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**Loneliness and Social Isolation-Prevalence among individuals  
with Visual Impairment: A Literature Review**

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*Abstract:* The purpose of this article was to review the published research literature on loneliness and social isolation among individuals with visual impairment by identifying indicators, describing characteristics, major findings and discussion. Articles were identified using keyword searches through various electronic databases that are available online. The databases published were chosen from the year 1999 to 2020. Out of the total articles chosen for the study 44 were found relevant to the objective. Among them 21 studies were descriptive, 12 were correlational, 9 were case studies including early intervention studies. Findings of the review study showed that

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isolation leads to being alone which is fixed by the level of blindness and the way, blind people accept and experience the absence of sight. Social support and interaction, psychological factors and socio economic status occurs and plays a major role in loneliness and isolation in the life of people with visual impairment.

**Keywords:** visual impairment, loneliness, social isolation, social interaction, self image

### **Introduction:**

There are various reasons for people with visual impairment to experience mental and physical problems. Isolation is included as a major factor among these and is also associated with loneliness and social establishment. Blind people are identified as a group who were at a higher risk of loneliness and isolation (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2003). Blindness is linked with high rate of loneliness and depression which leads to reduced quality of life in the elderly (Perrett, 2011). Loneliness and isolation should stem from impairment in vision (Hartman, 2009). There are a range of factors that have been originate to be significantly concurrent with loneliness among adolescents which leads to quality of their social establishment and connection. Visual impairment students of the adolescent age group exhibit high degree of loneliness (Gold, 2002). Loneliness in blind people can be viewed as relationship factor between communication and social interaction Browning (2004). Vision impairment can negatively impact psycho social development of an individual which may lead to loneliness. Since loneliness and isolation play a major role in the physical and mental wellbeing in the life of people with visual impairment we conducted a wide-ranging literature review. Major findings of the review suggested that individual psychological factors is playing a substantial role in determining the self-efficacy and self image of people with visual impairment whether if isolation and loneliness is experienced by people with visual impairment. The research highlights the lack of in detail explore study on the loneliness practice

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of children with visual impairment and peer support plays a strong source in addressing the loneliness of children and adolescents with visual impairment.

### **Objectives of the study:**

- 1) Find out the factors that contribute to the loneliness and social isolation of blind people as they are unpredictable consequences.
- 2) Identify the challenges encountered by people with visual impairment due to loneliness and depression
- 3) Establish the connection between loneliness and isolation as both are complex process which affects the psycho social well being of the blind people.
- 4) Create recommendations based on the review and to suggest policies for creating an inclusive environment for people with visual impairment.

### **Method:**

#### **Data Collection:**

Reference articles related to the study were identified and sorted by searching in electronic database and other electronic journals. The condensed keywords used during this search process wherever possible are as follows: a) visual impairment, blind, blindness, sight loss, people with visual impairment b) loneliness, social isolation, depression, mental well-being, coping strategies. With respect to the objective of the study the following databases were used: Eric, MEDline, CINAHL ( EBSCO), Shodhganga, PubMed, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), JSTOR, Google Scholar , Academic Search Complete (EBSCO) and ProQuest Central.

#### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:**

While selecting the articles which had different aims and findings, the authors had in mind it should meet the objectives of the paper done now. Research articles and papers that were selected is based on the inclusion criteria and those were rejected were based on the exclusion criteria.

#### **Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study**

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S. No	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1.	Papers and articles that were double peer reviewed	Articles that doesn't meet the objectives of the study
2.	Published in English language in e-journals	Papers that are in other local languages
3.	Published in the period of 1999 to 2020	Studies published in conferences, seminars and proceedings

### **Article Selection**

Totally 180 articles and papers were selected as a result of the search process. Out of these selected studies 138 were excluded based on the exclusion criteria. Predominantly disability population, elderly age group and marital status is the reason for exclusion of papers. The search process is completed and both the authors identified 42 articles which met to the objectives of the review study. Selected studies were grouped into correlation, descriptive and case studies. Mostly selected studies explored the relationship between the variables selected pertaining to loneliness and isolation.

### **Design of the study:**

Since it is a review paper the authors used three research designs for the study. 21 studies were descriptive. 12 studies were co relational and 9 studies were of intervention. When it comes to intervention studies, it is found that 4 were of pre experimental design, 3 were of true experimental design and 2 were of quasi experimental design.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Among the 42 studies chosen, 18 studies included theoretical framework. Remaining 24 did not explain theoretical framework.

### **Validity and reliability:**

Peer reviewed journals and studies that were scientific were chosen by the authors to make to the review paper more reliable and valid. Since the studies chosen meets the exclusion and inclusion criteria which has a strong link with the objectives of the study, reliable and valid conclusions can be attained towards the end of the study

### **Dependent variables, measures and sampling technique applied:**

Both the authors combined and tabulated the dependent variables. Also the authors identified the sampling technique and measures used in the papers. The information so collected is mentioned in the table below.

### **Table 2: Dependent variables, measures and sampling technique applied with respect to the papers regarding loneliness and social isolation of people with visual impairment**

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S. No	Number of studies	Dependent variables	Sampling technique	Measures applied
1.	12	Relationships and support, societal barriers, economic status, family support, peer groups	Purposive sampling	Questionnaires
2.	10	Functional and psychological needs	Random sampling	8 questionnaires and 2 interviews
3.	10	education, type of disability, children and young people	7 are purposive and 3 are random sampling	4 Questionnaires, 3 Surveys and 3 observations

### Major findings:

- 1) Comparing the loneliness of male and female people with visual impairment, four of the studies highlighted that loneliness rate is very high in women when compared to men. The reason highlighted are the reduced mobility, lack of family support and physical health issues faced by blind women which limits their association with outside world which results in isolation.
- 2) When it comes to workplace of blind people unequal access to job is an important factor that adds to the loneliness and isolation of blind people which makes the blind people to feel excluded. Background noises created during communication and sympathy feeling of the colleagues contribute to loneliness and depression of blind people in work place.
- 3) As age increases loneliness among blind people of older age group also increases. Older people who became blind in their early life due to acquired blindness tend to experience uncertainty and low self efficacy feeling. This may be due to the unavailability of rehabilitation centres and old age home for the blind people which can educate the society on the needs of blind people of older age group.
- 4) Social support plays an indomitable role in the loneliness experienced by the people. From the studies it is found that mostly blind people they themselves try to exclude form social events and gatherings, since they are not certain with mobility to new places, nervousness in establishing initial communication and lack of support from public in new places. This contributes a lot to the loneliness an isolation of blind people.
- 5) Being single is a risk factor that contributes to the loneliness of blind people. It is found more for adolescent and old age group of blind people. It is strongly reflected in the old age blind people. Lack of family support and disability are the two main reasons that made them to be single.

- 6) Regarding marital status two findings are seen. Blind people who are married also experience loneliness due to the lack of mental support from their partner. Also blind people who marry either marry a sighted or blind partner who have a good established and quality relationship tend to experience less negative experience of blindness. Loneliness rate if found to be low in those blind couple.
- 7) Children with visual impairment tend to experience loneliness naturally due to lack of support from their peer groups in school and adapted educational needs. Four of the study reported that difficulties in establishing friendship with sighted peers either in schools or in home network as a key issue in loneliness. The reason behind this is bullying and negative critics received by their sighted peers on their disability tends to create depression among the blind children.
- 8) Socio economic status of a blind individual plays a crucial role in perceived loneliness of blind people. Totally 8 papers reported that there is a link between loneliness of blind people with poor economic status. Also low average income resulted to remain single in most of the blind people life. People with visual impairment live in poverty and isolation irrespective of policies and rehabilitation services received.

## Discussion

The aim of this articles was to make a detailed review on the research papers and studies that are published related to loneliness and social isolation of blind people. The findings drawn resulted in strong outcomes relating to the variables and indicators chosen for the study.

- 1) Loneliness and isolation together is an intertwined process, contributing to each other. They contribute to the poor physical and mental well being of blind people.
- 2) Coping strategies include support from parents and peer group. Sight loss experience is much reduced with these factors. Gaining confidence in daily living skills and communication are supported by these factors.
- 3) Societal barriers reduce the inclusion of blind people which results in loneliness. Creating proper access to public places, buildings, transportation and job reduce the loneliness factors and to be linked with more people in the society.
- 4) With respect to children with visual impairment, support form peer groups, adapted learning materials and equal access to technology helps in reducing isolation thus in turn loneliness level is also decreased.

## Conclusion:

Both the researches have given adequate evidence for factors contributing to loneliness and isolation of blind people. This review is done in depth connecting the research studies conducted almost in the past 18 years. The study recommends more service policies to work on focusing the psychological and physical needs of blind people to reduce risk factors of loneliness. Further more study can be done on focussing the socio economic factors and loneliness of blind people. The study concludes by the major finding that loneliness and isolation are an interactive process which can be condensed by ever-increasing the quality of the life of blind people. Inclusion of blind people by creating proper sensitisation to the public, more of the parents and education system can help the blind people to focus more on mainstreaming and contributing to healthy mental and physical well being

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