

Abstract

Background: This study investigates the social capital implications of vision loss among working-age adults with acquired visual impairment in Nigeria. This includes exploring the challenges of acquiring and maintaining social relationships and supports for adults who acquire a significant vision impairment in adulthood, as opposed to being blind from birth or early in life. The study also investigates if visual rehabilitation services address the social goals of working-age adults with acquired visual impairment using the concepts of bonding, bridging and linking social capital as the theoretical concept. The experience of living with a visual impairment has been linked to social isolation, diminished social relationships, reduced network size, and decreased social support. These challenges may result in low access to social resources, diminished social capital, decreased social well-being and quality of life among working-age adults with acquired visual impairment. In Nigeria, social relationships and social connectedness is valued and it is an important aspect of culture and customs in this society. Hence, understanding the impact of vision loss on the established social networks among this group of individuals was the key aspect of this study.

Methodology: A qualitative study using a phenomenological approach was undertaken. Eight adults between the ages of 18 – 59 were recruited from disability service organisations in Nigeria. Telephone interviews were conducted with four males and four females. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to text. Data was analysed manually.

Findings: five broad themes were developed from participants accounts: (I) relationships with friends and others (ii) finding strength in family relationships (iii) changes to relationships with friends (iv) the impact of acquiring a vision impairment and (v) perception of visual rehabilitation services. The study findings indicated that the relationship between working-age adults with acquired visual impairment in Nigeria and

their family members improved post vision impairment, with stronger family ties resulting in enhanced bonding social capital. However, participants experienced diminished bridging and linking social capital, which was demonstrated by barriers to external social resources, decreased social well-being and quality of life. Furthermore, findings showed that visual rehabilitation services, while assisting participants in terms of psycho-emotional and functional adjustment, are lacking in addressing the social goals of working-age adults with acquired visual impairment in Nigeria. These findings were highlighted by both male and female study participants indicating that this was not a gendered phenomenon.

Conclusion: Because social connectedness and relationships are valued in Nigerian society, there will be need for the visual rehabilitation services to lay more emphasis on addressing the social goals of working-age adults with acquired visual impairment. This will in turn, facilitate access to external social resources, such as, employment information and instrumental support, which may facilitate bridging and linking social capital, social well-being and quality of life of working-age adults with acquired visual impairment in Nigeria.