

A Descriptive Study on Life Satisfaction and Socioeconomic Challenges Among Koreans with Visual Impairments

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Visual impairments can have far-reaching consequences on an individual's psychological and socioeconomic well-being. In South Korea, an estimated 9.5% of individuals with significant disabilities report severe visual impairment (VI). Despite the challenges they face, there exists limited comprehensive research exploring their overall life experiences, especially in the Korean context. **Objective:** This study aims to descriptively analyze stress, happiness, life satisfaction, socioeconomic status (SES), and social activity participation among Koreans with visual impairments (VI). **Methods:** Data from 516 participants from the "Panel Survey of Employment for the Disabled" (PSED) were utilized, focusing on respondents who identified their primary disability as visual impairment (VI). The study examined mental health, health behavior, and impairment-related stress using various measurement scales. **Results:** Preliminary results show perceived low SES among Koreans with visual impairments. However, a significant finding was the report of high life satisfaction despite the presence of high stress levels and low happiness ratings. Furthermore, there was a noted low level of engagement in social and leisure activities among the participants. **Conclusion:** The findings underscore the importance of tailored interventions by government and non-governmental bodies to enhance the SES and mental health of Koreans with visual impairments. This study provides a foundation for future health promotion strategies and policy designs aimed at benefiting this particular demographic in Korea.

Keywords: Visual Impairments, Life Satisfaction, Socioeconomic Status, Descriptive Study, South Korea.

INTRODUCTION:

The report released by the Korean Statistical Information Service of Statistics (2021) provides the statistical data describing the 2.5 million people experiencing significant disabilities in Korea, accounting for 5.29% of the total population of South Korea with over 9.5% reporting having a severe visual impairment (VI). The report also indicated that Koreans with a VI are likely to perceive themselves as a low income and experience financial struggles. Previous findings have provided evidence that individuals with IV frequently reported higher levels of psychological challenges (Demmin & Silverstein, 2020), decreased quality of life (Langelaan et al., 2007), loss of independence, and social isolation (Burnes et al., 2019). For example, Okoro, Strine, McKnight-Eily, Verlenden, and Hollis (2021) found that people with disabilities are likely to experience more mental distress than those without disabilities.

The presence of a disability tends to elevate stress levels, contributing to a lower quality of life and reduced life satisfaction (Lee, 2020).

People reporting visual impairments (VI) are likely to be dependent on family members and to experience financial, cultural, and psychological challenges (Burmedi, Becker, Heyl, Wahl, & Himmelsbach, 2002; Chou, 2008; Keeffe, 2005). These challenges have been found to increase psychological distress and stress that diminish life satisfaction (Chou, 2008). While some qualitative studies have investigated stress, coping, and personal growth in Korean adolescents with visual impairments (Kim, Han, & Park, 2017; Kim & Park, 2018), there is a paucity of literature that exploring the health-related challenges of Koreans with visual impairments (VI). For this study, our research team conducted a descriptive analysis of stress, happiness, life satisfaction, socioeconomic status (SES), and social activity participation among

Koreans with visual impairments. The findings from This study will contribute health-related data that future researchers can use for program development, health promotion strategies, and health-related policy design to benefit Koreans with visual impairment.

METHODS:

Data and Sample:

This study used data from 516 participants who identified their primary disability as visual impairment and took part in the sixth survey of the second wave of the "Panel Survey of Employment for the Disabled" (PSED). The survey was conducted by the Korean Employment Agency for the Disabled (KEAD) Employment Development Institute. The second wave of the PSED spanned approximately three months from May 24th to August 31st, 2021. Its objective was to gather information on the employment processes and relevant factors pertaining to individuals with disabilities in the labor market. Survey panel respondents were comprised of individuals aged 15 to 64 years of age residing in South Korea, who were registered as disabled according to the Act on Welfare of Persons with Disabilities.

Examining the general characteristics of the respondents with visual impairments, it was observed that there were 295 males (57.1%) and 221 females (42.9%). In terms of age distribution, the sample included 70 individuals in their 20s (13.6%), 75 in their 30s (14.6%), 120 in their 40s (23.4%), 106 in their 50s (20.7%), 113 in their 60s (21.9%), and 30 in their 70s (5.8%). Regarding the severity of disability, 342 individuals (66.3%) reported a mild disability, and 174 individuals (33.7%) reported a severe disability.

MEASURES:

This study aimed to describe the characteristics of the respondents in the study sample related to mental health, health behavior, and impairment-related stress. The data measurement tool employed in this study was developed under the joint supervision of the Ministry of Employment and Labor and the Korean Disabled Employment Agency during the establishment of the Korean Disabled Employment Panel Survey. Its primary purpose was to collect the information required for the formulation and evaluation of policies governing the employment of individuals with disabilities. This was achieved through an examination of their labor market entry and transition processes as well as the characteristics of economic activities based on the life cycles of those processes.

STRESS:

A single questionnaire was used to assess the level of stress related to disabilities that the respondents experienced in daily living. A six-point Likert scale was used (1 = very low, 6 = very high), with a higher score indicating a higher stress level.

HAPPINESS:

To assess the subjective experience of happiness, this study employed a single-item measurement using a 10-point Likert scale to gauge "current level of happiness." Higher scores on the scale indicated a greater degree of happiness.

LIFE SATISFACTION:

Overall level of life satisfaction was measured by a single questionnaire: "How satisfied are you with your daily life?" A four-point Likert scale was employed (1 = never experience, 4 = always experience), with a higher score indicating a higher level of life satisfaction.

SOCIOECONOMICS STATUS (SES):

Socioeconomic status was assessed using a four-point Likert scale: "When considering income, job, education, property, etc., how would you describe your current socioeconomic status level? 1 = low, 2 = low-mid, 3 = mid-high, and 4 = high.

SOCIAL ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION:

Level of social activity participation was measured by the following question: "How much do you think you are participating in various social activities?" A four-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of participation with a high score indicating a higher level of social activity participation (e.g., formal and informal social organizations, gatherings, weddings, funerals, graduations, and religious events).

RESULTS:

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of study variables through reporting mean, standard deviation (SD), minimum (Min), and maximum (Max). The values are as follows: stress (M = 3.35, SD = 0.91, Min = 1, Max = 6), happiness (M = 2.96, SD = 1.91, Min = 1, Max = 4), life satisfaction (M = 3.33, SD = 0.65, Min = 1, Max = 4), recognition of SES (M = 1.89, SD = 1.50, Min = 1, Max = 4), and social activity participation (M = 2.29, SD = 0.75, Min = 1, Max = 4).

DISCUSSION:

This study aimed to describe the characteristics of various health factors including stress, happiness, life satisfaction, SES, and social activity participation among Koreans with visual impairment. Study findings indicate that Koreans with visual impairment reported perceiving themselves as having a low SES, suggesting that Koreans with visual impairment tend to experience challenges in employment, financial stability, and education. Due to low SES perception by Koreans with visual impairments, government agencies and nongovernmental organizations should create strategies to increase the SES of Koreans with visual impairments. A growing body of literature

suggests that engagement in social and leisure activities plays an important role in improving the health and wellbeing of persons with physical disabilities (Kim et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2023). Some studies have demonstrated the positive impact of leisure activities on personal growth among adolescents with visual impairment (Kim, Han, & Park, 2017; Kim & Park, 2018). Despite the importance of activity participation, this descriptive study indicates that Koreans with visual impairment reported relatively low levels of engagement in social and leisure activities. The key finding of this study is that Koreans with visual impairments reported high levels of life satisfaction even though they also reported high stress levels and low levels of happiness. We recommend that further investigation of this relationship be conducted among Koreans with visual impairments. Based on the findings of this study, our

research team makes the following practical suggestions on how to increase the mental health of this population. First, as indicated, government agencies, community groups, and program designers and implementers should design and implement a variety of programs that are tailored to meet the specific needs of persons with visual impairments. As examples, music concerts performed by people with visual impairments can serve as an important strategy in encouraging social participation. In addition, Kyun (2000) reported that Koreans tend to express negative attitudes and prejudices toward other Koreans with a disability and perceive having a disability as a disgrace to the family. Thus, providing emotional and social support for Koreans with visual impairments plays an important role in reducing stress and improving SES, happiness, and life satisfaction.

Table: 1

Descriptive Statistics					
	Stress	Happiness	Life satisfaction	Recognition of SES	Social activity participation
Mean	3.35	2.96	3.33	1.89	2.29
SD	0.91	1.91	0.65	1.50	0.75
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	6	4	4	4	4

N = 516

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