



PERSONAL FACTORS OF PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTEXT OF VISION IMPAIRMENT - BRIEF

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Abstract

We have proposed in this study an exploratory analysis of some potential factors of professional participation in a group of 80 participants with impaired sight, through a set of socio-demographic, disability related variables and aspects of psychological functioning. In this regard, we explored differences by employment status (occupied or not) and associations with time spent with work (measured in hours per week), focusing on: gender of participants, their age, educational level, residual vision level, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, self-perceived independence, social support level, satisfaction with involvement in social activities, level of busyness self-appreciation, financial level and self-perceived health. The present paper summarizes a study that makes part of a larger work regarding participation in the context of vision impairment and has been previously published in an extensive manner at national level.

Keywords: participation; vision impairment; employment; psychological functioning

Introduction

Among the factors mentioned and analyzed in the literature as having an influence on the employment of persons with disabilities are the type, severity, age of acquisition of disability, associated health problems, education

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and vocational training of the person, use of assistive technologies, socio-educational level of the family, receipt of support services, level of psychological functioning, as well as community and family attitudes toward participation of the individual. Specific difficulties concerning employment include the poor possibilities in the choice of a suitable profession, waiving certain social benefits for an income that may not be permanent, but also the reduced opening of employers for diversity in the workplace and for creating the necessary adaptations.

In the context of vision impairment, according to the literature in the field, the most often identified predictors of employment of visually impaired people include the educational level, age, compensatory skills and visual status.

Method

As well as the entire study, its methodological details have been previously presented in an extensive manner in Răcășan (2015, pp. 40-78). For the present paper, we will only mention some brief considerations.

We have proposed in this study an exploratory analysis of some potential factors of professional participation in a group of 80 participants with impaired sight, through a set of socio-demographic, disability related variables and aspects of psychological functioning. In this regard, we explored differences by employment status (occupied or not) and associations with time spent with work (measured in hours per week), focusing on: gender of participants, their age, educational level, residual vision level, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, self-perceived independence, social support level, satisfaction with involvement in social activities, level of busyness self-appreciation, financial level and self-perceived health.

Participants

The sample consisted of 80 Romanian participants (38 women, 42 men) between 21 and 62 years of age, with a visual acuity of less than 0.3, of which 34 were unemployed (19 women, 15 men) and 46 were employed (19 women, 27 men). A detailed presentation of the group of participants in terms of socio-demographic and disability related characteristics, some aspects of personal autonomy and psychological functioning and a brief analysis of the 12 cases

that may be considered refusals of participation in our study is available in Răcășan (2015, pp. 42-61).

Instruments

The questionnaire for collecting socio-demographic and disability related data includes 35 questions related to gender, age, residence, nationality, religion, level of education, specialization and training, occupation, marital status, duration of the couple relationship, children, persons living with, self-appreciated financial level, significant health problems and self-perceived health, degree of vision impairments, diagnosis, visual acuity, visual field, age of acquisition of impairment and its progressive nature, distance in centimeters (or meters) of a person recognition and of visually counting fingers, duration of studies in a specialized school, used and desired assistive technologies, extent to which vision can be used in everyday life, level of Braille system and personal computer use, self-perceived level of independence and of social support.

The Participation Measurement Questionnaire (PMQ) that we developed contains a set of 29 items with numerical answer on ratio scale, which measures objective participation in various activities of everyday life in the areas productivity, personal relationships, community and out of the house. The instrument is suitable for the special population in target and it contains common elements with other internationally proposed instruments designed to measure the same construct, with some original elements added.

The Participation Assessment with Recombined Tools-Objective - 17 (PART-O-17) (Bogner et al., 2011)

Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). Romanian version of the questionnaire has 21 items (Perțe, 2013) and received the acronym DASS-21R. Adaptation and standardization on Romanian population has been made by Perțe and Albu in 2011.

General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Romanian version was performed by Băban, Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1996), available on the website <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de>.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965). Romanian version of the scale was adapted by Moldovan (2007).

Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Adaptation and validation of the scale on the Romanian

population was carried out initially by Marian (2007) and subsequently by Stevens et al. (2012).

Procedure

Data were collected from February to March 2015, through two alternative means: telephone interviews carried out in one or two conversations with each participant (added to the first introductory conversation) and by filling out an online form by the participants, with telephone interview verification and completion of the protocols.

Results and discussion

According to official statistics, employment participation rate in visually impaired people is among the lowest compared to other disability groups in Romania, about 3% (in 2009 it was lower than 3%, according to ANPH statistics, cited in MMFPS, 2013). Less is known about the amount of time spent with paid work by active visually impaired people, our data showing very similar data to the general Romanian population (we obtained more than 1 hour/ week, compared to the relevant results extracted from Time Use Survey in Romania, published in 2013 by the National Institute of Statistics [INS]).

Participation in paid work activities in our sample was similar for men and women regarding time spent working, while the work participation rates showed a difference between genders of 17,4%, favoring men. Similar gender differences in employment status and chances have been also found in other disability groups (Achterberg, Wind, de Boer, & Frings-Dresen, 2009, pp. 130-131) and also in the general Romanian population, with 25-64 aged men indicating a 19.9% higher participation rate than women (INS, 2013, p. 169).

Differences regarding working hours as a function of educational level in our sample were non-significant, as tested with Kruskal Wallis Test ($p_{\text{Monte Carlo}}=.534$). If, however, we analyzed mean ranks of hours spent working depending on the educational level, we could observe they were considerably reduced in the case of vocational ($mr=32,57$) and high school ($mr=36,13$) graduates as compared to post-secondary school ($mr=44,68$), faculty ($mr=42,39$) and post-graduate ($mr=48,20$) graduates.

Related to the occupational status, we could notice that vocational school and high school graduates were similarly distributed in relation to employment status, respectively unemployed, while post-secondary school graduates were mostly employed (70,59%), as the faculty graduates (59,26%) and the post-graduates (60%). Thus, although differences as regards the occupational status are statistically insignificant in relation to the educational level, we could affirm that the rates of employment tend to be better in graduates of higher levels than high school.

Educational level has been frequently associated with occupational status in different disability groups. In a meta-analytical study, Achterberg, Wind, de Boer and Frings-Dresen (2009) concluded that it is an important predictor of employment. In groups with vision impairment, Leonard, D'Allura and Horowitz (1999, *cited in* Bell & Mino, 2013) found significant associations of employment with higher educational level and also with inclusive education, while Cavenaugh, Giesen and Steinman (2006) concluded that educational level, along with age, associated disability and race were strong predictors of employment.

Regarding impairment severity, in our sample 60% of the participants with total blindness were active, while 50% of those with practical blindness and 61% of those with low vision, with no significant differences by occupational status, as well as regarding time spent working (clustered). Results of previous studies are contradictory towards the influence of visual status or residual vision level on work participation. Leonard et al. (1999, *cited in* Bell & Mino, 2013) reported that this factor had a strong impact on income, blind people in his study having better chances of occupying higher positions compared to low vision ones. On the other hand, Darenbourg (2013) also found visual impairment severity as a significant predictor of employment outcomes, but in the favor of those with low vision.

We also found differences regarding some aspects of psychological functioning according to the occupational status (table 1), such as the level of satisfaction with life ($Z=-1.885$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$), self-esteem ($Z=-1.739$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$) and general self-efficacy ($Z=-2.034$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$), which were higher in active participants. In contrast, the inactive ones had higher anxiety levels ($Z=-1.744$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$).

Table 1. Comparisons according to the occupational status regarding satisfaction with life, self-esteem, self-efficacy, depression, anxiety and stress levels

	Occupational status	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
Self-esteem score ($Z=-1.739$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$)	unoccupied	34	34,85	1185,00
	occupied	45	43,89	1975,00
Satisfaction with life score ($Z=-1.885$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$)	unoccupied	34	34,41	1170,00
	occupied	45	44,22	1990,00
Depression score	unoccupied	34	42,46	1443,50
	occupied	46	39,05	1796,50
Anxiety score ($Z=-1.744$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$)	unoccupied	34	45,74	1555,00
	occupied	46	36,63	1685,00
Stress score	unoccupied	34	42,16	1433,50
	occupied	46	39,27	1806,50
General self-efficacy score ($Z=-2.034$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$)	unoccupied	34	33,97	1155,00
	occupied	45	44,56	2005,00

Previous studies showed that employed, as compared to unemployed people tend to express higher anxiety and depression disorders prevalence, have higher rates of alcohol consumption, and lower self-esteem and quality of life levels (*apud* Chan, Strauser, Gervey, & Lee, 2010).

As expected, we also identified significant gender differences with respect to these aspects. Among active participants, women had significantly higher anxiety levels ($Z=-2.064$, $p<.05$), while among those inactive, women had significantly higher levels of both anxiety ($Z=-2.058$, $p<.05$) and depression ($Z=-2.354$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.01$).

Interestingly, our unemployed participants also spend considerably less time with domestic activities (mean ranks_{women}=31,47, _{men}=17,89 for active ones and _{women}=21,58, _{men}=12,33, $Z=-2.695$ for inactive participants, $p<.01$), perceiving themselves as more dependent ($Z=-2.167$, $p<.05$) and less healthy ($Z=-1.736$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$) as compared to active ones, have poorer abilities of using a computer ($Z=-1.689$, $p_{\text{exact}}<.05$), and tend to use assistive technologies less ($Z=-1.736$, $p_{\text{exact}}=.054$).

As Roșeanu, Marian, Tomulescu and Pusta (2008) concluded, people that are „oriented towards negative aspects of their life in the past and/or view their present in a fatalistic or hedonistic way”, „are most likely to display

frequent symptoms of depression, anxiety and/or somatization”, which explains why satisfaction with life also tends to be lower.

According to Marian (2013, p. 8) “depressive mood frequently appears in jobless persons in association to internal, stable and global negative explicative style (or attributional style)”. Even in the absence of a disability, learned helplessness can appear when a person loses his job, leading to „passivity and demoralisation, which will make it very difficult for the unemployed person to find a new job” (Marian, 2013, p. 8).

On the other hand, employed participants in our sample spend less time in leisure time activities (mostly solitary), particularly reading besides compulsory study ($Z=-2.765$, $p<.01$) and tend to have greater outdoor participation scores ($Z=-2.695$, $p=.055$). We also tested whether there were occupational status and gender differences in participation domains, and found gender differences in personal relations participation for active participants (mean ranks_{women}=18,82, _{men}=26,8 $Z=-1,986$, $p<.05$), but also regarding leisure time activities participation (mean ranks_{women}=17,32, _{men}=27,85, $Z=-2,630$, $p<.01$). We assume that these differences may be, at least in part, due to higher amount of time spent by women in household, childcare and others care activities, remaining thus significantly less available time for other types of activities.

Limits of the study

The main limits of the proposed study refer to a small number of participants and to the non-random sampling method chosen, although this could be considered adaptive taking into account that we refer to a very heterogeneous special population in terms of visual experience and useful residual vision. Increased heterogeneity is due to the diversity of visual diseases, often present in combination - which implies variable impairment of vision indicators - but also to the age of impairment requirement - with significant repercussions upon the level and fidelity of representations. As regards the small number of participants, it imposes certain limits in the possibilities of data analysis and interpretation, but we preferred assuming them in favour of collecting quality data and ensuring its accuracy as much as possible.

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