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Ranjita Dawn

Educational Achievement and Psychosocial Transition in Visually Impaired Adolescents

Studies from India

 Springer

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Foreword

Self-esteem or the image we have of ourselves is a critical component in shaping our personality and confidence. The formation of self-esteem is deeply connected with the process of socialization. Thus, the vibes we receive about ourselves play an important role in the construction of the image we have of ourselves. This is true for most people irrespective of differences in gender, race, class, disability, and a host of other factors. The experiences of childhood and the teenage years are vital for developing positive self-esteem.

Persons with disabilities are often vulnerable to negative self-image development. Persons with disabilities are often looked down upon by society, ridiculed for their disfigurement, and forced to be isolated due to their physical, sensory, cognitive or emotional state of being. This form of oppression operates in society to the extent that such persons could begin to believe and act as if the oppressors' belief systems, values, and way of life are the reality. This has been termed internalized oppression. The psycho-emotional dimensions of disability point to what disabled people can be, ignoring their abilities. This kind of reaction rooted in the negative attitudes and prejudice of society towards disabled people leaves them hurt, feeling worthless, and unattractive. One important aspect includes the way people respond emotionally to social exclusion and physical barriers such as feelings of anger and frustration when they encounter inaccessible buildings. Another aspect of this form of disability can include emotional responses to the social reactions of others. This can be manifested in instances such as feeling ashamed when stared at in the streets. This kind of emotional disability is another facet of internalized oppression.

Thus, low self-esteem is closely connected with internalized oppression. Social prejudice and stereotypes of persons with disabilities are also responsible for their negative self-image. Self-esteem and self-image are undoubtedly closely related. Thus, the popular notions of the perfect body and beauty are likely to lead to a feeling of shame and incompetence amongst persons with visible physical impairments. This naturally lowers their self-image. In the present-day consumerist society this phenomenon is evident. In such a milieu, it is not unnatural that persons with disabilities harbour not so positive ideas about their looks and body. This may also lead to them withdrawing into a cocoon. On the other extreme, another

possible reaction can result in complete negation of one's impairment—a process of self-denial, which creates a vicious cycle where persons with disabilities become victims.

Self-confidence is the stepping stone towards progress and making one's own place in society. The first step towards building of self-confidence is acknowledging one's limitations or impairments. By doing this people move forward in discovering innovative skills, which are likely to help them overcome the limitations caused by disability. Accepting constructive criticism directed towards improving one's personality is another aspect of developing self-confidence. These factors lead to the formation and nurturing of healthy interpersonal relationships with significant others.

Self-esteem may be different according to the nature of one's impairment. People with visible physical impairment may feel more conscious of being judged and viewed differently. Other forms of impairments have their own share of oppression in different forms. Directly related with this is the opportunity to have access to various amenities of life such as education, health facilities, employment, recreation, personal relationships and so on.

The present volume introspects over the development and differences in self-esteem of blind and sighted students studying in a non-inclusive set up. It may be an interesting exercise to explore the self-esteem of blind students as well as students with other forms of impairments, studying in an inclusive education system, the presumption being that the two will vary in their approach in analysing their self-esteem.

I sincerely hope that this book would invoke a critical understanding of the present educational scenario of blind students and can be a catalyst towards forward-looking changes in the near future.

My best wishes to the author.

Jeeja Ghosh
Head of Advocacy and Disability Studies
Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy, Kolkata, India

Preface

The book focuses on some of the psychological aspects of blindness (loss, grief, and eventual ‘acceptance’), adaptation and coping strategies. It propagates the social model of disability and is a complete breakaway from the individual approach. It opposes the issue of blindness being positioned absolutely on individual approach with little consideration of societal context. This reductionist approach tends to assume blindness as solely a physiological event and not a social process.

This book is an initiative towards addressing the dearth of adequate research on the correlation between various psychosocial factors (anxiety, depression, self-esteem) and their cumulative impact on the psychological development and educational achievement of blind individuals in the Indian context.

Adolescence is a critical period of development marked by rapid changes such as transition to independence and finding one’s own identity and necessitates in-depth research. The psychological well-being of both blind and sighted adolescents is dependent on several factors such as their social and economic background, gender, age, perceived social support and social and emotional maturity. Inability to adjust to the various physical, cognitive, and affective changes may cause them to exhibit different types of behavioural problems.

Social acceptance and psychological well-being as essential prerequisites for successful rehabilitation of all individuals made it an imperative to explore the traumas, dilemmas, and challenges that people with disabilities experience. These have a significant influence on the latter’s self-view, adjustment patterns, and acceptance into mainstream society. This volume provides a comprehensive analysis of social adjustment and emotional development of visually impaired individuals to identify if a type of school setting produces significant impact on their educational achievement. Apart from this, although studies indicate differences among students with visual impairments regarding their psychosocial development and social interaction in various settings, there is lack of substantial research that describes the structural properties of diverse educational settings and their impact on adjustment patterns and academic performance.

The book assesses and analyses if the type of educational placement (non-integrated) produces any significant influences and differences among adolescent blind and sighted students in respect of their self-esteem, adjustment, and academic achievement. The interaction pattern and self-perception of blind students at school have been looked into from the social constructivist perspective of disability to analyse if experiences of schooling for children with disability are mediated through school practices and processes rather than the physical impairment itself.

Chapter 1 highlights the marked changes in paradigms for defining disability from the individual approach, or more specifically the medical model, to the social approach. This facilitates understanding various issues concerned with disability being perceived predominantly as medical or biological or the social approach theories which were found to be more concerned with structural and material conditions, culture, and representation. I highlight certain important issues as well as shortcomings existing in the area of research concerning visual impairment, thus urging the need for undertaking more in-depth and extensive research.

Chapter 2 explores various aspects of self-esteem and adjustment and their relation to disability. It critically analyses the diverse theories and their relevance in affecting the psychological well-being of people with disabilities, particularly blind individuals.

Critical reorientation of different approaches and perspectives has significant implications on the manner in which law and policy relating to disability are developed. There is now growing awareness among people that the problem does not reside in the person with a disability, but results from the structures, practices, and attitudes that prevent the individual from exercising his or her capabilities. Keeping this in view, Chap. 3 investigates policy perspectives regarding the education of people with disabilities at the global level and specifically in India. It is obvious that although there has been a marked shift in paradigms towards making educational provisions, there are also various backlogs and barriers, which make it essential to undertake more focused and comprehensive efforts for deriving optimum benefits. It is within this perspective that the book aims to look into the diverse trends and factors affecting the academic performance of blind individuals as well as their performance in relation to their sighted counterparts.

Chapter 4 on quantitative and qualitative analysis provides an analysis of this data.

Chapter 5 provides an overall analysis of the various findings. It also specifies some implications and limitations of the research undertaken and offers some suggestions for further research.

Acknowledgements

At the very outset a special word of appreciation for my family members. There are no words sufficient enough to express love and gratitude for my family members—my mother, my sister, my brother, my son Sachdeep, and niece Nikita—for their tremendous support. I would like to thank them for being there for me throughout my life and for everything they have done for me. This book would never have materialized without their love, presence, and sacrifice. I extend my sincere gratitude to them for the rich experiences they have given me, which have enabled me to undertake this work and complete it.

I also extend my gratitude to Springer for undertaking publication of the work.

About the Book

This book provides a fresh approach to studies on adolescents with visual impairment. It threads through the three elements of disability (visual impairment), psychosocial development of adolescents, and their educational achievement. It highlights how these concepts traverse across and cast an irrefutable impact on each other. The author prepares the ground by highlighting the failure of existing theories of disability studies in addressing issues concerning adolescents. She further critiques the psycho-medical approach to disability which undermines or disregards its social construction. The book provides an analysis of numerous issues affecting the psychosocial development of adolescents with visual impairment, which is further validated through narratives in educational settings. It also strongly advocates the need to create awareness about the basic ethics of human relationships and rights, moral consciousness and social and civic responsibilities, which can play a vital role in ensuring the healthy psychosocial development of adolescents with visual impairment, and in ensuring inclusion.

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About the Author

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Abbreviations

AA	Academic Achievement
CABE	Central Advisory Board of Education
CWSN	Children With Special Needs
DISE	District Information System for Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
EDU	Educational Adjustment
EMO	Emotional Adjustment
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
ICIDH	International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps
IE	Inclusive Education
IEDC	Integrated Education for the Disabled Children
IOM	Institute of Medicine
MHRD	Ministry of Human and Resource Development
NAB	National Association for the Blind
NCERT	National Council for Educational Research and Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIVH	National Institute for the Visually Handicapped
NPE	National Policy of Education
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organization
PIED	Projected Integrated Education for the Disabled
PWD	Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995
RCI	Rehabilitative Council of India
RTI	Response to Intervention Model
SC	Scheduled Caste
SE	Self-Esteem
SOC	Social Adjustment
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSR	Students' Self-Rating of Academic Performance

ST	Scheduled Tribe
TR	Teachers' Rating of Students' Academic Performance
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPIAS	Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation
WHO	World Health Organization

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