REVIEW OF RESEARCH
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SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ITS CORRELATES WITH SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED PERSONS IN TIRUCHIRAPPALLI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT :

Aim: *This section attempts to measure the social support received by the visually impaired persons in the study area.* ***Method:*** *There were 396 visually impaired persons in the area of Study, out of which the researcher selected 296 persons as a sample by adopting simple random sampling procedure using lottery method. The Multidimensional Social Support Scale developed by* ***Zimet et al.,*** *was used to measure the social support.* ***Result:*** *The findings show that the mean score of the total social support is 4.88 with a score range of 2-7 and a little less than two-third (61 %) of the respondents scored 'high' on overall social support. The social support score increases only with the increase in the education, income and family size of the visually impaired persons.* ***Conclusion:*** *The study will be more helpful to evolve an effective intervention programmes to the visually impaired persons to enhance their perceived social support.*

KEYWORDS : *Social Support, Visually Impaired Persons, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu.*

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, it is estimated that there are 37 million people with total blindness and 124 million people with low vision (Resnikoff et al., 2004). Most of them have lost their eyesight due to diseases that are treatable or preventable (Pizzarello et al., 2004). Among the total world population of 6,737.50 million, the visually impaired comprises of 285.4 million (4.24 per cent) which include blind with 39.4 million (0.58 per cent) and low vision with 246 million (3.65 per cent) (WHO, 2010). India is a home to the world's largest number of blind people. Of the 37 million people across the Globe who are blind, over 15 million are from India. Among these, nearly 75 per cent of the cases are avoidable blindness (Sinha, 2007). Among the total world population of visually impaired, people with total blindness and low vision constitute 8.08 million (20.5 per cent) and 54.54 million (22.2 per cent) respectively live in India. (WHO, 2012, and Pascolini, & Mariotti, 2012). The disabled population in India increased from 21.9 million (2.1 %) in 2001, to 26.8 million (2.21%) in 2011 (Census of India, 2011, Sivakumar, 2013). Among these total disabled 5.03 million (18.8%) were visually impaired of which 2.64 Million (52.4 %) were male and 2.39 million (47.6 %) were female. In Tamil Nadu, among the total population of 72.1 million, the disabled population was 1.18 million (1.6 %) of which 0.66 million (55.7 %) were males and 0.52 million (44.5 %) were females. Among the total disabled population, 1.27 lakh (10.8 %) were visually impaired, of which 0.68 lakh (53.2 %) were males and 0.61 lakh (46.8 %) were females (Government of India. 2015). Tamil Nadu is the only state, which has a higher number of disabled females than males (Census of India 2001).

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Social Support means support received from family, friends, and significant others by the respondents (Zimet, 1988). Social support is the physical and emotional comfort given to him/her by their family, friends, co-workers and others. It is notable that social support indicates that community of people who share their love, care and affection to the needy. (The Canadian Mental Health Association, 2017).Various studies have been carried out on social support. Barron, et al.(1994), carried out a study on marital status, social support, and loneliness in visually impaired elderly people. The findings indicate that marital status was not directly related to loneliness but may be indirectly related through social support. Loneliness was associated with greater network dissatisfaction related to caring and relaxation. Kef (1997), examined the personal networks and social supports of blind and visually impaired youth, in Netherlands. The findings revealed that, parents were the most important source of support for all the blind and visually impaired youth. Horowitz, et al. (2003), in their study on the influence of health, social support quality and rehabilitation on depression among disabled elders indicated that being unmarried, in poorer health, having lower quality of relationships with family, and lower stability in friendships were significant independent risk factors for initial depression, explaining 50 per cent of the variance. Decline in depression over time was predicted by younger age, better self-rated health, stability of friendships, and use of rehabilitation services that, along with baseline depression, explained 61 per cent of the variance in depressive symptomatology at the two-year follow-up. Cimarolli & Boerner (2005) investigated multiple aspects of social support and their links to the well-being of adults with visual impairment. The findings revealed that the help from the family members was the most frequent type of positive support that was received, and underestimation of the participants' competencies was the most common type of negative support that was received. Less-optimal wellbeing appeared to be linked with experiencing lack of support and with receiving only negative support. Bruce et al (2007) reported that high levels of severe lack of social support in comparison to the general population especially among men, and lack of social support expressed extensively by those who were rarely or never visited by family or neighbours. Tunde-Ayinmode et al., (2011) reported that most of the blind people were reasonably adjusted in key areas of social interaction, marriage, and family. The reviews of earlier literatures revealed only a few attempts that were made to study the relationship between the social support and the background characteristics of the visually impaired persons. There are no recent studies about visually impaired persons of India with specific focus on social support. In view of this research gap, the researcher has proposed to design an in-depth study to explore the various correlates of psycho-social aspects of the visually impaired persons in Tiruchirappalli district, wherein the magnitude of visually impaired persons is expected to be high. With this backdrop, the present piece of research work has been carried out as a field-based empirical study in the selected area.

METHODOLOGY:

Objectives: The objective of the present research work is to measure the social support and its correlates with socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. *Sampling Procedure*: The researcher purposively selected Dheeranmanagar and Gandhinagar areas in Tiruchirappalli District, Tamil Nadu as the study area. The researcher has chosen these two locations, as the government has constructed houses specifically for the visually impaired persons for their rehabilitation. There were 396 visually impaired persons in the study areas, *out of which* the researcher selected 296 visually impaired persons as sample for the present research using simple random sampling procedure. At the time of data collection, 16 respondents were not available at their home due to the nature of their occupation and four respondents expressed their inevitable inability to provide information to the research investigators. Hence, the sample size for the present research was only 276 visually impaired persons. Social support of the visually impaired persons was measured using Multidimensional Scale for Social Support developed by*, Zimet* et al., (1988). This scale consists of 12 items on a 7-point Likert scale, from not suitable at all (1) to very suitable (7*).* The items tended to divide into factor groups relating to the source of the social support, namely family (items 3, 4, 8 & 11), friends (items 6, 7, 9 & 12) and significant other (items 1, 2, 5 & 10).To calculate the total score of

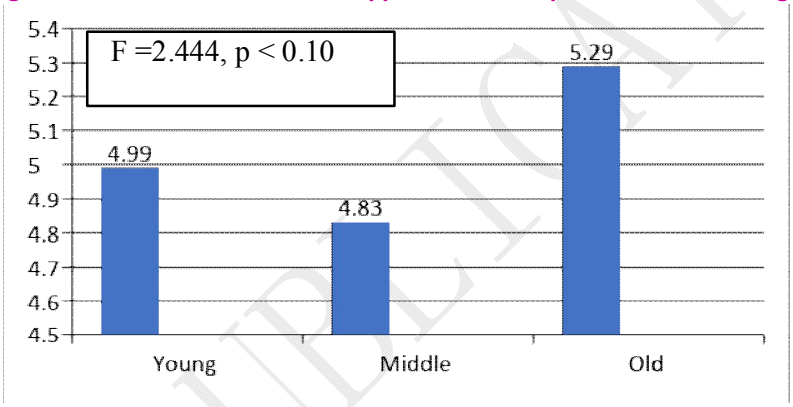
the scale, sum across all 12 items, and then divided by 12. *Higher score indicates higher social support.* The reliability value in the present study for the social support scale and its factors arealpha 0.942.

RESULTS

Level of social support: The findings show that the mean score of the total social support is 4.88with minimum of 2 to a maximum of 7. The respondents have been classified into 'low' and 'high' categories based on the mean score in order to provide a comparative profile of the respondents. The findings indicate that a little less than two-third (61 %) of the respondents scored 'high' on overall social support.

Current Age of respondents and social support: Data provided in figure 1 depict that the mean score of support received from family, friends and significant others were higher among those respondents who belong to older age group than the young and middle age group respondents. The ANOVA results in this regard turned out as statistically highly significant in the case of support received from friends (F- 4.896, $p < 0.01$) and not significant in the case of support received from family and significant others. Thus, the null hypothesis that *'there is no statistically significant difference between the age group of the respondents in the mean score of social supports received from family, and significant others '*is accepted.

Figure -1: Mean score of social support across respondents' current age



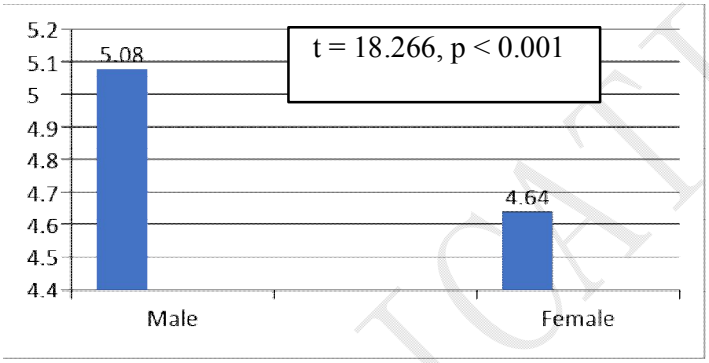
Sex and Social Support: Figure 2 represents that male respondents have a higher mean score in social support than their female counterparts. The independent sample t-test reveals that there is statistically highly significant difference in mean score of support received from family ($t = 10.0$, $p < 0.01$), friends ($t = 18.664$, $p < 0.001$), significant others ($t = 7.409$, $p < 0.01$) and total social support ($t = 18.266$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the research hypothesis '*the mean score of social support is higher among the male respondents than their female counterparts is accepted and thereby rejected the null hypotheses.*

Marital Status and social support: From the analysis, it was reported that the mean score of family support and significant others was found higher among the married respondents, whereas the mean score of support received friends was found higher among the unmarried respondents. The ANOVA test results also turned out as very highly significant in the case of support received from family ($F = 28.653, p < 0.001$) and significant others family ($F = 16.322$, $p < 0.01$**)** and highly significant in the case of support received from friends ($F = 5.768$**,** $p < 0.001$**,** $p < 0.01$). Therefore, it may be concluded that the null hypothesis that there *is a statistically significant difference between the marital statuses of the respondents in the mean score of support received from family, friend and significant others* is rejected and thereby the research hypothesis is accepted.

Type of marriages and social support: It was found that the mean score support received from families was found higher among those respondents who got married outside their caste – inter caste marriage

(*exogamy*) whereas the unmarried respondents received higher level of support from their friends. The support of significant others is found higher among those respondents who were married with close relatives (*sub caste endogamy*). Finally, those respondents who were married within their own caste (*endogamy*) found low level of support from their families, friends and significant others. However, the ANOVA results turned out **as** statistically highly significant in the case of support received from friends only (F - 4.586,< 0.01) and not significant in the case of family support and support received from significant others. Hence, the null hypothesis that *there is no statistically significant difference between the types of marriages among the visually impaired persons in the mean score of friend's support*is rejected and thereby the research hypothesis is accepted in this regard.

Figure -2: Mean score of social support across respondents' gender background

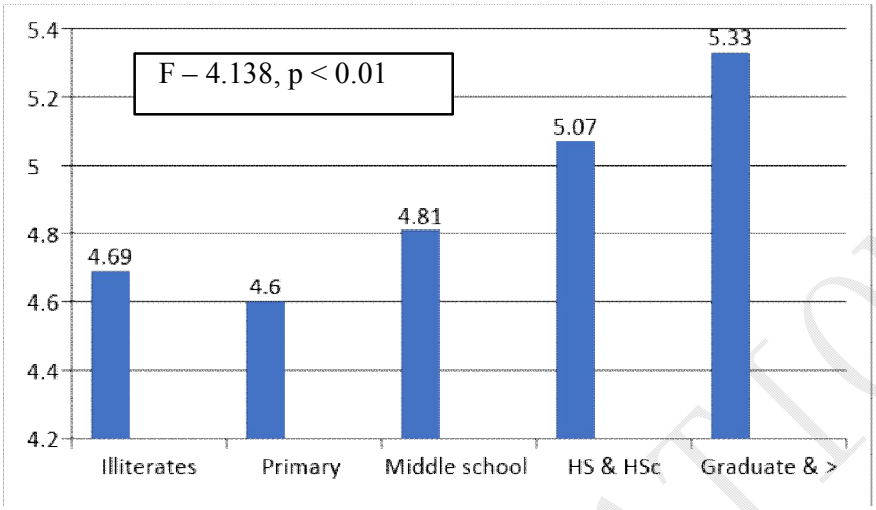


Social standing (caste) and religion of respondents and social support: From the cross tabular analysis, it was found that the mean score of all the three factors of social support do not vary much across the respondents' social standing and religion. Moreover, the patterns are inconsistent. The ANOVA results also did not turn out as statistically significant in this regard. Hence, the null hypothesis that *there is no statistically significant difference between the caste and religion of the respondents in the mean score of social support* is accepted.

Size of the Family and social support: The analysis between the family size and the social support reported that the respondents who belong to big size families had a higher mean score in family support, friends' support and support received from significant others. However, the ANOVA results reveal that there is a statistically moderately significant in support received from family (F = 3.461, p < 0.05) and highly significant (F = 6.004, p < 0.01) in support received from significant others and not significant in the case of support received from friends. Thus the null hypothesis that *'there is no statistically significant difference between the family size in mean score of support received from family and significant others, is accepted except in the case of support received from friends.*

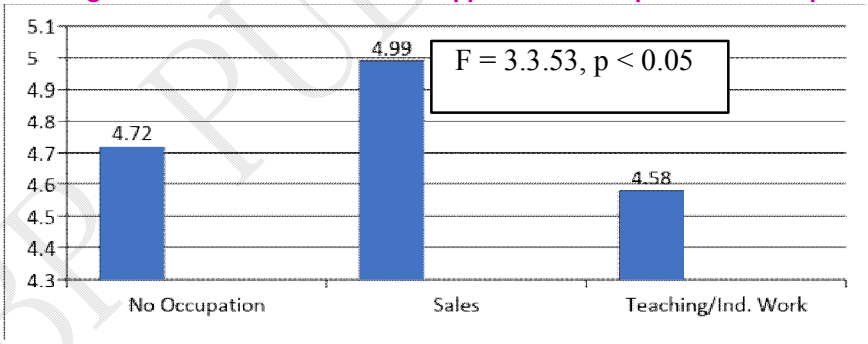
Education and social support: Figure 3 revealed that the mean score of the respondents, who have studied up to graduation level and above, were higher in family and **friends'** support, and support received from significant others. It shows that as education of the respondents increases the mean score of social support also increases. The ANOVA results also show that there is a marginally significant difference in the case of support received from families (p < 0.10) and very highly significant difference in support received from friends (p< 0.001) and no significant difference was observed in support received from significant others. Thus the research hypothesis *'the level of education of the respondents increases, the mean score of social support also increases is accepted except in the case of support received from significant others'.*

Figure -3: Mean score of social support across respondents' level of education



Occupation and social support: Figure 3 reveals that the mean score of family support is a little higher among the teachers / industrial workers. The mean score of friends' support and significant others are higher among those respondents who are engaged in sales. However, the ANOVA results have also turned out as marginally significant in the case of family support ($p < 0.10$), moderately significant in the case of friend's support ($p < 0.05$) and not significant in the case of support received from significant others. Hence, the research hypothesis there is a statistically significant difference between the occupational **statuses** of the visually impaired persons in the means score of social support is accepted except in the case of support received from the significant others.

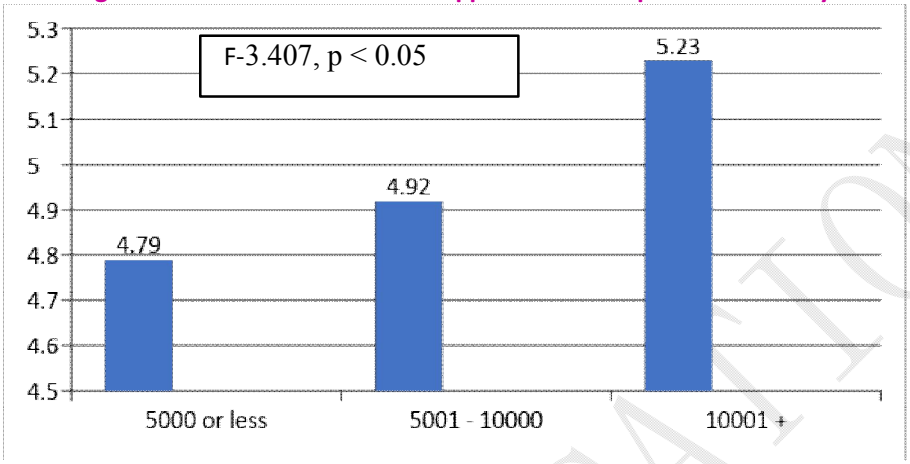
Figure –4: Mean score of social support across respondents' occupation



Personal and Family Income and social support: Figure 4 revealed that the mean score of three factors of social support viz., support received from family, friends and significant others were decreasing consistently with an increase in levels of the respondent's personal income with few exceptions. The ANOVA results have also turned out to be moderately significant in the case of support received family ($p < 0.05$) and friends ($p < 0.05$) and marginally significant in the case of support received from others ($p < 0.10$). Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between the level of the personal income of the respondents in the means score of support received from family, friends and significant others is rejected in this regard. Further, Panel 4 of Table 4.2.3 reveal that, as the family income increases, the mean score of social support (family, friends and significant others) also increases. However, the ANOVA results turned out **as** marginally significant ($p < 0.10$) only in the case of support received from family and not so in the case of

support received from friends and significant others. Hence, null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between the levels of the family income of the respondents in the means score of social support is accepted except in the case of family support.

Figure -5: Mean score of social support across respondents' family income



Housing and social support: It revealed that the mean score of social support was higher among those respondents who were living in their own houses than in rented houses. The independent sample t test results have also turned out to be moderately significant in the case of family support ($p < 0.05$) highly significant in the case of support received from significant others ($p < 0.01$) and not so in the case of support received from friends. Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between the ownership of the houses in the mean score of social support is rejected except in the case of support received from friends.

Relationship between the social support and socio-demographic variables: Table - 1 revealed that education, personal and family income and family size were positively correlated with support received from family members of the visually impaired persons. Support received from friends was negatively correlated with age at marriage, where as it was positively related to level of education of the respondents. The support received from significant others were positively correlated with education, personal and family income and number of family members in the family of the respondents. It means that respondent's education, personal and family income and family size increases the social support received by the visually impaired persons also increases. The family support is increases with increases in the respondent's education, personal income, family income and number of family members. Age at marriage increases, the support received from friends decreases. Education of the respondent increases, the support received from friends also increases. The support received from significant others increase with an increase in the number of family members, education, personal income and family income of the visually impaired persons.

Table - 1: Streamlined correlation* matrix between the socio-economic variables of the visually impaired persons and various factors of social support

SN	Variables	Social Support Domains			Total Social Support
		Family	Friends	Others	
1	Age	0.064	-0.084	0.024	-0.014
2	Age at Marriage	0.014	*-0.123	0.062	-0.031
3	Education	**0.178	***.223	*0.153	***0.226
4	R. income	***0.202	*0.122	*0.124	**0.170
5	Family income	**0.169	0.112	*0.134	**0.160
6	No. family members	***0.216	0.042	***0.290	***0.205

*Note: Streamlined correlation is a simplified form of method of production of correlation matrix using SPSS .That is, a correlation matrix in SPSS does not have to be totally square with the same number of columns and rows. Sometimes, a series of correlations displayed for a select number of variables.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the mean score of the social support and its three factors viz., family support, friends' support and support received from significant others were 4.88, 5.27, 4.31, and 5.06 respectively, the mean score of support received from family, friends and significant others were higher among those respondents who belong to older age group than the young and middle age group respondents. The male respondents scored higher social support than their female counterparts did. The mean score of support received from families was found to be higher among those respondents who have married outside their caste – inter caste marriages (*exogamy*) whereas the unmarried respondents received higher level of support from their friends. The mean score of social support does not vary much across the respondents' caste and religion. Further, the social support score was increased with the increase in the education, income and family size of the visually impaired persons. Appropriate psychosocial intervention programme and promotion of interpersonal relationship will boost the perceived social support among the visually impaired persons.

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