

Coping and Resilience in Adults with Total Blindness in Kerala

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This study on the personal experiences of adults with total blindness in Kerala was intended to advance knowledge about their coping skills and resilience in the face of constant adversity. Sixteen adults (8 men and 8 women) who were totally blind for at least 20 years participated in this study. Content analysis of the data collected from the participants, including the congenitally blind and the illiterate, showed that they had normal functional skills. The coping skills in the adventitious blind participants depended on their willingness to unconditionally accept the disability and the level of independence they showed before becoming blind. Themes such as high unemployment, social stigma, bodily injuries, and gender gap also evolved from the data analysis. Suggestions for improving the lives of the blind population in Kerala were also offered by the participants, such as increasing the monthly government pension and educating visually-impaired children in exclusive blind schools instead of regular schools. Making government jobs reserved for the visually impaired available and increasing the vocational opportunities for women were also suggested by the participants. .

Keywords: Coping & Resilience, Adults with total Blindness, Kerala, Developing Country

A human being with blindness can be compared to a car with a perfect engine that is forced to navigate in darkness because its headlights are not working. Ninety percent of the visually impaired people of the world live in developing countries. The personal experiences and the coping skills of people with blindness from developing countries such as India have been largely unexplored by the world's psychosocial researchers (Ademola-Popoola, Tunde-Ayinmode, & Akande, 2010; Haines-Wandga, 1996).

Cimarolli et al., (2011) conducted a qualitative study on the functional, psychological, and social challenges faced by older adults with significant visual impairment due to macular degeneration. The following numerous challenges reported by the participants in various domains bring out the extent to which they reduce the victim's quality of life: Functional: Reading, outdoor mobility, shopping, watching TV, financial management, driving, meal preparation, using phone, using transportation, grooming, writing, housekeeping, indoor mobility, locating objects, identifying objects, sewing, general mobility, repair, handling money, taking medication, telling time;

Psychological: General thoughts and feelings about blindness, negative affect, sadness, loss of independence, thinking about potential problems in future, anxiety, embarrassment, loneliness; Social: Leisure, recognizing people, eating out, art and crafts, visiting social network in person, social correspondence, travel, people don't understand blindness, volunteer work, caregiving.

Blindness in India and in Kerala

India had population of 1.2 billion according to the census of 2011. It had 8 million blind people and 38 million people with low vision.

Kerala, that has a population of 33 million, has the highest literacy rate (91%) in India. The life expectancy of a person in Kerala at birth is 74 years. Thus, literacy rate and life expectancy in Kerala are comparable to that of developed countries. According to the 2012 census, there were 3,34,000 visually impaired people in Kerala.

Research Questions

The central question was: What are the personal experiences of individuals with total blindness in Kerala and what are the coping skills