

Social Exclusion of Women with Visual Impairment in Tiruchirappalli District

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Abstract: Women with visual impairment have experienced exclusion and marginalization from family, mainstream school, the community and university. The experience of social exclusion is multi-structural, multidimensional and complex. This paper is aimed to describe the social exclusion of women with visual impairment in Tiruchirappalli District. The descriptive nature of the study is undertaken with 30 women with visual impairment aged 18 and above 42 years were selected through purposive sampling technique. An interview schedule and observation was used for collection of data. The study result revealed that when the age group of the respondents is concerned they were mostly come under the age group of 18 to 29 years, mostly of Christians and 50% of respondents were categorized into up to primary level. When looking at marital status of 10% of the respondents were widow. It is noted that half of the respondents having family income of Rs.2,000 to 4,000/- and 40% are in joint families in nature. The study established that participants' exclusion from access to opportunities and development left them psychologically, socially, financially and emotionally blemished. Conclusion: The study established that visual impairment and social exclusion were related.

Keywords: Social exclusion, Social inclusion, Poverty, Marginalization, Women

“Being disabled should not mean being disqualified from having access to every aspect of life”

-Emma Thompson

I. INTRODUCTION

Visual impairment refers to all degrees of vision loss, harm, injury, and low vision. It relates to that visual condition which limits an individual's ability to successfully complete the activities of everyday life. Whereas, blindness is defined as having no more vision than light perception in both eyes and where corrective lenses would make no difference (British Dictionary). Legal blindness is at least 20/200 corrected vision in both eyes, or restricted field of vision of at least twenty (20) degrees. A person who has 20/70 to 20/200 visions, however, is also visually impaired (NFB, 1995; Massachusetts Association for The Blind, N.D).

Persons with visual impairment can be infants, children, adolescents or adults; they may have different types of visual problems; such as inability to recognize the faraway objects; or difficulties in reading small words, etc. Such types of problems can be easily treated with glasses or lenses. But when more than one element of the eye or brain that are needed to process images become diseased or damaged, severe or total loss of vision can occur. In such cases, vision cannot be fully bring back even with medical treatment, surgery, or corrective lenses (Groenveld 1993). At least eighty percent of the world's visually impaired children live in low and middle-income countries, where less than ten percent of them have access to education. This sad fact almost guarantees that these children

face a lifetime of poverty and illiteracy (Larry and Mani, 2007).

Visually impairment has lifelong consequence for on visually impaired persons due to its effect on their success. It is commonly observed that people with visual abnormalities have limited opportunities for education and employment that keep them away from economic empowerment. Visually impaired people feel anxious because of thinking about how to deal with with the problems of blindness. Moreover, visual impairment seem to suggest more discomfort than more other disabilities because it is an seeming disability while walking visually impaired people use a cane, guide dog, sighted guide and use dark glasses. Moreover eyes are also playing an important role in society and social interaction and people generally feel uncomfortable to talk with people who are unable to establish eye contact. This feeling of worthlessness can shrink their self-esteem as well (Gelfand, Jenson & Drew, 1997).

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Globally about 314 million people are visually impaired; . The International Eye Foundation (IEF), based in the United States of America, reports that there are currently 45 million of them are blind people in the world. It also states that every five seconds, one person in the world goes blind. A child goes blind every minute in spite of the fact that eighty percent of blindness is avoidable; 20 percent preventable and 60 percent treatable. Cataract remains the leading cause of blindness globally, except in the most developed countries. Correction of refractive errors could give normal vision to more than 12 million children (ages five to 15). The need and significance of intervention in blindness is best explained by the fact that about 85% of all visual impairment is avoidable globally. Any blindness control programmeneed to pay special attention on women and children. As per the World Health Organization, ninety percent of the world's blind people live in developing countries: nine million in India, seven million in Africa and six million in China.

The number of blind people in the world is set to double over the next twenty years, despite the availability of highly cost-effective interventions. Four out of five people who will lose their sight will do so unnecessarily. It was in recognition of this unacceptable prognosis that the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) in 1999 launched the joint initiative known as VISION 2020: The Right to Sight.

Visual impairment brings profound economic disadvantage to individuals, their families and societies. Several recent studies have quantified these impacts. Many of the causes of avoidable blindness in low-income countries are directly related to poverty, including hunger, malnutrition and limited access to health, education, water and sanitation services. These problems are most acute in the least economically developed

regions, home to more than 90% of the world's visually impaired people.

A. Indian scenario of visual impairment

India, world's second largest population, has the distinction of being the home of the world's largest number of blind people. World Health Organization(WHO) statistics revealed that approximately 63 million people in India are visually impaired, and of these 8 million people are totally blind. The number of blind persons in India in 2000 was estimated to be 18.7 million.

The projected number of blind persons in India would increase to 24.1 million in 2010 and 31.6 million 2020. Based on Government of India statistics (2011), one out of every three blind persons in the world lives in India. Over 15 million people are blind out of which 11.75 million live in the rural and most backward areas. Over 9.4 million have cataract related blindness. 2.8 million are blind due to refractive error. 6 million people become blind with low vision every year.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study aimed at measuring the Poverty of women with visual impairment. The nature of the study was descriptive. The population of the study comprised of all visually impaired were located at Tiruchirappalli. The sample of 30 visually impairment women aged 18 and above 42 year of age were selected through purposive sampling technique. An interview schedule and observation was used for collection of data by incorporating items like, socio economic status of women with visual impairment.

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IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Distribution Respondents by Socio Economic Conditions (N = 30)

S.No	Socio - Economic Conditions			
	Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage	
1.	Age	18-23	10	33.33
		24-29	11	36.66
		30-35	4	13.33
		36-41	3	10
		Above 42	2	6.66
2.	Religion	Hinduism	13	43.33
		Christians	17	56.66
3.	Marital status	Un married	12	40
		Married	15	50
		Widowed	3	10

4.	Educational Qualification	Illiterate	12	40
		Primary	15	50
		Secondary	3	10
5.	Income (monthly)	1000-2000	15	50
		2001-4000	10	33.33
		Above 4000	5	16.66
6.	Type of family	Nuclear family	18	60
		Joint family	12	40

The study result revealed that when the age group of the respondents is concerned they are mostly come under the age group of 18 to 29 years. In this study, the respondents of the age group are ranging from 18 years to above 42 years. As per this study is concerned with women with blindness they are mostly of Christians. When the educational status of the respondents are analysed, it is noted that out of 30 respondents only three respondents are educated secondary level and the remaining 50% of respondents are categorized into up to primary level and 40% of respondent are illiterate. When looking at marital status of respondents, 40% of them are at their unmarried followed by 50% are married and remaining 10% of the respondents are widow. It is noted that half of the respondents having family income of Rs.1,000 to 2,000/- and 16% of respondent having above Rs. 4000. With regard to the type of the family, more than half of the respondents are living in nuclear family (60 %) and 40% are in joint families in nature.

The socio economic status of blind women has a direct impact on social exclusion of the blind women. Gender is one of the important profile variables of the this study. It has its own impact on the employment pattern. The problem encountered in availing employment may also be influenced by the gender of the blind people. This study only considers women with visual impairment. Income is the most important determining factor of standard of living. Access to food, shelter, economic comforts, social appreciation, are greatly depends upon one's income level. In this study shows that low level of income of respondent. In other words women with visually challenges have been living with poverty. Women who are legally blind or visually impaired in the Tiruchirappalli have long suffered high rates of unemployment. The socio economic status of blind women has a direct impact on their day to day life. Education is imperative for both individuals and societies. It is clear that education is very essential in the life of the individuals as it has the potential of securing a better life for her. Many blind women said their visual impairment as curses or punishment inflicted upon them for sins. They commit such beliefs and attitudes not only demoralize blind people but also deny them the opportunity to participate in certain socio-economic activities, like in education and the job market.

CONCLUSION

Women as a group are more vulnerable regardless of their caste, class or religion. Several problems are common to all girls and women whether or not they have disability. For

example, access to healthcare, education and employment is the key cause of higher rates of social exclusion among people with visual disabilities is that they are generally lower than for men. The most vulnerable and neglected among women are women with disabilities. They suffer double discrimination, both on the grounds of gender and impairment, often unable to earn an income because of exclusion from potential employment opportunities. Most studies indicate that women with visual impairment are more likely to be unemployed, and tend to have lower salaries. Further, visual impairment often leads to loss of employment, change to a less rewarding occupation, or reduced productivity, while restoring sight often brings occupational rehabilitation and a return to work. Among people with visual impairment, there is some indication that those with visual impairments are most likely to be affected by unemployment, and several studies suggest women are more likely to be jobless.

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