

## PERCEIVED SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AMONG VISUALLY IMPAIRED TEENAGERS

By

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### *Abstract*

*This study was designed to measure the perception of visually impaired teenagers towards social acceptance. Objectives of the study included to assess the acceptance level amongst visually impaired teenagers and to find out the students' demographic variations of gender, age and grade in determining perceptions of social acceptance. A survey was conducted on a population of the visually impaired teenagers studying at special schools. A random sample of 100 visually impaired students including 50 male and 50 female respondents was collected from three special schools located at Rawalpindi and Islamabad. A questionnaire containing 26 items was used for data collection on five subscales/subcategories named as: Personal Acceptance, Acceptance of Abilities, Acceptance as a Courageous Person and Rejection of Competencies. Results revealed that 58% of the teenagers are experiencing rejection and 32% are experiencing mild acceptance whereas, only 20 % visually impaired perceived to be socially accepted. Students studying at 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> class possessed less academic acceptance as compared to the students studying at 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> grade. Similar to any other teen visually impaired teens also require social support in a form of acceptance; therefore, it is recommended that those who are concerned with visually impaired may show positive attitude while interacting with visually impaired teenagers.*

**Keywords:** Visually Impaired, Teenagers, Social Acceptance, Social Rejection

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## **Introduction**

Adolescence is an extremely complex period in one's life due to the adjustment that the teenagers have to make during this life period. Adolescence is marked with various changes; especially physical, social and emotional changes put adolescents' self-confidence in a vulnerable position. Societal acceptance plays a significant role in the development of self-confidence. Generally adolescents are prone to be dissatisfied with themselves due to which they critique on their personal characteristics and try to change the way they are. For ego identity adolescents pay great attention to how people view them (Slavin, 2000). Therefore, during adolescence along with parents other members of society become important for them. To feel a sense of belonging adolescents look towards society for acceptance, this acceptance consequently boosts their self confidence. Whereas, lack of social support can negatively affect the personality structure of the teenagers and consequently they can become short tempered, critical, fussy and low self esteemed (Myers, 2002). In other words social rejection can create a feeling of low confidence.

Visual impairment refers to all degrees of vision loss,, harm, injury, low vision. It relates to that visual condition which limits an individual's ability to successfully complete the activities of everyday life. Whereas, blindness is defined as having no more vision than light perception in both eyes and where corrective lenses would make no difference (British Dictionary). Legal blindness is at least 20/200 corrected vision in both eyes, or restricted field of vision of at least twenty (20) degrees. A person who has 20/70 to 20/200 visions, however, is also visually impaired (NFB, 1995; Massachusetts Association for The Blind, N.D).

Persons with visual impairment can be infants, toddlers, adolescents or adults; they may have different types of visual problems; such as inability to recognize the faraway objects; or difficulties in reading small words, etc. Such types of problems can be easily treated with glasses or lenses. But when more than one element of the eye or brain that are needed to process images become diseased or damaged, severe or total loss of vision can occur. In such cases, vision cannot be fully restored even with medical treatment, surgery, or corrective lenses (Groenveld 1993).

Visually impairment has lifelong implication for visually impaired persons due to its effect on their success. It is commonly observed that people with visual anomalies have limited opportunities for education and employment that keep them away from economic empowerment. Visually impaired people feel anxious because of thinking about how to cope with the problems of blindness. Moreover, visual impairment seem to evoke more awkwardness than more other disabilities because it is an apparent disability while walking visually impaired people use a cane, guide dog, sighted guide and use dark glasses. Moreover eyes are also playing an important role in society and social interaction and people generally feel uncomfortable to talk with people who are unable to establish eye contact. This feeling of worthlessness can diminish their self-esteem as well (Gelfand, Jenson & Drew, 1997).

Various negative social characteristics are traditionally attributed to teenagers with visual impairment including, unable to be productive, incompetent to manage their own affairs, at risk for self injury, inferior and socially immature. One reason of such perception might be communication with visually impaired people as while communicating they are unable to see the facial expression therefore; they miss those information which are helpful to figure out a situation and understanding (Jan, Freeman & Scott, 1977).

It is natural that when parents discover that they have a blind child, they are not only grief about the deficiency but they get shocked. They may react in different ways; they may accept the condition and provide a supportive environment to promote the independent skills or they may become frustrated. The visually impaired students' rundown in academic success because they ought social eradication experience due to non-availability of specialized teaching and learning facilities and methodologies (James & Gallagher, 1980). So, it can be said that acceptance is one of the challenges for visually impaired people. They need social support and physical help in completion of their daily tasks which may help them in accepting their disability. Attitude of society is the main difficulty in the development of persons with disabilities because society takes the person with visual impairment as a burden, dependent and an object of pity, so these attitudes impact negatively on their psychological well being. Due to social rejection some visually impaired individuals became indifferent by showing their disinterest towards activities and people around them. Some of them do not want to speak and play with peers; resultantly others may recognize them as self-conscious or stranger. Sometimes they are left alone by their peers or people around them (Conger, 1991).

Gailienė (2014) researched on the self-appraisal problems of visually impaired students studied in Lithuanian and stated that self-appraisal of the visually impaired is more often polarized than sighted (it is either groundlessly positive or too negative). It means that visually impaired have a certain place in the structure of their self-consciousness. If the self-appraisal process is concentrated on the handicap it acquires a lot of negative aspects then they visualize themselves as less important due to being handicapped, which curb their movement, potential and adjustment in society. If they ignore their disability in the process of self-appraisal then they imagine visual impairment is of almost no significance in their lives, but they lay down themselves under impracticable goals and conduct themselves as if they could see well and are pertinent to experience certain failures because of that. Studies on visual impairment (Beaty, 1992; Lopez-Justicia et al., 2001) proved that adolescents with visual impairments feel derisory due to their physical disability, lack of social acceptance and academic underachievement. Although studies also confirmed (Gronmo & Augestad, 2000) that psychological development of visually impaired adolescents were analogous to psychological social development of sighted adolescent. It was reported by Dodds et al., (1994) that person who loses his or her sight goes through widespread cognitive, emotional, behavioral and motivational adjustments (Dodds et al., 1994).

In developing countries majority of the population is besieged by poor quality living, condition of visually impaired population is worse if compared with rest of the population. As far as visually impaired students are concerned in Pakistan the Government has established Directorates at Federal and Provincial levels. Under these Directorates various schools and centers are working to cater the educational and vocational need of all children with special needs. In these schools and centres visually impaired students are enrolled and provided with them various incentives including free education, scholarships, free books, uniforms, lodging and transportation facilities. Despite of all these incentives often time's visually impaired students are not satisfied with the behavior of their family members, teachers, peers and other care givers. Some of them are also facing sever rejection due to unknown factors.

No doubt visually impaired students are not only part of our society but also part of our education system. They need acceptance at various levels including home, community, and educational institutions, so they may able to develop a confident and successful personality with assurance of successful future.

Literature review enables us to determine a few of the difficulties experienced by visually impaired people and importance of social acceptance for better adjustment and self esteem of visually impaired students. It is a fact that teenage is a period where social acceptance is important for all teenagers, but it is more important for visually impaired teenagers because they are extremely sensitive towards social acceptance therefore, present study was planned. The major purpose to the study was to weigh perception of visually impaired teenagers regarding social acceptance.

### **Objectives**

The study intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To measure the social acceptance among visually impaired teenagers.
2. To measure the affect of students' demographic variation of gender, age and grade in determining their perception about social acceptance.

### **Hypotheses**

- 1 Female visually impaired teenager experience more social acceptance than visually impaired male.
- 2 Elder visually impaired students experience more social acceptance than the younger visually impaired students.
- 3 Visually impaired students studying in elementary level experience less social acceptance as compared with visually impaired students studying in secondary level.

### **Method**

The present study aimed at measuring the phenomena of social acceptance among visually impaired teenagers. The nature of the study was descriptive; data was collected through a standardized questionnaire developed by Khurshid & Malik (2011) which was based on 26 items and five subscales. The data was collated through personal visits and personal tool administration on 100 visually impaired students who were contacted and briefed about the purpose of the study. The respondents were requested to fill in the questionnaire in one sitting.

### **Population**

The population of the study comprised of all visually impaired teenagers who are studying at Special Education Institutions located at Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

### **Sample**

A stratified random sample of 100 visually impaired (50 male and 50 female) was collected who were studying in public sector schools and center of special education named as, Government Al-Qandeel Secondary School of Special Education for Blind (Boys) Rawalpindi, Government School for the Blind (Girls) Rawalpindi and Al-Makhdoom Special Education Centre, Islamabad.

### **Research Instrument**

In this study for the measurement of perceived social acceptance, a standardized research questionnaire developed by Khurshid & Malik, (2011) was used, which contains 26

items and five subscales such as Academic Acceptance, Personal Acceptance, Acceptance of Ability, Acceptance as a Courageous Person and Rejection of Competencies. Five point rating scale containing response categories such as somewhat true, neither true nor false, somewhat false, extremely false and extremely true was used to rate each item.

### **Pilot Testing**

Pilot testing was carried out to determine the psychometric properties of research questionnaire on a sample of 20 visually impaired teenagers, collected data was analyzed by using statistical package of (SSPS) version 20. Reliability coefficients were calculated by split half method, by dividing test items in to into 2 parts, 13 items in each part. Reliability of part 1 was .86 and reliability of part 2 was .88, between the forms reliability was .84. Items total correlations were calculated in order to determine the construct validity of research questionnaire as shown below:

**Table 1**  
**Items-Total Correlations of Respondent Scores on Social Acceptance Questionnaire**  
**(N=20)**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Correlations</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Correlations</b>
<b>1</b>	1	<b>14</b>	.43
<b>2</b>	.8	<b>15</b>	.22
<b>3</b>	-.50	<b>16</b>	-.64
<b>4</b>	.40	<b>17</b>	-.18
<b>5</b>	.46	<b>18</b>	.64
<b>6</b>	-.35	<b>19</b>	.49
<b>7</b>	.81	<b>20</b>	.43
<b>8</b>	-.82	<b>21</b>	.37
<b>9</b>	-.47	<b>22</b>	.39
<b>10</b>	-.65	<b>23</b>	.11
<b>11</b>	-.70	<b>24</b>	-.1
<b>12</b>	.60	<b>25</b>	.62
<b>13</b>	.15	<b>26</b>	-.20

Table 1 describes the item total correlation of social acceptance of visually impaired teenagers. The correlation ranged from 1 to .81. Result revealed that items no 3, 6,8,9,10,11,16,17,24 and 26 have negative significant correlations with the social acceptance questionnaire, rest of the items have positive significant correlation.

### **Results**

After determining the psychometric properties social acceptance questionnaire it was administered to 100 male and female visually impaired teenagers, collected data was

analyzed by using SPSS 20.0 through appropriate statistical procedure such as percentile analysis, Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation. On the basis of the data analysis following results was drawn.

**Table 2**  
**Percentile Analysis of Respondents' Score on Social Acceptance Questionnaire (N=100)**

<b>Percentiles</b>	<b>Scores</b>
<b>5</b>	100.0
<b>10</b>	110.0
<b>15</b>	120.0
<b>20</b>	134.0
<b>25</b>	146.0
<b>30</b>	157.0
<b>35</b>	159.0
<b>40</b>	170.0
<b>45</b>	181.0
<b>50</b>	187.0
<b>55</b>	189.0
<b>60</b>	190.0
<b>65</b>	198.0
<b>70</b>	200.0
<b>75</b>	209.0
<b>80</b>	210.0
<b>85</b>	212.0
<b>90</b>	214.0
<b>95</b>	218.0

Table 2 shows the percentile ranks of social acceptance of the visually impaired teenagers. The percentile ranks were calculated in order to identify three levels of visually impaired teenagers; it included rejection, mild acceptance and acceptance experienced by visually impaired teens. The score of 146 falls on 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, illustrating social rejection. Score of 187 falls on 50<sup>th</sup> percentile characterizing mild social acceptance, whereas score of 209 falls on 75<sup>th</sup> percentile demonstrating social acceptance of visually impaired teens.

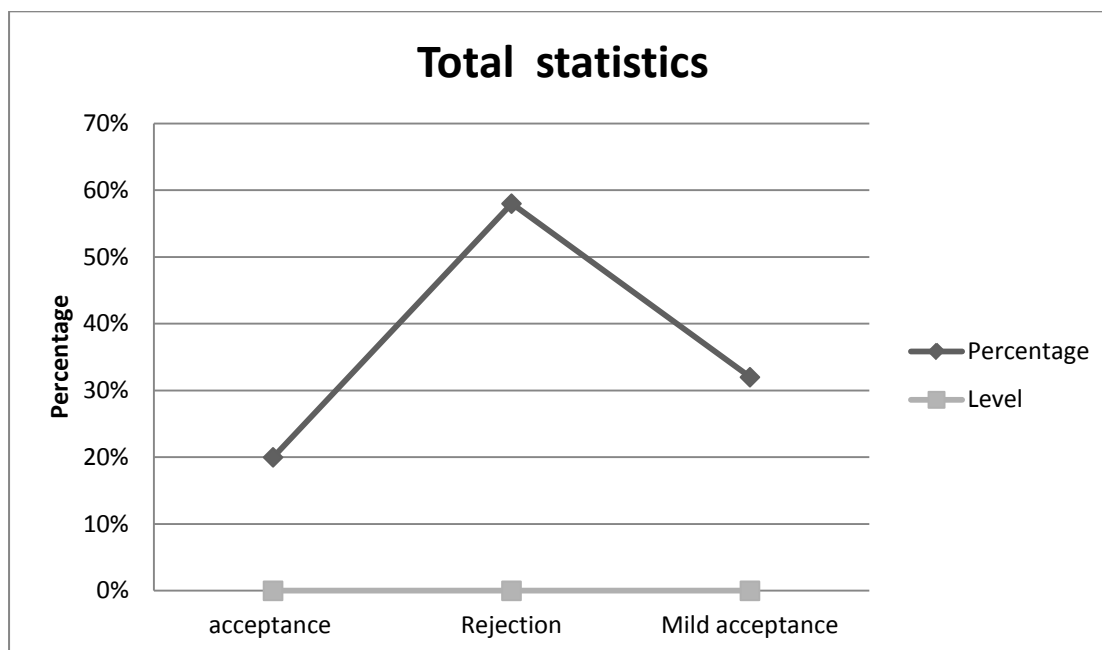
**Figure 1**

Figure 1 describes the three levels; rejection, mild acceptance and acceptance for visually impaired teenagers. Figure illustrates that 58% of the teenagers are experiencing rejection of while 32% are experiencing mild acceptance whereas, only 20 % of visually impaired students are feeling socially accepted.

**Table 3**  
**Gender Differences in the Visually Impaired Teenagers' Perceptions Social Acceptance Questionnaire (N=100)**

<b>Social Acceptance</b>	<b>Boys (N =50)</b>		<b>Girls (N =50)</b>		
<b>Subscales</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D</b>	<b>t</b>
Academic acceptance	8.1	1.2	13.0	1.2	
Personal acceptance	29.2	4.5	26.4	5.3	
Acceptance of abilities	18.4	3.5	18.2	3.2	
Acceptance as a person	14.4	2.1	14.2	2.1	
Rejection of competencies	22.6	3.1	28.5	7.1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>92.7</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>100.3</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>8.67</b>

Table 3 describes mean and SD of teenagers scores on social acceptance questionnaire. results reveled that overall visually impaired girls are experiencing higher social acceptance as compared to visually impaired boys. Subscales wise analyses inform further about social acceptance dimensions experienced by both genders that girls have higher score on academic acceptance and rejection of competencies than boys. Whereas, visually impaired boys are having more personal acceptance. Interestingly on subscale acceptance of abilities and acceptance as a courageous person no major difference was found in the score of both genders.

**Table 4**  
**Age Differences in the Visually Impaired Teenagers' Perceptions on Social Acceptance Questionnaire (N=100)**

	<b>13-15</b>		<b>15-17</b>		<b>18-19</b>	
	<b>Number 19</b>		<b>Number 44</b>		<b>Number 37</b>	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Academic acceptance	10.1	1.3	8.3	1.5	8.1	1.2
Personal acceptance	27.4	2.1	25.2	5.4	30.6	5.1
Acceptance of abilities	18.2	3.0	17.3	3.5	25.3	2.1
Acceptance as a Courageous person	14.5	2.1	14.5	2.5	14.6	1.4
Rejection of competencies	23.2	3.3	22.3	3.7	22.6	8.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>93.4</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>87.6</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>101.2</b>	<b>18.1</b>

Table 4 deals with age differences of respondents scores on social acceptance questionnaire. Results presented in table revealed that visually impaired students those who are elder (18-19) experienced more social acceptance than visually impaired teens of other age groups. On subsacle acceptance as a courages person students of all age groups experienced somewhat same scores. overall teens whose age ranged from 15-17 feel more rejected as compared to other groups of visually students.

**Table 5**  
**Age Differences in the Visually Impaired Teenagers**

Variable	Source of Variation	df	P
	Between the groups	3	
Age	Within groups	95	.887
	<b>Total</b>	98	

Table 5 is showing significant difference in the score of visually impaired students due to variation in their ages.

**Table 6**  
**Grade Differences in the Visually Impaired Teenagers' Perceptions Social Acceptance Questionnaire (N=100)**

GRADE	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> (N=50)		9 <sup>th</sup> - 10 <sup>th</sup> ( N=50)		<i>t</i>
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Academic acceptance	7.4	1.3	8.4	1.4	
Personal acceptance	23.1	4.3	27.2	6.3	
Acceptance of abilities	16.2	3.1	18.1	2.7	
Acceptance as a Courageous person	16.1	2.6	20.2	1.6	
Rejection of competencies	21.4	3.4	24.5	1.5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>84.2</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>98.4</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>7.9</b>

Table 6 presents differences in the perception of social acceptance experienced by teenagers studying at various grades (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>) and (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>). Results revealed that overall students those are studying at 6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> class have less academic acceptance. Students studying at 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> grade possessed higher personal acceptance and their abilities are more acknowledged by others. Teen hold more acceptance of ability. Moreover, these students are acknowledged by others as courageous grade felt them rejected as compared to the students studying at 6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> graders.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Results revealed that visually impaired students whose age ranged from 18-19 years experienced more social acceptance than visually impaired teens of other age groups. Overall teens whose age ranged from 15-17 years feel more rejected as compared to other groups of visually students.

Grade wise difference in the responses revealed that students those were studying at 6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> class have less academic acceptance. Students studying at 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> grade possessed higher personal acceptance and their abilities are acknowledged by others. Gender wise difference revealed that visually impaired girls are experienced higher social acceptance as compared to visually impaired boys.

Overall result revealed that 58% of the teenagers were experiencing rejection of while 32% are experiencing mild acceptance whereas, only 20 % visually impaired perceived to have social acceptance.

Visually impaired population is as diverse as the general population; visually impaired people are not only musicians like Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles, nor broom makers in a factory. They are judges, lawyers, accountants, secretaries, librarians, educators, physicians, social workers, and a host of other professions (American Foundation for the Blind, 1997). It is general observation that people with visual impairment experienced negative attitudes by the people who are not disabled. Negative perceptions, prejudices and attitudes are some of the factors that cause rejection while dealing with visually impaired. This rejection affects the type of education and rehabilitation blind people receive.

In a study, entitled parents and the playground: a study of attitudes towards children and young people with sight loss, it has been reported that 43% of children with a vision impairment have experienced bullying at school because of their sight loss and 86% have found themselves excluded from activities by their peers. It was also observed that verbal abuse, being ignored and in some cases even physical provocation have left many children feeling anxious, withdrawn and depressed (Blind child in UK, 2014).

If we look at the mental state of visually impaired we can feel that for visually impaired there is a high probability of being depressed, friendless and growing up unable to work due to their disability. If society ensures acceptance then visually impaired would be led towards better adjustment.

## **Recommendations**

The Following are some recommendations to cope with the difficulties experienced by visually impaired students and promote social acceptance among the people and visually impaired teenagers.

- 1 Education has a prime importance for all so it also has a significant importance for visually impaired people, here it is expected that special education institutions may provide all required facilities and incentives to the visually impaired students without humiliating their self respect.
- 2 In educational institutions the role of teachers is imperative to impart learning in an efficient manner, in the context of special education teachers must have complete knowledge of the psychology of individual difference and clear cut understanding of special education so they can treat their students with love and acceptance. There should be mutual respects and friendly relationship among the students and teacher. Teachers should focus on developing self esteem in visually impaired teens through recognition of their abilities.
- 3 Visually impaired students studying at 6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> class should be provided more academic acceptance and higher personal acceptance and their abilities should

be acknowledged by other more and they also embrace more acceptance of ability. Teens studying at secondary section may also need same encouragement.

- 4 At preset visually impaired boys perceive themselves as to be more rejected than girls therefore, it is recommended that parents teachers and all other those are dealing with visually impaired boys may show positive attitude and do conscious efforts for devising strategy of acceptance while dealing with them.
- 5 Like other teenagers the visually impaired also require social support at every step of their life, therefore it is recommended that those who are concerned with visually impaired may show flexibility in their dealing. In daily life maybe normal fellows ought to not avoid visually impaired people because this avoidance may lead them towards low self esteem and social isolation.

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