

FACTORS INFLUENCING SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT FOR MEN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

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Abstract *This study investigated experiences of men with visual impairment in Indonesia as they responded to challenges in employment. **Method:** The study was qualitative, using in-depth interviews. The participants were employed men with visual impairment and married to a sighted woman, selected using snowball sampling. The visual impairment was acquired before employment and marriage, but no specific exclusion criteria for the visual impairment. Thirty-nine participants were interviewed for one hour each in their native language of Bahasa Indonesia using semi-structured questions. The interviews were transcribed, translated, and analysed. **Results:** Five factors and seventeen sub factors were found: institutional settings, family support, social support, personal traits, and employment arrangements. **Discussion:** The study found that there are factors that play a positive role for some participants, but a negative role for others. Improvement in certain factors is needed in order to develop better employment for people with visual impairment in Indonesia. Limitations of this study were: the number of participants, the locations of study, and the criteria of visual impairment. **Implications for Practitioners:** Improving the education system, optimal implementation of the employment quota system, developing personal traits, and improving awareness to trigger better family and social network support, would be beneficial for future employment of people with visual impairment.*

Keywords: employment, visual impairment, in-depth interview

1. Introduction

In developing countries such as Indonesia, people living with disabilities receive very minimal attention. Despite the fact that Indonesia has signed and ratified The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and is in the process of amending the latest Act on People with Impairments (Act No. 4/1997), the implementation of the Act and convention itself has not been optimal (Markus, 2005, in Irwanto, Kasim, Fransiska, Lusli, & Siradj, 2010). One major problem is limited opportunities for people with disabilities to attain a good quality of life.

This study focuses on people with visual impairment in Indonesia. There is a body of research on people with visual impairment obtaining employment, but there has not been any research on successful people with visual

impairment. According to data presented by The Ministry of Social Affairs of Indonesia and Surveyor Indonesia (2008), three quarters of the population of people with visual impairments do not work. The situation of being unemployed negatively influences their quality of life, including personal life (Leonard, 2000, in La Grow & Daye, 2005). In Indonesia, marriage is considered to be the final goal of a personal relationship between a man and a woman. A related concern in this cultural context is an expectation that in a family a man (as a husband and a father) is the primary income earner. The situation of being unemployed creates difficulties for men with visual impairment in Indonesia to be able to get married. Thus, it is important to investigate the strategies adopted by employed married men with visual impairment in Indonesia to overcome challenges encountered in employment in order to attain a good quality of life.

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2. Literature Review

Employment opportunities for people with visual impairment in Indonesia are very limited. The underlying factors reported include the reluctance of government offices to hire people with visual impairment due to their disability, limited options of rehabilitations program conducted by the government, and inadequate preparation to compete with the general population in obtaining employment or establishing business (Dwiyana, 2013; Irwanto et al., 2010; Nurkolis, 2002 in Utami, 2010; Wyata Guna, 2014).

There is a body of research on factors predicting future employment of people with visual impairment. However, none is research on successful people with visual impairment, particularly in Indonesia. A number of studies noted that people with visual impairment had more difficulties obtaining employment compared to the general population (Capella-McDonnall, 2005; Jacko, Cobo, Cobo, Fleming, & Moore, 2010; Jang, Yun-Tung, Meng-Hsiu, & Shih, 2013; McDonnall, 2010, 2011; Shaw, Gold & Wolffe, 2007). Transportation issues and negative attitudes toward visual impairment are some of the difficulties encountered (Crudden, Sansing & Butler, 2005). Strategies suggested by Crudden et al. (2005) to overcome barriers include: increasing societal awareness of the importance of being employed and the capability of people with visual impairment, maintaining networks, accessible transportation system, and assistive technology.

The underlying factors for employment of people with visual impairment identified in prior research are: a higher level of education, an employment quota system, personal traits, and good social support of family and/or social networks (Capella-McDonnall, 2005; Cimarolli & Wang, 2006; Crudden, 2002; Kef & Dekovic, 2004; Kef, Hox, & Habekoth, 2000; Kirchner, Schmeidler & Todorov, 1999; McDonnall, 2010; McDonnall & Crudden, 2009; Roy, Dimigen & Taylor, 1998). In a study conducted by McDonnall and Crudden (2009), academic competence was one of the factors affecting successful employment of youths with visual impairments in the United States. One type of education for youth with visual impairment in Indonesia is inclusive

education. There is a paucity of literature about the effectiveness of inclusive education and it is inconsistent. Nevertheless, it is believed that even though students with visual impairment might find difficulties in forming relationships with their peers in an inclusive school setting, studying in an integrated environment provides a rich learning opportunity for their social skills that will be useful for the future (Cambra & Silvestre, 2003; Nakken and Pill, 2002, in Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009).

A study by Jang et al. (2013) on predictors of employment outcomes for people with visual impairment in Taiwan found that the employment quota system implemented in Taiwan worked effectively in promoting employment for this specific group. Indonesia has also established legislation on an employment quota system (State Secretary, 1998) which should have improved the employment opportunities for people with visual impairment.

Family support is also one of the factors that influence the employment of people with visual impairment (McDonnall, 2010; Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2013; Steinberg 2011, cited in Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2013). It is believed that parental support plays an important role in the transition process of people with visual impairment from childhood to adult. Other types of significant support for people with visual impairment may be obtained from friends/peers, teachers, and community/neighbours (Kef & Dekovic, 2004; Kef et al., 2000). Peer and teacher support is critical for youth with visual impairment particularly when they are no longer living with their parents, such as in dormitories or rehabilitation centres.

Other contributing factors identified as affecting the transition process of youth with visual impairment are self determination and self esteem (McDonnal & Crudden, 2009). Having self determination and self esteem provides youth with visual impairment with more control over their lives as they get to choose what it is they want, particularly when they become adults, which helps them to interact with others, to make decisions, and to perform to their potential.

Studies have also reported that having a large social network provides more opportunities for people with visual impairment particularly in obtaining a job (Luecking, Fabian & Tilson, 2004, cited in McDonnall, 2011; Nagle, 2001; Wolffe, Ajuwon & Kelly, 2013). The term social network refers to networks with colleagues, acquaintances, or connections built by participants through work experiences or volunteering that could be useful when they look for employment (McDonnall, 2011). Wolffe et al. (2013) conducted a study on the perceptions of employed people with visual impairment in Nigeria about challenges and supporting factors for employment. A factor enabling participants to obtain and maintain employment was networks that related to the types of employment desired.

Vocational rehabilitation creates opportunities for people with visual impairment to obtain employment (Capella –McDonnall, 2005; Lee & Park, 2008; Wolffe, Roessler & Schriener, 1992 in Goertz, Lierop, Houkes, & Nijhuis, 2010). Capella-McDonnall (2005) reported that people with visual impairment who complete vocational rehabilitation programs and obtain a certificate or a degree have better opportunities to gain employment compared to those who undertake vocational training but do not obtain a certificate or a degree, or to those who do not participate in vocational rehabilitation programs.

3. Methodology

This study is qualitative, using in-depth interviews as the method of collecting data, enabling the participants to explore and present their personal accounts to the researcher without pressure. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants opportunities to talk openly about the topic. The order of the guiding questions was adjusted according to the participants' responses (Bryman, 2001, in Rowley, 2012; Travers, 2010). This study was undertaken with the ethics approval of the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC) of Flinders University Project No. 6303.

The participants were recruited from personal contacts of the researcher using snow-ball sampling (Neuman, 2003). The first contact

made to the participants was using a direct approach via email and telephone. Once they agreed to participate, the interview schedule was arranged. The completed consent form was collected at the interview. The participants are 39 people from 20 couples with only one participant's spouse preferring not to participate. Five participants were living in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. The other fifteen participants were living in Bandung, one of major cities in Indonesia that is located about three hours drive from Jakarta. Bandung is the city where a rehabilitation centre for people with visual impairment was first established by an eye specialist from The Netherlands, Ch. A. Westhoff, in 1901 (Wyata Guna, 2014).

The age-range of the participants was 25 to 60 years, with the majority in their early thirties to late forties. Out of twenty participants, thirteen were totally blind, six had low vision, and one had mild vision loss. The participant with mild vision loss was previously totally blind due to cataracts, but underwent surgery twice before becoming employed and married. The percentage of the participants in this study who have university qualifications was 75% which is significantly higher than that recorded for the general population who have university qualifications in Indonesia, which is around 15% (BPS, 2012). This substantial difference shows that the participants in this study are among the small number of people in Indonesia who have attained a higher level of educational qualifications.

Data were collected through face to face interviews. The location of the interview was adjusted to the preferences of the participants. During the interview, some participants were accompanied by their spouse, while some couples took turns at being interviewed individually. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, which is the researcher's native language, and were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Afterwards, the transcription was translated into English by a professional translator. The interview data were analysed to infer codes and categories using thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, cited in Bowen, 2009).

The research questions listed below outline the key areas the study was focusing on and from which the interview questions were derived.

1. How do men with visual impairment in Indonesia negotiate the challenges they encounter in the area of employment?
2. How do rehabilitation programs carried out by the government play a role in facilitating employment?

4. Findings

Based on the interview data about lived experience, certain factors have been identified. There are factors that play a positive role for some participants, but a negative role for others. The factors found are shown in Figure 1.

1. *Institutional setting*. Three subcategories: inclusive schools, special schools, and vocational rehabilitation.

Due to the limited number of special schools in the past, some participants experienced studying in an inclusive school before any legislation on inclusive schools was enacted. They found advantages such as developing mechanisms to cope with society’s attitudes and developing competitiveness and self confidence which were beneficial for their future. This is in accordance with Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) who stated that there were positive effects of inclusive education for students living with disabilities.

Several participants found special schools contributed important aspects to their academic background. The special senior high school for students with visual impairment provided music as a major, where a regular school provided music as an additional subject. The music skills opened opportunities for them to obtain employment in the future. Special schools also provided basic knowledge for students with visual impairment such as basic

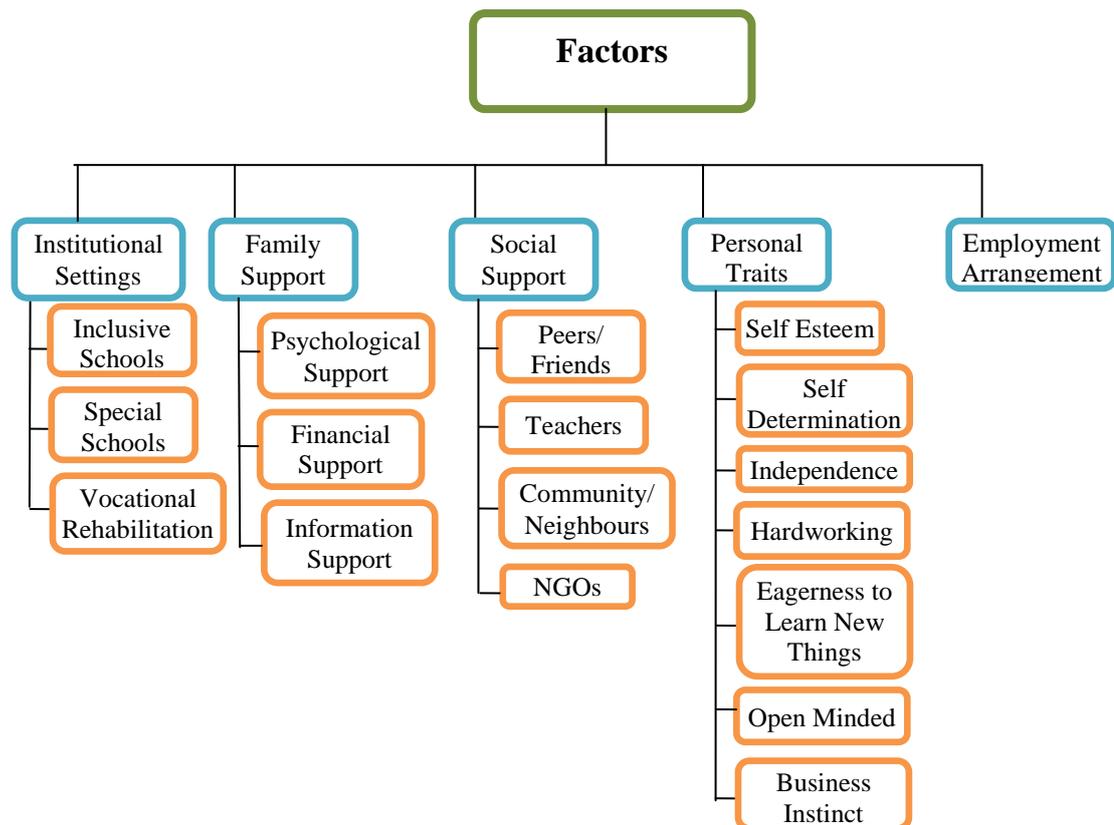


Figure 1 Factors Influencing Men with Visual Impairment in Indonesia Meeting Challenges in Employment

science, and writing and reading Braille, which is still important particularly in developing countries where having a computer with a screen reader is a luxury.

Vocational rehabilitation is conducted by The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA). The programs undertaken by the participants were massage skills, Shiatsu skills, and music. These skills provided them with the opportunity to obtain future employment. However, the institutional setting in which the consumers live within the centre, had a profound negative effect on one of the participants, that is, creating the feeling of being labelled.

2. *Family support.* Three subcategories: psychological support, financial support, and information support.

The positive psychological support acquired by the participants opened their way to education and employment despite their disabilities. Financial support offered opportunities to several participants to start their own businesses. In addition, the information support provided them with more options on education and employment. However, several participants experienced limiting factors from parents such as over protectiveness or doubt toward their potential, as also found by Glover-Graf (2012), which created a significant effect on the participants such as feeling ashamed of their visual impairment despite their achievements.

3. *Social support.* Four subcategories: support from peers/friends, support from teachers, support from community/neighbours, support from non-government organizations.

Some friends of the participants were the people who introduced them to the area they are currently working in or provided them with financial support when they were young. Meanwhile, support from teachers could be in the form of information or encouragement during their teenage years, as also found previously by Pinqart and Pfeiffer (2013). One participant obtained advocacy from his teacher. Support from the community/neighbours was found to offer

opportunities for the participants to have a better quality of life in the future. Several participants succeeded in building and maintaining reciprocal relationships with the community in which the participants also had the opportunity to make a contribution. Support from non-government organizations provided various opportunities for the participants including eye surgery, scholarships, and training skills.

4. *Personal traits.* Seven subcategories: self esteem, self determination, independence (financial and mobility), hardworking, eagerness to learn new things, open minded, and business instinct.

Relevant to McDonnall and Crudden (2009), self esteem helped the participants to establish relationships not only with peers but also with other people, while self determination enabled the participants to acknowledge their choices. Some participants have been independent in supporting themselves with relation to tuition fees or other needs; they also have been working before leaving school, either as masseurs or as musicians. Hardworking is also one of the traits that enabled the participants to answer the challenges they encountered both in education and in employment, such as accessing reading materials and obtaining additional jobs. Some others showed eagerness to learn new things which opened numerous opportunities for them in both employment and social networks. Being open-minded helped one participant to discover another type of employment, that is car sales, which might not have been thought of by other people with visual impairment. Some participants established private businesses which they consider enabled them to attain a better quality of life. Unfortunately, according to them, not many people with visual impairment have the will and persistence to run a business.

5. *Employment arrangements.*

In Indonesia, an employment quota system has been established to improve the welfare of people with disabilities (State Secretary, 1998). This system creates a quota for people with disabilities to work

in any company that employs at least 100 employees. However, the system has not been implemented effectively. The difficulties in obtaining a job occur not only in the private sector, but also in the public sector. In many cases, people with visual impairment also encounter constraints to work in government agencies (Irwanto et al., 2010). In this study, three participants obtained employment from the quota employment system, and one participant obtained employment because the employer used the principle of Diversity and Inclusion. Several participants stated that sometimes employment arrangements did not mean that the person was placed based on their potential, but based on assumptions of where a person with a certain type of impairment was usually placed, and that there were also differences in practice at different locations.

5. Discussion and Implications

This study found five factors influencing men with visual impairment in Indonesia when answering the challenges encountered in gaining and maintaining employment. Some participants went to inclusive schools, some to special schools, and some went to vocational rehabilitation. Inclusive schools are considered to be able to provide experience for people with visual impairment to meet and socialize with the general population, and to strengthen their characters, as also found by Nakken and Pill (2002, in Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009) and Cambra and Silvestre (2003). However, it was found that currently inclusive schools have not been able to match special schools in providing certain skills, such as music, and suitable learning resources and methods. Thus, there has to be improvement in the quality of inclusive schools, including the curriculum, the learning methods and resources, and also the standard practice of inclusive schools in every area which would best facilitate participation of students with visual impairment. As long as inclusive schools are unable to meet the needs of students with visual impairment, special schools are important as they build certain skills useful for their future employment. Special schools are also critical particularly for students with visual impairment who live in

disadvantaged or rural areas where access to inclusive schools is very limited, or for students with visual impairment who lack support from their family and the only chance for education is to study in special schools. Vocational rehabilitation provides skills for participants to be employed, but improvement in the variety and the quality of the programs is necessary, with the inclusion of specific skills such as management and social skills, and better workforce distribution which would increase employment opportunities.

Living inside a rehabilitation centre established by the government appears to be promoting the assumption that the consumers are burdens for society, as also stated by Groce (1999); hence, it escalates the negative attitudes toward them. In addition, living inside a rehabilitation centre also excludes the consumers from mainstream society (Chen, Brodwin, Cardoso, Chan, 2002). It results in the consumers not having the opportunity to maintain reciprocal interaction with society, and puts them in a comfort-zone which limits their experiences of life amongst the general population. Advocacy to minimise negative attitudes toward people with visual impairment in society is important, so that people with visual impairment who live in a rehabilitation centre will not need to feel labelled. In addition, providing experience of living amongst the general population would assist people with visual impairment to develop coping mechanisms.

Family support was a factor that enabled participants to attain a good quality of life. With adequate positive family support, people with visual impairment would be able to build self-esteem and personal empowerment in pursuing their desires; McDonall (2010) found that parental support has a positive relationship with future employment. Negative family support, particularly psychological, influences individuals to feel more negative about themselves and their chances of employment. This indicates how societal attitudes have a profound effect on the life of people with visual impairment. It is important for parents to provide as positive an environment as possible for their children with visual impairment.

Social support was found to have positive effects towards people with visual impairment,

particularly in increasing the opportunity of employment. Every type of available support was responsible in some way for enabling the participants to overcome the challenges they encountered. Positive support provided for students living with visual impairment by teachers and peers/friends helped them to handle challenges. As people with visual impairment also lived within the community, it cannot be denied that support from the community provided positive effects for the participants. Accounts from the participants show that it was possible for people with visual impairment to live among the general population. Mutual support is a key element of human interaction and community participation. The presence of a person with visual impairment in a community does not only urge the general population to assist the person but also to maintain relationships or even foster respect toward them. Non-government organizations are also one of the enabling factors for people with visual impairment to be able to obtain a good quality of life through the services and facilities provided. It is important to create inclusive and accessible environments for people with visual impairment which would provide positive support for them.

Personal traits considered to be important for future employment identified in this study are self esteem, self determination, independence, hardworking, eagerness to learn new things, an open mind, and a business instinct. Some participants suggested that self-esteem helped them to socialize and to maintain relationships with others, particularly with people without disabilities. In addition, by having self determination, the participants had more control over their lives which sometimes did not happen for many people living with disabilities due to the stigma attached to their disability. Independence of the participants built their characters and showed their desire to achieve a better quality of life. Independence is one of the positive characteristics that could expose people with visual impairment to new opportunities for employment. The participants have also been hardworking in the area of education and employment. Due to visual barriers, the participants had to pass several steps before actually being able to read any materials. They also have started to work while they were still students due to financial constraints. Some

participants reported that they had other businesses apart from their main job. By getting used to working hard at earlier stages, people with visual impairment would find it less difficult to work hard when they were adults. Developing this trait as part of the vocational rehabilitation program could be beneficial because it would build the frame of mind of people with visual impairment to consider business as a type of employment.

In terms of employment arrangements, despite the very minimal number of participants who gain benefit from the employment quota system, most of the participants believed that it was important to keep implementing and improving the employment quota system as it will be useful for many people with visual impairment. Studies of the implementation of an employment quota system in certain developing countries showed significant benefits for people with visual impairment (Wang, 2011; Jang et al., 2013). By implementing the employment quota system, people with visual impairment should no longer be expected to work only in massage and music, but also in many other areas, such as being a telemarketing officer (Participant 7), a lawyer (Participant 15), and a car seller (Participant 3). It is important to arrange an employment quota for people with visual impairment, or other disability, that is based not only on where they were usually placed or on their impairment, but based on their personal capacity and interests. In other words, the government should keep implementing and improving the employment quota system which would be able to promote the opportunities for people with visual impairment to obtain employment and a good quality of life.

6. Limitations

There were four limitations identified as potentially impacting the quality and accessibility of the data for this study. The limitations are listed and the recommendations are included in relation to each.

1. A limited numbers of participants who do not represent the whole group of people with visual impairment in Indonesia. Additional data could be gathered and different results might be available if there were more participants.

2. The location of the study which only covered two major cities in Indonesia, Jakarta and Bandung. Indonesia is a very large country, therefore studies undertaken in minor cities or rural areas might provide different sets of data and different results from participants' accounts.
3. The inclusion of the participants with visual impairment in general may have been a limitation. Studies which involve only subjects who have low vision or subjects who are totally blind might provide different results.
4. All the participants were married, which is the norm for employed men in Indonesia. Whether this is different for unemployed men with disabilities was not within this study's scope. The study did not investigate in what ways marriage was a specific influence on the participants' employment.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored factors that men with visual impairment in Indonesia found important when meeting the challenges they encountered in employment. The literature reviewed suggested certain factors relevant for employment of people with visual impairment: employment arrangements, education, family supports, social supports, personal traits, social networks, and vocational rehabilitation. Through the accounts of the participants this study's findings related to the factors reported in literature.

It can be inferred that improvement in the quality of life of people with visual impairment will not be optimal without the involvement of all parties: the government, the private sector, society, and people with visual impairment themselves. It is important to involve every party in answering the challenges encountered by people with visual impairment in employment. Improvement of the employment quota system and rehabilitation programs, including special schools, inclusive schools, and vocational rehabilitation, could create better employment opportunities. The participants succeeded in meeting the challenges encountered in obtaining employment due to institutional settings (inclusive schools, special schools, and vocational rehabilitation), family

support (psychological, financial, and information supports), social supports (from peers/friends, teachers, community/neighbours, and non-government organizations), personal traits (self esteem, self determination, independence, hardworking, eagerness to learn new things, and business instinct), and employment arrangements.

The outcomes of this research may be useful for the government and disability organizations in establishing or further developing effective rehabilitation programs for people with visual impairment. Overall findings were consistent with similar studies overseas and presented additional information through new themes and categories that were found, providing considerations for future research and practice. Further research is recommended to enable more evidence to be gathered about strategies people with visual impairment find helpful to overcome the challenges encountered in the areas of employment.

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