

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PERSONS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS; A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore the lived experiences of persons with visual impairments; focusing on how they perceive their disability and the coping mechanisms they adopt to manage daily life challenges in personal, educational, and social contexts. Despite increasing awareness of disability inclusion, individuals with visual impairments continue to face developmental, social, and educational barriers. A qualitative research design grounded in phenomenology was employed. Five participants with visual impairments were selected through purposive sampling from the Department of Special Education, Punjab. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather detailed narratives of their experiences. An interview guide was used to conduct semi-structured interviews, and data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify themes and subthemes within participant narratives. Four superordinate themes emerged from the data: (1) awareness of disability, (2) adaptation to disability, (3) resilience and self-efficacy, and (4) the need for assistive devices. Participants demonstrated a high level of self-awareness, strong adaptive behaviors, emotional resilience, and a desire for independence. The study concludes that while individuals with visual impairments exhibit remarkable resilience and adaptability, their full potential is constrained by the absence of inclusive infrastructure and resources. The findings call for enhanced support through assistive technologies, inclusive educational practices, and awareness initiatives to ensure their equal participation in society.

Keywords: *Visual impairments, lived experiences, phenomenological study, resilience, adaptation, self-efficacy.*

Introduction

Blindness is a serious challenge to every human being (Genet et al., 2021; Zegeye 2020). Blind persons are considered weak and vulnerable among society and unable to get higher education (Genet et al., 2021). The attitude of society towards persons with visual impairments may vary on the basis of socioeconomic background of those persons (Zegeye, 2020). The students with visual impairments have resilience to overcome the risk factors in their way of disability since their early life. Their courage and adaptation have been enabling them to achieve success in their personal, social and educational life despite hurdles (Genet et al., 2021; Zegeye, 2020).

Persons with visual impairments face numerous developmental, social, financial and educational difficulties in their lives. They have to cope with various stressors such as frustration, mental depression, physical and social adaptation. The problems faced by the persons with visual impairments cause loneliness, anxiety, social and emotional isolation and frustration

in them (Resch et al., 2012). Educational challenges such as negative attitudes, difficulty in accessing course materials, architectural barriers, and inaccessible pedagogy are common for persons with visual impairments (Beauchamp-Pryor, 2013).

It has been observed that persons with visual impairments have to come across various hurdles in their personal, social, physical and education spheres since childhood to late adulthood. Furthermore, there are limited educational resources and opportunities to provide important knowledge in order to reduce isolation and promote healthy human development for them (Columna et al., 2017).

Coping mechanisms to deal with daily barriers such as adaptation, family support and social support have a very positive and significant effect on persons with visual impairments (Veerman et al., 2019). Adaptation to life is very important coping method to handle impediments in the way of their visual impairments. Whereas, adaptation is the ability to transform adversities into essential social skills to meet with positive results (Rooney et al., 2018). Coping provides persons with visual impairments with protection against serious repercussions of their disability and their related problems (Craig, 2012).

The current study was aimed to examine the perceptions of persons with visual impairments regarding their disabilities as well as their educational, social and developmental problems. Therefore, this study was intended to explore the factors that involved perceptions of their disabilities and the coping processes they adapt in order to handle their daily life challenges.

Method

A qualitative method based on phenomenological analysis was used to explore the lived experiences of persons with visual impairments. Participants were recruited on the basis of purposive sampling from the Department of Special Education, Punjab. Semi structured interviews were conducted from the five participants with visual impairments. In-depth analysis was applied in order to generate themes from the information taken by the interviews. Interpretative phenomenological approach was considered in order to get detailed examination of lived experiences of persons with visual impairments (Smith, 2011).

Results

The study was intended to explore the perception and coping mechanisms of persons with visual impairments to deal with daily life barriers. Semi structured interviews were conducted and recorded. The in depth interviews were analyzed through IPA. The results of the study generated superordinate themes of perception and coping process of persons with visual impairments.

| Superordinate themes | Sub-themes |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1.Awareness of disability | Self-awareness Awareness of surroundings |
| 2.Adaption of disability | Adaptation to blindness and environment Adaptation to daily life barriers as a results of disability |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 3.Resilience and self-efficacy | Resilient behavior to overcome life challenges Self-efficacy to accomplish the given tasks |
| 4.Assistive devices | Need of assistive devices for quality education Use of assistive devices for communication and vocational skills |

Awareness of Disability

The participants were aware of their disability and blindness. They knew that they were different from normal people and surroundings. They were able to recall when it was revealed to them they were borne with visual impairments. Moreover, they recognized their disability and they have been adapting to their disability.

I was 6 years old when my mother told me that you are blind and you could not see like other siblings. I was blind by birth so I don't have idea how to see things with sight. I am well aware of my blindness and I have to live with it in my whole life. I can feel the surroundings with my other senses such as voices, smell and touch. (01).

Adaptation to disability

The participants with visual impairments have been adapting to their disability since early life. They used to learn new things in their development to deal with daily life barriers. They used to do work and chores by adapting basic life skills and self-help skills.

I am very adapted to do my work and activities on my own with little assistance. My family and siblings used to help me in accomplishing difficult tasks. But I can walk, find routes, can go market and school with little assistance. I can play and sing a song. I can spend time with my siblings, friends and peers normally. I learned basic life skills to be self-sufficient in my personal, educational and social life. I am happy and satisfied with myself and my existence. (02)

Resilience and Self-efficacy

The participants had strong resilience and courage to handle daily life hurdles and stressors. They were confident they can accomplish each and every goal if they learn those mastery skills. Learning basic self-help skills and mastery skills makes them more adaptable and resilient in their lives. They had career oriented and goal oriented thoughts and cognition.

Daily life barriers are part of life. I don't consider those barriers much difficult when I learn and adapt to handle those things. I have courage and strength to accomplish task that courage came from my family and teachers. I am living a good life and I don't feel isolated and frustrated. My education and learning are making me more self-efficacious that's why I am believe in myself to learn and do things in my personal, educational and social life.(03)

Need of Assistive Devices

The participants showed concerns there is a dire need of assistive devices for their educational, communication and vocational assistance. Institutions are lacking those devices and resources they need most for their quality education and professional skills.

I want to get higher education and want to be a teacher like my teacher who is also blind. But there are no assistive devices provided in my institution for my assistance in education and

vocational training. Sometimes I need talking mobile for effective communication and Perkins for practice. I think lack of assistive devices is causing suppression of my vocational skills. (04)

Discussion

The present study explored the lived experiences of persons with visual impairments through an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The themes that emerged—awareness of disability, adaptation, resilience and self-efficacy, and the role of assistive devices—offer meaningful insights into how individuals with visual impairments perceive, navigate, and adapt to their daily life challenges. These findings are supported and contextualized through the lens of existing literature.

Awareness of Disability and Self-Understanding

The participants exhibited a clear awareness of their disability and an understanding of how it differentiates them from their peers. This awareness began in early childhood and developed with time, helping them conceptualize their identity. This finding is consistent with Zegeye (2020), who emphasized that self-awareness among blind individuals is an evolving process influenced by family, environment, and social interactions. Genet et al. (2021) also noted that such awareness is foundational to psychological adjustment and personal development in individuals with blindness. This self-awareness, rather than being a source of limitation, was seen by participants as a reality to be accepted and adapted to—a finding that reflects Genet et al.'s (2021) conclusion that individuals with visual impairments often develop strong cognitive frameworks to interpret their limitations constructively.

Adaptation to Disability and Daily Life Barriers

Participants described various forms of adaptation—ranging from learning basic life skills to adjusting to educational and environmental challenges. The adaptive strategies mentioned, such as navigating independently, completing chores, or engaging socially, reflect the findings of Columna et al. (2017), who observed that physical and functional adaptations were central to the well-being and inclusion of individuals with visual impairments. The participants' adaptation also aligns with the concept of “active coping,” which includes skill-building, independence, and task management. As Rooney et al. (2018) reported, adaptation enables visually impaired persons to transform adversity into a tool for social and emotional growth. Similarly, Veerman et al. (2019) found that such intra-personal adjustments help reduce feelings of loneliness and marginalization.

Resilience and Self-Efficacy

The theme of resilience was evident in all participant narratives. They consistently described their ability to persist in the face of adversity, crediting this strength to family, teachers, and personal motivation. This supports the argument by Craig (2012), who stated that resilience acts as a buffer against the negative psychosocial effects of physical disabilities. Moreover, participants' belief in their ability to achieve academic and vocational goals despite limited resources is a clear reflection of high self-efficacy. Genet et al. (2021) emphasized that self-efficacy and resilience are closely interlinked traits in individuals with visual impairments and are vital for both psychological health and academic success.

Role and Lack of Assistive Devices

A prominent concern raised was the unavailability of assistive technologies—tools which are critical for equal access to education and communication. The participants highlighted the absence of essential devices like Perkins Brailers, talking mobile phones, and digital readers in educational settings. Beauchamp-Pryor (2013) emphasized that inclusive education is heavily

reliant on the availability of assistive technologies and that without them, students with disabilities remain disadvantaged. The lack of assistive tools reported in the current study aligns with systemic barriers identified in previous research, such as those described by Columna et al. (2017), who emphasized that many institutions in developing countries fail to meet the technological needs of students with visual impairments. The participants' concern demonstrates that while internal strengths (resilience, adaptation) are critical, institutional support remains a significant external factor influencing their success.

Conclusion

The present study explored the lived experiences of persons with visual impairments, shedding light on their perceptions, coping mechanisms, and adaptation strategies. The findings illustrate that despite facing considerable social, educational, and psychological challenges, individuals with visual impairments demonstrate remarkable resilience, self-efficacy, and adaptability. Participants exhibited a strong awareness of their disability, along with a determined effort to lead independent lives through the development of self-help skills and the utilization of available support systems. Crucially, the study highlights the essential role of social support—particularly from family and educators—in fostering confidence and motivation among individuals with visual impairments. Furthermore, the lack of assistive devices and inclusive educational infrastructure emerged as significant barriers that inhibit their academic and vocational growth. The voices of the participants underscore the urgent need for inclusive policies and better-equipped institutions to support their development.

Limitations

The study was limited to five participants from one geographic and institutional setting, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. All participants were recruited from an educational institution, possibly excluding perspectives of those with visual impairments who are not currently engaged in formal education or are from rural/remote settings.

Implications

Institutions must prioritize the provision of assistive technologies such as Braille tools, screen readers, and talking devices to enhance the learning experiences of students with visual impairments. Training programs for teachers should be implemented to promote inclusive pedagogical strategies and improve educators' understanding of the needs of visually impaired learners. Community awareness campaigns are essential to reduce stigma and promote the social inclusion of individuals with visual impairments.

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