college and hostel. Even the teachers were not aware about their special needs, capabilities and potentialities. Whereas, 10 percent of the respondents had faced education related difficulties. They did not have any family support which further created problems for them. They themselves arranged for their admission fee and other expenses of education as the stipend given by the Government for higher education was not sufficient to meet their needs. 37.5 per cent were those respondents who didn't face any kind of Difficulty in the educational Institute.

Difficulty in getting employment**Table No. 7 Distribution showing difficulties faced by the respondents in getting employment**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
NA	32	16.0
Yes	92	46.0
No	76	38.0
Total	200	100.0

Out of the total 84 per cent employed respondents, 46 percent respondents faced a number of difficulties in getting job. They faced discrimination, negative attitude of the employers and were many times rejected due to their disability. Further probing revealed that, they appeared in number of interviews and written tests. Many times they qualified tests but did not receive any appointment letter. It shows that visually impaired persons have to struggle hard because of the lack of awareness on the part of the general public, regarding their education and capabilities. Even though the visually impaired are competent and skilled enough to perform their duties the employers are prejudiced in their thinking and hence do not select these individuals. Also there are no separate quotas for totally visually impaired persons. They had to compete with partially sighted candidates and in most of the cases preference is given to the partially sighted.

Attitude of the Employers:**Table No. 8 Distribution showing attitude of the employers.**

Response	Frequency	Percent
NA	32	16.0
Positive Attitude	129	64.5
Negative attitude	37	18.5
Total	200	100.0

The data indicate that out of 168 employed respondents, 64.5 per cent respondents were of the view that their employer had positive attitude towards their abilities and had cordial relations with them. There were 18.5 per cent of the respondents who experienced negative attitude of their employer. Many of these respondents had unsatisfactory relations with their employers. Many of the respondents who had cordial relations with their employer reported that earlier they had satisfactory relations but when their employer became aware about their

potentialities and efficient working, their attitude towards persons with disability changed and then they were given equal opportunities in all the matters at their work place.

Job Satisfaction

Table No. 9 Distribution of the respondents showing job satisfaction

Response	Frequency	Percent
NA	32	16.0
Yes	105	52.5
No	63	31.5
Total	200	100.0

Data revealed that among the employed respondents, 52.5 percent respondents were satisfied with their present job. They had achieved a status compatible or equivalent to their academic qualification. When a person is able to explore his full potential and gets rewards according to his capabilities and efforts, he feels satisfied but at the same time if a person does not get an opportunity to explore his capabilities and doesn't get deserved rewards, it leads to lack of satisfaction. The remaining 31.5 percent respondents were not satisfied with their present job. These respondents, who were not satisfied, were further probed for the reasons. 16.5 percent of the respondents were not satisfied with their present job because they had been employed at a lower level job, which was not equivalent to their educational qualification. They were getting less salary. There were 8.5 percent respondents who were unsatisfied with their present job due to discriminatory attitude at their work place.

Factors Hampering Personal Progress

Table No. 10 Distribution showing the perception of the respondents about major hindering factors for achievements in life

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of financial support	65	32.5
Lack of family support	25	12.5
Lack of opportunity	71	35.5
Lack of awareness	20	10.0
None	19	9.5
Total	200	100.0

Data show that a majority of respondents i.e. 35.5 percent expressed that lack of opportunities were the major obstacles which hampered their progress. They reported limited choice of subjects at higher level of education. Similarly, in employment they were not given

jobs of responsibility to explore their hidden talents and competency. There were 32.5 percent who faced financial difficulties in achieving their goals, and 10 percent of the total could not work for their goals at the right time due to lack of awareness regarding various educational institutions, welfare schemes and facilities given by the Government. Further probing of these respondents reveals that they were from rural background; their parents were not educated and had no knowledge about the educational opportunities for the visually impaired. Data also shows that 9.5 percent of the surveyed denied any hindrances in their lives. Some of these respondents were partially sighted and had sufficient support from their family and educational institutions. On the other hand, some respondents were from poor socio-economic background. Their parents did not spend any money on their education as they got free education and got employment accordingly. Some of them excelled, in alternative fields like sports and earned name for themselves as well as for their nation. For them disability paved the way for their success.

Main Factors of Achievement

Table No. 11 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 a majority of respondents i.e. 51 percent 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 were 35 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. .

Awareness about Potentialities of Visually Impaired**Table No. 12 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. 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.

Cultivation of Positive Attitude of Society towards Visually Impaired**Table No. 13 Distribution showing the perception of the respondents about positive attitude of society**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	111	55.5
No	89	44.5
Total	200	100.0

The above data reveal that 55.5 percent respondents were of the opinion that attitude of society towards visually impaired people had changed to a great extent. People have positive and favorable attitude. A majority of these respondents were graduates and post-graduates and had occupied middle as well as higher status jobs in the urban areas. They have good social network of friends and relatives. They used to participate in the social functions of the society and have established themselves in the society. They have shown their talents and capabilities and these factors have significantly contributed in the cultivation of positive attitude towards visually impaired in the society. Data also shows that, there were 44.5 percent of the respondents who expressed that society still lacks awareness about the capabilities of the visually impaired, thus lack positive attitude towards them. These respondents further reported that a majority of visually impaired population reside in the rural

areas where people lack awareness. People had sympathetic attitude and considered them dependent who need a great deal of help. This type of underlying attitude is one of the major barriers in the integration of visually impaired in society. Results indicate that society is cultivating a positive attitude towards the disabled people. Furthermore from the people interviewed we find that there is a relation between the level of education and awareness, level of economic status and the attitude towards visually impaired. The findings of the present study coincide with the findings of Christy et.al (2005) who concluded that attitude towards blind is positive.

Thus, we can say that with the advancement of modern accessible technology and legislative measure, educational and economic implication of visual impairment have become less challenging as compared to social implications. Rehabilitation of visually impaired will not be successful unless the society cultivate positive attitude towards the visually impaired.

Conclusion:

In this paper an attempt has been made to analyze the interaction and perception of visually impaired persons towards social support systems. 3 support systems have been included in the study i.e. family, education and work place.

The findings indicate that a majority of the respondents had accepted their visual impairment and are leading a successful life. A maximum number of the respondents have received family support. Their parents and family members helped them in all the matters of life. But 11 per cent of the respondents didn't receive any kind of support from their parents. Lack of family support and negative behavior has created negative impact on the well being of the visually impaired persons. They faced additional challenges to become successful in life. Similarly, in the education and work place support, those respondents who didn't receive support, faced number of difficulties. Their path of struggle becomes more difficult. Some of the visually impaired persons were not satisfied with their achievements because of the limited opportunities, lack of support and negative attitude. Many of the respondents are satisfied with their achievements and according to them equal opportunities, social support, financial support, proper guidance and awareness of various developmental schemes are the major factors. According to them attitude of society has changed to some extent but it is still linked with the literacy. Some of the changes had taken place to make the barrier free environment but these are limited to urban areas. The findings highlight the fact that visually impaired person can become independent if they get the right encouragement and the active co-operation from the family and community.

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