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Employment Challenges and Opportunities for Persons with Visual Impairment in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The employment challenges and opportunities for persons with visual impairment (PWVI) in Pakistan were investigated in this study.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Quantitative approach through a structured survey of 70 respondents was used. Influencing factors of job acquisition, types of employment, and available support mechanisms for PWVI were determined.

Findings: Predominant presence of PWVI in provincial government roles and teaching was found. PWVI face challenges such as societal attitudes, infrastructure accessibility, and limited training opportunities. It was suggested that there should be enhanced educational access, inclusive hiring, improved workplace and public accessibility, expanded vocational training, and awareness campaigns about disability rights.

Implications/Originality/Value: These actions are needed to foster a more inclusive employment environment to empowering PWVI for achieving greater socio-economic integration and professional success in Pakistan.



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Introduction

Understanding the job challenges for people with visual impairments is key in creating inclusive practices and policies. Despite progress in civil rights and job training programs, significant barriers such as lower employment rates compared to those without visual impairments are there to impede the independent and quality work participation.

Literature Review

Globally, employment rates for people with visual impairments range between 25% and 40%, with many either unemployed or underemployed (Martiniello & Wittich, 2019). Education, prior experience, personal attributes, workplace culture, and employer attitudes all influence their participation in the labor force (Benoit et al., 2013; Wolffe & Candela, 2002; Coffey et al., 2014; Crudden et al., 2005; La Grow & Daye, 2005; McDonnall, 2019).

Negative employer attitudes towards hiring and retaining employees with visual impairment are well-documented (Bengisu et al., 2008; Frank & Bellini, 2005; Shaw et al., 2007; McDonnall et al., 2014). Employment prospects are further complicated by accessibility barriers in the built environment (Cushley et al., 2023). Comparative studies across developed and developing countries are conducted in which disparities in employment experiences and policy impacts are noted (Grech & Goodley, 2011; Singal, 2010).

In a study of Schur et al. (2013), discriminatory practices and systemic barriers were reported towards special needs persons particularly PWVI. These malpractices hamper the quality of standards for healthy and independent life. But the employment challenges for people with visual impairment are getting much worse. Measures as policies and societal changes are crucial steps in removing these barriers (Ameri et al., 2018; Vedeler, 2014). Employer attitudes and workplace accommodations are essential for promoting fair job opportunities for people with visual deficiency (McDonnall, 2019; Wolffe & Spungin, 2002; World Blind Union, 2019). In Pakistan's context, the exploration of the facts about employment landscape of persons with visual impairment is critical because of its segregated systems.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the employment experiences of employees with visual impairment in Pakistan.
2. To explore the employment challenges faced by employees with visual impairment at work.
3. To explore the available support services for employees with visual impairment in the workplace.

Methodology of the Study

- The research methodology followed the quantitative paradigm having descriptive nature. They conducted a survey with a structured questionnaire to collect their findings.
- The target population comprised visually impaired individuals who are employed in various sectors across Pakistan.
- Given the scattered nature of this population and the lack of available data on their employment status, a snowball sampling technique was adopted to identify and recruit participants. A sample of 70 PWVI was gathered through this method.
- The questionnaire, developed based on an extensive literature review, was divided into two sections: demographics and employment-related barriers.
- Data collection was conducted personally and phone calls, where the researcher read out the questions to the participants and recorded their responses.
- A combination of multiple rating scales, including Yes/No and Likert scales (strongly disagree to strongly agree) was employed. The study was piloted to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument. The estimated reliability was Cronbach's alpha 0.79.
- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were calculated to encapsulate the demographic details and the answers to the employment-related queries. This analysis provided insights into the demographic characteristics of the employed PWVI and the various barriers they face in their professional lives.

Findings

➤ Demographic Details of the Respondents

Gender

- **Male:** 43 respondents (61.4%)
- **Female:** 27 respondents (38.6%)

Age

- **21 to 30 years:** 26 respondents (37.1%)
- **31 to 40 years:** 35 respondents (50.0%)
- **41 to 50 years:** 9 respondents (12.9%)

Qualification

- **F.A:** 5 respondents (7.1%)
- **B.A:** 14 respondents (20.0%)
- **M.A:** 43 respondents (61.4%)
- **M.Phil:** 6 respondents (8.6%)
- **PH.D:** 2 respondents (2.9%)

Level of Visual Impairment

- **Moderate:** 1 respondent (1.4%)
- **Low vision:** 9 respondents (12.9%)
- **Totally blind:** 49 respondents (70.0%)
- **Partially sighted:** 11 respondents (15.7%)

Designation

- **Telephone operator:** 3 respondents (4.3%)
- **Computer operator:** 7 respondents (10.2%)
- **Daily wages employer:** 27 respondents (38.6%)
- **JSET (Junior Special Education Teacher):** 16 respondents (22.9%)
- **SSET (Senior Special Education Teacher):** 13 respondents (18.6%)
- **Senior teacher:** 1 respondent (1.4%)
- **Lecturer:** 3 respondents (4.3%)

Organization

- **Government:** 57 respondents (81.4%)
- **Private:** 13 respondents (18.6%)

Monthly Income

- **30,000-50,000:** 42 respondents (60.0%)
- **51,000-70,000:** 12 respondents (17.1%)
- **71,000-90,000:** 14 respondents (20.0%)
- **91,000-110,000:** 2 respondents (2.9%)

Experience

- **1 to 10 years:** 59 respondents (84.3%)
- **11 to 20 years:** 11 respondents (15.7%)

Education Completed From

- **Special School:** 43 respondents (67.1%)
- **General School:** 23 respondents (32.9%)

City

- **Lahore:** 20 respondents (28.6%)
- **Multan:** 1 respondent (1.4%)
- **Karachi:** 7 respondents (10.0%)
- **Hafizabad:** 7 respondents (10.0%)
- **Kusoor:** 6 respondents (8.6%)
- **Faisalabad:** 4 respondents (5.7%)
- **Chakwal:** 7 respondents (10.0%)
- **Peshawar:** 2 respondents (2.9%)
- **Lodhran:** 2 respondents (2.9%)

- **Sahiwal:** 3 respondents (4.3%)
- **Gujranwala:** 6 respondents (8.6%)
- **Jhang:** 1 respondent (1.4%)
- **Responses of the Respondents**

Preferred Reading Methods

Preferred reading methods among persons with visual impairment (PWVI), 41.4% prefer Braille, 24.3% opt for computer disks, and 15.7% use tape cassettes or audio recordings. Additionally, 11.4% rely on large print materials, while 7.1% still use regular print. The M response is 3.77, with a SD of 1.33, highlighting reasonable variability in reading preferences among respondents.

Main Mode of Transportation to Work

The study highlights that persons with visual impairment (PWVI) have to travel for work. Public transport is crucial, with 51.4% using it. Family support is significant, with 20% driven to work. 11.4% walk to nearby workplaces, emphasizing proximity benefits. 7.1% use private cars with drivers, showing some independence. Taxis are used by 2.9%, and 1.4% use other modes. The M response is 3.06, with a SD of 1.57, indicating diverse transportation needs among PWVI.

Working Hours

Among employed persons with visual impairment (PWVI), 60% reported working 6 hours daily, 37.1% work 8 hours daily, and a smaller group (2.9%) works 10 hours daily. The M daily working hours reported is 2.57, with a SD of 0.55, representing moderate consistency in reported work hours.

Types of Work

Employed persons with VI (57.1%) are involved in teaching roles, around 25.7% are engaged in public-facing positions, and 17.1% handle communications, supporting organizational efficiency through administrative roles such as transfer calls. The M reported for types of work is 2.40, with a SD of 0.77, demonstrating moderate variance in job roles among PWVI.

Type of Employer

Approximately 68.6% are employed in provincial government roles, about 22.9% are involved in private businesses or are self-employed, and 8.6% work in federal government agencies. The M reported for employer types is 3.68, with a SD of 1.06, representing moderate variation in employment opportunities for PWVI across governmental and private sectors.

Job Satisfaction

Approximately 45.7% of respondents expressed satisfaction with their current job, and 37.1% reporting high levels of satisfaction. However, 17.1% indicated dissatisfaction. The M job satisfaction value is 3.20, with a SD of 0.71, signifying moderate variation.

Challenges in Employment

In seeking employment:

- The most prevalent issue reported was **societal challenges**, with 34.3% of respondents citing societal perceptions and barriers affecting job opportunities.
- **Family-related problems** were noted by 21.4% of respondents.
- While **transportation challenges** also affected 21.4% in accessing suitable transportation.
- **Colleague-related issues** were mentioned by 14.3% of respondents.
- **Education-related** problems affected 8.6%.

The M score for these challenges was 3.19, with a SD of 1.24, indicating moderate agreement among respondents on these barriers to employment opportunities for PWVI.

Job Mobility Challenges

A significant majority, 74.3%, indicated that their visual impairment does not hinder them from changing jobs. However, 25.7% reported challenges related to their disability when seeking new employment. The *M* score for job mobility challenges due to disability was 1.74, with a *SD* of 0.44, indicating moderate agreement among respondents on these barriers.

Perceptions of Underemployment

A majority, 77.1%, reported satisfaction with their current job roles and compensation levels, however, 22.9% expressed feelings of underemployment or receiving inadequate pay relative to their qualifications and expectations. The *M* value for feelings of underemployment was 1.77, having a low *SD* of 0.42, suggesting consistent agreement among those who feel underpaid.

Employment Stability

A significant majority, 80.0%, reported never experiencing job termination due to their disability. However, 20.0% of respondents indicated they had been fired or asked to resign for reasons linked to their disability. The *M* score for job termination due to disability was 1.80, having a low *SD* of 0.40, signifying consistent agreement among those who faced job loss.

Access to Training Programs

A significant majority, 87.1%, reported no access issues when seeking to participate in training programs. However, 12.9% of respondents faced difficulties accessing training opportunities due to their visual impairment. The *M* score for access issues was 1.87, having a low *SD* of 0.34, representing consistent agreement among those experiencing barriers.

Sources of Job Seeking Advice

- **Teachers** emerged as the primary source, with 38.6% of PWVI receiving guidance from educators.
- **Friends** (18.6%) and relatives (12.9%) also provided significant support.
- **Newspapers and books** were utilized by 15.7% of respondents.
- While 8.6% respondents relied on the **internet** for job advice.
- **State employment offices** were the least utilized (5.7%) but the *M* score of 3.87, indicating moderate agreement among those who sought assistance from this formal channel.

Sources of Assistance in Job Finding

- **Newspapers and books** were rated most helpful by 24.3% of respondents.
- **Relatives** were cited by 21.4% as valuable in facilitating job opportunities.
- **Internet resources** were effective for 20.0% of respondents.
- **Teachers and friends** each contributed to job finding for 17.1% of respondents.

The *M* effectiveness score was highest for newspapers and books at 2.91, having a *SD* of 1.49, representing moderate consensus on the reliability and accessibility of traditional media in assisting PWVI with job searches.

Availability of Rehabilitation Services

A significant majority, 67.1% of respondents, perceive rehabilitation services to be lacking in the country. In contrast, 32.0% of respondents reported that they believe rehabilitation services are available in Pakistan. The *M* score for perception of rehabilitation services availability was 1.70, having a *SD* of 0.49, signifying reasonable agreement among respondents on this issue.

Factors Contributing to Employee Retention

- The most significant factor, identified by 44.3% of respondents, is the **support of friendly colleagues**.

- Additionally, 38.6% of respondents highlighted the importance of a **good working environment**.
- A smaller proportion, 11.4%, cited a **good salary package** as critical for retention.
- Furthermore, 5.7% of respondents noted that **access to transportation facilities** is crucial for their continued employment.

The *M* score for factors contributing to employee retention was 3.10, with a *SD* of 0.95, representing a high level of consistency among respondents regarding the significance of these factors.

Obstacles in Job Seeking

- The most prevalent obstacle, noted by 31.4% of respondents, is the **negative attitudes** towards blindness in the **general public**.
- **Access to transportation** was identified by 27.1% as a significant barrier.
- Additionally, 21.4% cited a **lack of accurate job information**.
- **Discrimination in hiring processes** due to visual impairment was reported by 11.4% respondents.
- **Negative attitudes from employers** were mentioned by 8.6% respondents.

The *M* score for obstacles discouraging job seeking was 3.01, having a *SD* of 1.19, representing reasonable agreement among respondents about the severity of these barriers.

Obstacles Discouraging Job Seeking

- The most prevalent obstacle, cited by 30% of respondents, is the **lack of adaptive equipment** needed for their work.
- About 21.4% of respondents identified a **lack of computer skills** as a significant barrier. Additionally, 20% mentioned a **lack of job-specific skills**.
- Moreover, 17.1% reported a **lack of information about available job opportunities**.
- Finally, 11.4% noted a **lack of educational opportunities**.

The *M* score for obstacles discouraging job seeking was 2.91, with a *SD* of 1.33, indicating moderate agreement among respondents about the severity of these barriers.

Obstacles Discouraging Job Retaining

- The most prominent barrier, reported by 41.4% of respondents, is **discouragement from family members**.
- Additionally, 30% identified **transfer issues**, such as commuting or relocation difficulties.
- A notable 11.4% cited a **lack of relevant work experience**.
- Similarly, 11.4% mentioned the **severity of their disability** as a barrier.
- A smaller proportion, 5.7%, noted a **lack of training opportunities**.

The *M* score for obstacles discouraging job seeking was 3.30, with a *SD* of 1.01, indicating moderate agreement among respondents about the severity of these challenges.

Implementation of Employment and Rehabilitation Ordinance 1989 in Pakistan

According to the data, 51% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the implementation of the ordinance. Conversely, 48.6% believed the ordinance is implemented satisfactorily. The *M* score of 1.52 with a *SD* of 0.53 reflects diverse opinions among respondents regarding the ordinance's implementation.

Government Services

- According to the data, 34.3% of respondents received **training in other job skills** from the state government.
- Additionally, 21.4% received **financial assistance for work uniforms**, easing financial burdens associated with job-related expenses.

- Moreover, 17.1% received **training in computer skills**.
- Furthermore, 10% respondents received **financial aid for educational expenses**.

The M score of 3.18 with a SD of 1.20 indicates moderate agreement among respondents.

Government Services for Searching Employment

- Majority of the respondents (40%) received **assistance in identifying suitable job opportunities** based on their skills and abilities.
- Additionally, 22.9% participated in **job training programs** for enhancing their job-related skills and employability.
- Moreover, 15.7% received **information on how work affects their benefits**.
- Furthermore, 12.9% received **training in orientation and mobility skills**.
- Lastly, 8.6% received **personalized job opportunity information**.

The M score of 3.15 with a SD of 1.18, indicates moderate agreement among respondents.

Institutional Support and Development in Current Employment

- Majority of the respondents (35.7%) reported that they receive support for **improving their job-related abilities**.
- Additionally, 21.4% received assistance in **improving communication skills**.
- Furthermore, 18.6% reported that they receive **support to maintain their jobs**.
- Moreover, 14.3% received assistance to **enhance competitiveness with nondisabled workers**.
- Lastly, 10% received help in **securing employment**.

The M score of 3.40 with a SD of 1.29 indicates moderate agreement among respondents.

Facilitators in Job Acquisition

- According to the data, 38.6% of respondents attribute their successful job acquisition to **interview training for effective communication** with employers.
- Additionally, 34.3% mentioned that **job skills training** played a crucial role by equipping them with essential competencies sought by employers.
- Moreover, 22.9% cited **previous work experience** as instrumental in securing their current jobs.
- Finally, 4.3% noted the **assistance of adaptive equipment** in their job search process for independent task performance.

The M score of 1.93 with a SD of 0.89 indicates moderate agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of these facilitators in job acquisition.

Provision of Vocational and Computer Trainings

About 50% of respondents with visual impairments in Pakistan received vocational and computer training. However, the remaining 50% did not receive such training which indicates a significant gap in access. The M score of 1.50 with a SD of 0.50 suggests moderate agreement among respondents on the availability of these training programs.

Availability of Orientation and Mobility Trainings

About 70% of persons with visual impairment (PWVI) in Pakistan received orientation and mobility (O&M) training. However, 30% of respondents did not receive O&M training. The M score of 1.70 with a SD of 0.46 indicates moderate agreement among respondents on the availability of O&M training.

Support Factors in Obtaining Current Job

- **Education** was cited by 20% of respondents to emphasize its role in equipping PWVI with essential skills for the job market.
- **Positive societal attitudes** contributed to job acquisition for 24.3% of respondents.
- Additionally, 26.4% received assistance from **relatives or friends**.

- Furthermore, 22.9% drew **inspiration from successful visually impaired individuals** who serve as role models in their career pursuits.

The *M* score of 2.81 with a *SD* of 1.31 indicates varied agreement among respondents.

Strategies to Overcome Barriers

- **Family support** emerged as the most significant factor, with 44.3% of respondents.
- **High moral values and determination** were cited by 24.3% of respondents.
- **Teachers** also played a supportive role for 17.1% of respondents.
- Additionally, 14.3% attributed their success to **having clear aims and aspirations**.

The *M* score of 2.91 with a *SD* of 1.13, indicates varied reliance on these strategies.

Suggestions for Seeking Employment

- Majority of the respondents (30.0%) emphasized on the provision of quality educational opportunities.
- About 27.1% respondents highlighted **Skill development programs**.
- **22.9% respondents stressed Independence**.
- **Focused education** is reported by 10.0% respondents.
- Both **Communication skills and vocational training courses** are suggested by 10.0% respondents.

The average score of 3.31, with a spread of 1.56, indicates that respondents had different views on the topic.

Discussion

The study findings provide valuable insights into employment among persons with visual impairments (PWVI) in Pakistan. It was found that preferences for reading methods vary among PWVI. This finding emphasizes the need for diverse accessible reading options to enhance inclusion and accessibility (Martiniello & Wittich, 2019). Inaccessibility is a continuous challenge for persons with special needs. These accessibility challenges (Cushley et al., 2023) highlight the necessity for improved infrastructure to support employment opportunities.

Equitable and quality employment opportunities are lacking for PWVI. In the study of Grech and Goodley (2011), there was revelation of varying employment rates and job distributions among PWVI align with global trends. Flexible work arrangements are crucial for inclusive practices. PWVI hold positions in provincial governments roles which reflects that policy influence on their employment opportunities and integration into the public sector (Ameri et al., 2018).

The results of this study show that job satisfaction levels are generally positive among PWVI but challenges are also persist due to the negative attitudes of employer (McDonnall et al., 2014) and discriminatory practices (Schur et al., 2013). Societal perceptions and barriers are major challenges for PWVI in employment (McDonnall, 2019). Labor force participation of PWVI is hindered by some persistent issues such as negative employer attitudes and accessibility barriers (Cushley et al., 2023).

Many PWVI reported minimal obstacles to job mobility which shows their adaptability and resilience in career transitions (Singal, 2010). Many PWVI feel they are not fully using their skills and are paid less than they should be based on their qualifications (Frank & Bellini, 2005). PWVI reported the access to training programs and government services reflecting the efforts to enhance skill development and vocational training opportunities (World Blind Union, 2019). However, there are still issues with people knowing about and getting the help they need from rehabilitation services (Vedeler, 2014). Negative employer attitudes, accessibility issues in the built environment, and varying policy impacts across different countries are persistent issues (Bengisu et al., 2008; Grech & Goodley, 2011; McDonnall, 2017; Schur et al., 2013).

Conclusion

The study reveals both good and tough parts of employment for people with visual impairments. Many are happy with their jobs and can get training, but they still deal with problems like how people see them, places that aren't easy to access, and not having enough suitable jobs. Fixing these things needs teamwork from leaders, bosses, and everyone else. If we work together, we can make places where people with visual impairments can do well at work and feel supported.

Recommendations

1. Persons with visual impairments should have access to vocational and computer training programs starting from primary school and continuing throughout their education.
2. Both public and private sector employers should promote inclusive hiring practices.
3. Workplace policies should include flexible accommodations and adaptive technologies to support persons with visual impairments.
4. Support networks and mentorship programs should be established to foster career development and resilience among persons with visual impairments.

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