

Career Prospects For Visually Impaired - A Study On Job Identification and Recruitment Strategies

C. Dwarakesh
Kavitha Ramu¹

Employment opportunities and education for VI have risen substantially while complementing each other in last decade. Building of a career demands institutionalised academic qualification, which can only be determined by investigating job profiles for VI. This study illustrates improvement in quality of VI at work post 2011, the era of globalisation and smart gadgets. Based on the provisions of law and the ground reality, gaps are identified in the system, while laying emphasis on defining roles and eliminating malpractice during recruitment.

RPWD Act, 2016 has ensured that adequate employment opportunities are created for VI, responsible agencies are set up at centre and state to ensure its implementation, posts are filled as per norms. The unavailability of clear reports on jobs identified by each employer and number of VI employed in each organisation/ ministry is attributable to poor implementation of certain facets of the RPWD Act while little authority to relevant committees to hold employers accountable are identified. An attempt has been made to highlight developments in career prospects of VI based on census reports, case laws, job advertisements, exam results and surveys. The correlation between education, law and career and the manner in which defining roles serves as the cornerstone for overall development is discussed. Efficacy of recruitment exams for banking sector is analyzed with inputs from exam takers. In the present socio economic condition, the pragmatic solution to facilitating career prospects for VI is to design sustainable goals with foresight. A win-win equation between employer and VI employees is within reach, provided employers adopt global inclusion policies. Need of the hour is opportunity, not sympathy.

Key words : Visually impaired, Career prospects, Employment, PSU's, Recruitment exams

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to MajC. Dwarakesh , Research Scholar, Department of Management Science, PSG College of Arts and Science, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore-641014 Email : dwarak.army@gmail.com

1. Associate Professor.....do.....Email : kavitharamu@psgcas.ac.in

Employment not only provides a sense of satisfaction and pride, but also serves as an armor for visually impaired (VI) to face challenges of life with dignity. In today's competitive era, unemployment rates are substantially increasing owing to opaque job market, where the gap between prospective candidates and requisite skill sets are apparent. India with a growing population of more than 125 crore remains one of the most competitive job markets. Persons With Disability (PWD) are those individuals who lack the ability to perform activities that others can easily carry out. Among the 3 crore PWD in India, 19 percent of them are visually impaired.

Developments in adaptive technology has lead to improvement in quality of employment for VI post 2011. Based on the provisions of law and ground reality, gaps are identified in the system, while laying emphasis on defining roles and eliminating malpractices during recruitment.

Laws pertaining to protection for rights for disabled have paved-way for employment opportunities, however a major proportion of posts allotted to VI remain unfilled. This paper focuses on subjects pertaining to qualified VI with less job opportunities and under employment. Additionally, reasons for discontentment of under-utilised VI is analysed, while discussing suggestions to improve quality of VI at work.

1. Visually Impaired People in India

World Health Organisation defines blindness as visual sharpness of less than 3/60 or a corresponding field loss to less than 10 degrees in the better eye, even with the best possible spectacle correction. This means a person is unable to count fingers from a distance of 3 meters. In 2019, 20.5 percent of world's blind people, 22.2 percent of worlds' low vision and 21.9 percent of world's vision impaired are in India (WHO, 2019). In other words, unlike other handicaps, it is not easy to define blindness, since some VI can see partially, some have periphery vision and some are totally blind throughout the day or have limited working abilities. Generally, a medical certificate issued by a government hospital indicates the level of disability in terms of percentage. This percentage, for example, 40% or above is eligible to claim various benefits from the government, especially reservation in employment and education. Since this paper aims to throw light on facilitation of career prospects for VI, it is imperative to know VI population in working age group. As per the latest census reports available (2011), below table represents the target population.

CAREER PROSPECTS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Age Group	Population
20 – 29 years	6, 21, 543
30 – 39 years	5, 55, 348
40 – 49 years	5, 42, 000
50 – 59 years	5, 18, 000

2. Laws pertaining to employment of VI

Government Departments and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) have been an important employer of PWD. While VI could bring little utility to the employer in 1960s, reservation in jobs was inclined more towards welfare of personnel than contribution to the organisation. The first Special Employment Exchange was set up way back in 1959 in Mumbai. Government of India initiated the policy of 3% reservation in jobs for disabled people more than four decades ago in 1977. However, the reservation was only in the lower ranking jobs (C & D categories) with a supplemented justification that VI could only perform simple manual tasks that were repetitive in nature. In 1995, when The PWD Act was passed, this reservation was extended to higher ranking jobs (A & B categories) as well. Job Access With Speech (JAWS), one of the first screen reader software simplified the lives of VI with its launch in Jan 1995, enabling VI to read, write and perform computer based jobs at par with able bodied counterparts. Subsequently there was more success stories of VI in developed countries in various streams.

Clearly India lacked pace in accepting VI and adaptive technology and hence PWD Act of 1995 was not observed in spirit. Government had been viewing 3% reservation in a very restricted manner. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed in Delhi High Court by a visually impaired lawyer, S K Rungta in 2006, against the Government's poor record in implementing PWD Act, 1995. Delhi High Court ruled that 3% of the "total strength" of employees in any Government establishment should be disabled persons. (Source: December 22, 2008 indianexpress.com). This earmark judgment provides clarification to Section 33 of the said Act that, reservation should be extended to total jobs in any organisation and not just to identified jobs.

Following the advent of screen reader software for Mac book, Android and Microsoft in 2009, VI have been able to perform better at work and studies without much dependence on

braille or recorders. This resulted in more VI excelling in law, education, IT and social sciences. Therefore more jobs were identified in various organisations which was further strengthened by UN convention on the rights for PWD (2006), followed by Right for Persons With Disability (RPWD) Act (2016). This is testimony to the fact that provisions in law for VI augmented career prospects while technological developments and internet boom were also enabling the cause.

In addition to the laws, the National policy on Electronic Accessibility recognises the need to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disabilities and facilitates PWD with equal access to Electronics & ICTs. This policy also recognises the diversity of PWD and provides for their specific needs. Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DEIT) is the nodal department for monitoring the implementation of this policy.

Relation between law and career prospects

Evolution of career prospects for VI who could only be allotted lower ranking jobs, to conquering the prestigious IAS (Indian Administrative Services) is primarily because of RPWD Act and developments in technology. Some examples of successful VI are Major Gopal Mitra (UNICEF), Ms Bino Xephine (IFS) and Justice Chakravarthy (Law). Majority of the employed VI today agree that they could get a job only because reservation in jobs has been enforced by the government.

The RPWD Act, 2016, an act to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the rights for persons with disability was passed in parliament on 13 December 2016. The salient features of this act relevant to VI are:

- a. It is applicable to all ministries/ departments of center and state government
- b. 1% job reservation to VI in total workforce
- c. No discrimination at work and no person to be denied promotion merely on account of his/her disability
- d. Employer to provide support for VI in the form of assistive gadgets and conducive work environment
- e. If a person attains disability after joining an organisation, he/she shall be shifted to a suitable job / profile or retained in the organisation till he/she attains the age of superannuation
- f. Committees will be set up in center and state to implement and record the status of VI employed in various organisations with periodic updation of the same

CAREER PROSPECTS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

- g. Agencies shall be setup to identify suitable roles for VI and address promotion aspects of such candidates
- h. Upper age relaxation for employment, special provisions to appear for recruitment exams, i.e., scribe, extra time, braille/ tape recorders, etc

Undoubtedly, RPWD Act ,2016 is the biggest factor influencing employment opportunities for VI. However, there remains a question whether candidates are being employed as per the reservations policies and also to their optimum potential. Numerous cases relating to denial of jobs for VI have been witnessed in the last few years by almost all participants of the survey. Some categories of discrimination/ denial are:

- In spite of posts identified for VI, organisations had not conducted interview for the said posts nor did they invite applications
- Candidates did not receive appointment orders despite qualifying exams or getting selected
- Individuals are placed in jobs but do not get promoted at par with counterparts with same seniority due to lack of identified posts up the career ladder
- In case a candidate who acquired a disability after joining service, the person is invalidated from service

3. Employment of VI in India - Current Scenario

As per employment exchange census 2016, 12,488 VI were registered with special employment exchange in India. There are 42 special employment exchanges and 38 special employment cells functioning across the country. In 2003, placement ratio was 0.9 and 0.7 percent in special employment exchange and special cells respectively. In 1994, it was 2 percent and 1.2 percent respectively. The placement unit of National Institute for Visually Handicapped (NIVH) sponsored 6760 VI for various jobs, out of which only 286 were successfully placed, as compared to 250 candidates placed out of 4537 candidates in the previous year.

As many as 37 government aided institutes across India offer courses for VI. Additionally more than 200 private institutions work towards rehabilitation and vocational training of VI. The courses offered in these institutions/ training centers include paper cup making, chair caning, Physiotherapy, Japanese medicine massage, IT/ computer courses, BPO training, computer courses, software development etc., based on the level of education of the VI. During 2019 www.jobability.com, a joint venture of LCD trust and Accenture, recorded advertisements from more than 350 companies with requirement for VI in various posts. Based on NIVH report, the number of posts identified for VI in government of India has

increased from 1084 to 1841 in 2017. This data is proof to the survey report where 80% of participants agreed that the number of employment opportunities for VI has significantly increased. In 2018, the employment rate of VI through NIVH was a meagre 0.04 percent.

The census data available on placement of VI could be misleading. On one hand, the number of advertisements and posts identified for VI have sharply grown up in number. On the other employment ratio has declined by a great margin since 2003. The reason for such a mismatch is, most educated VI prefer applying for jobs through internet portals.

Analysis of IAS officers serves as a good example. For many years VI were only offered jobs in group C and D categories of SSC. Since 2006, VI were permitted to appear for the coveted exam with scribe and reservations in posts. In the initial years, there were many cases of candidates being denied appointments as the government remarked that they were not suitable for the posts identified. In fact before 2009, out of the 88 posts which were to be filled by VI, less than 29 vacancies were filled. A similar ordeal was faced by candidates in states due to non implementation of the PWD Act. For instance, group A services are open to VI in Odisha only since 2015 and the first batch saw 8 candidates successfully clearing the exam. Such a positive trend in creating opportunities is because of the fact that senior VI in the system have contributed to the development of the mechanism. Time and again the officers have tried to appraise the government about the capability of VI showcasing individual achievements from all over the world. Today almost all vacancies for IAS officers are identified and filled appropriately eg. Ms. Bino Xephine becomes the first IFS officer in spite of being completely blind. This trend is attributable to high level of authority and resources available to IAS officers. Not all organisations have such luxury and therefore the pace of improvement with respect to condition of VI remains slow.

4. Defining job profiles and its impact on education system

Facilitation of career and employment opportunities should commence with organisations defining and allocating specific jobs that can be performed by VI. Survey reveals that 60% of employed VI were under utilised and 70% of students were unable to choose an appropriate course in college. There are certain agencies which only discuss about disability and equal opportunities which sublime to a delusion that VI can perform any job at par with able bodied counterparts. The truth is VI can do well only if the roles assigned to them do not require eyesight or assistance of able bodied person. For example, in an inclusive system, VI can be a good teacher, however not all subjects can be taught by a VI efficiently without compromising on the quality of instruction, assessment of candidates, etc. Further subjects like English, law do not require eyesight as they are theory based and hence a government body must publish a clear list of roles, jobs available in each organisation for VI.

CAREER PROSPECTS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Once jobs are earmarked, the qualification required can be easily ascertained. This shall remain as a target as the students in schools and colleges know what to study, progressing on a road map towards career building. In case of technical courses like software/ IT, private players can be insisted upon to train candidates in cognizance with agencies like NIVH via short term courses. eg. Japanese medical manual therapy at NIVH, Dehradun.

Although there are numerous courses run specially for the blind, employment opportunities remain negligible for candidates pursuing certain courses. For instance, a diploma in fragrance for a duration of 2 years, offered by a private agency has not been able to fetch any jobs in govt/ private agencies. Institutions must carefully mention if the course offered can fetch jobs or if it's a mere venture to augment a person's skills. This shall save valuable time as most VI pursue studies for the want of a job to secure their livelihood.

A reverse engineering approach is the need of the hour. When an employer clearly defines a job for VI, it makes a win-win proposition for both the employer and employee. This shall result in value addition to the employer while the employee is content making a livelihood. In the existing socio economic condition of the country, it is unlikely to expect more funds being allotted for the cause, however retrospection on existing posts, foresight and defining roles based on promotional aspects can pave way for simultaneous growth in career and education.

5. Job market - Corporate firms vs PSUs

Among the 72 employed participants, only 8 candidates were placed in MNCs in a range of profiles from software development to marketing and HR. A prerequisite to join such organisations is excellent proficiency in English and exemplary knowledge of the trade with a good academic record. Such companies value talent and provide adequate facilities for VI in a conducive work environment. Some candidates even get flexible work hours, work from home options and hence contentment of employees is top notch. However, all candidates admit that MNCs do not have reservation policies with respect to VI and hence a student is not sure if he would get a job in an MNC even if he acquired the requisite skills. Infact the recruitment strategies of these companies is very innovative leaving no room for malpractice.

Government sector is more preferred by VI since they are in the ambit of RPWD Act. Among the 72 employed VI, 64 admit that they could get a job only because of strict reservation policies. Infact all candidates opined that they could have a secure livelihood even if they were under utilised in the organisation in such companies. Some of the companies where the VI are employed are:

- MNC - TCS, IBM, Infosys, Wipro

- Government/ PSUs - NTPC, IOCL, FCI, DRDO
- Banks - All nationalised banks like SBI, PNB and rural cooperative banks

Among the job providers, Banking Sector is one of the most sought after professions offering reservations for VI. They also prefer a banking profession because

- Educational criteria is a mere higher secondary pass for clerk post and any undergraduate degree for the post of Probationary Officer
- Job security and handsome remuneration
- VI can get his/ her own scribe to write the recruitment exam

6. Drawbacks in recruitment exams

No mechanism can improve by hiding loop holes in a system. This section aims to highlight malpractices that are reported in the competitive exams pertaining to VI. Ministry of justice and social empowerment has issued guidelines for the conduct of exams with special provisions for PWD. The salient features of the provisions for VI are as follows:

- a. Extra time of 20 minutes for each hour of the exam
- b. Computers enabled with screen reader software shall be provided for the candidates wherever possible
- c. Candidates shall be permitted to check the computers well in advance before the commencement of the exam, however no candidate shall be permitted to use personal computers/ laptops
- d. In case computers can not be provided, permission to write the exam with a scribe is accorded

There is no denial that these provisions are framed as it takes time for the scribe to read the questions and as VI dictates the answers and makes corrections to what is written by the scribe. Further cut off marks for each category of PWD has to be lesser than that of an able bodied candidate as PWD also have learning difficulties.

Candidates in Tamil Nadu revealed that the cut-off marks for VI in these exams were higher than that of an able bodied person. A logical question that arises is how a VI can have cut off marks much higher than an able bodied person. Investigation made by interaction with exam takers of the said exam reveals the following :

- a. Candidates are permitted to bring their own scribe. Many candidates bring a scribe who has prepared/ appeared for the same exam earlier
- b. As per the exam policy, bringing own scribe is permitted, provided the scribe is less

CAREER PROSPECTS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

qualified than the candidate. In practice, there is no mechanism to check the actual qualification of the scribe

- c. Around 50% of the candidates score well with an own scribe and extra time. In fact some of the scribes solve the paper even without reading the questions to the candidate
- d. Cut off marks are determined by taking average marks of all VI candidates and drawing a line corresponding to number of posts reserved for VI

Hence honest candidates are at a disadvantage as they fail to qualify the exam by a small fraction. Some unscrupulous coaching centers encash this loophole and train VI with a promise to provide a trained candidate as scribe during exams. Unless such loopholes are addressed to, selection of right candidates for the job is impossible.

Statement of the Problem

An in depth study of employment prospects for VI is conducted to rethink skill development, formal education and professional training for such candidates. It is required to understand the possible causes for unemployment . Implementation of policies pertaining to employment of VI should take into account practical difficulties endured by VI, catering for sustainable growth. This study elucidates factors hindering the employment of VI and also suggest remedial measures for better career prospects.

Objectives of the Study

- To establish the relation between provisions in law and employment opportunities
- To identify drawbacks in recruitment strategies of employers
- To ascertain the connection between job definition and road map to education & skill development
- To identify grey areas in provisions of employment for VI

Method of Data Collection

There are around 105 candidates registered with District Central Library, Coimbatore which has a functional special cell for PWD. These candidates are in the age group of 20 to 52 where 72 VI are employed in various organisations across the country and remaining are students. Data collected from this group serves as a crucial input. The paper is also based on the secondary data collected.

Survey of Visually impaired candidates Coimbatore

Total Number of candidates surveyed	105
Number of VI employed	72
Number of students	33
Number of candidates employed in MNCs	8
Number of candidates employed in government/ PSUs	64

RESULTS

- Out of 105, 80% admit that the number of job opportunities has significantly increased in the last 10 years
- All 8 candidates employed in corporate firms/ MNCs are content with their jobs and admit that there is no room for malpractice during recruitment
- Out of 72 employed, 70% feel that they don't have appropriate job or they are under utilised owing to poor job definition by the employer
- Out of 105, 70% did not have a clear idea of which course to choose in college due to unavailability of Qualitative Requirement of various employers
- Out of 72 employed, 80% feel that most recruitment exams are not specially designed for VI
- Out of 105, the average number of recruitment exams taken by each VI is 5
- Out of 72 employed, 56 got selected for a post earlier but did not get an appointment for more than two years
- All 105 candidates admit that they were computer literates and had applied for the jobs directly through internet portals
- Only 20% of candidates had registered in employment exchange whereas none were provided with a job in Tamil Nadu
- Out of 105 VI, 75% feel that mal-practice is rampant because of unauthorised scribe through unscrupulous agents

DISCUSSION

Number of educated VI has increased in recent years owing to the proactive work of special training centers, schools and NGOs. Consequently, significant increase in the number of employment opportunities for VI during 2011-2019 is observed. Number of employment

CAREER PROSPECTS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

seekers approaching employment exchanges/ SEEs has gone down, since internet has simplified the application process. Data available vide 2011 census and employment exchange reports 2016, are far from current ground reality and hence cannot be considered for framing policies. Vacancies for VI in government sector follows a standard pattern. However, MNCs do not adhere to any standard reservation policy on a time bound manner.

In case of government sector, the exam pattern is archaic while question papers for VI are not different, taking into account their inability to solve mathematical, graphical interpretation questions. Corporate firms inculcate innovative recruitment strategies based on job analysis on a case to case basis, leaving no room for malpractice. There are cases that MNCs have hired VI in the past, but have stopped hiring VI for the said posts. Computer literacy is the key to inclusion at workplace. It is therefore essential that both PSUs and corporate firms include a formal computer education/rehabilitation course from a recognized institution, as a prerequisite in their recruitment advertisements.

Government of India has been prompt in designing theory based question papers for VI in higher secondary exams. Whereas, a similar policy on conduct of recruitment exams for VI is not in place, thereby leading to malpractice during exams. It is essential to have a unilateral decision on scrutinizing recruitment exams of all agencies employing VI. This body shall ensure that these exams test the candidates' skills with optimum use of computers, screen reader software. Hence, the mechanism blue ribbons candidates who are both computer literate and academically qualified. Prospects for graduates/ educated VI is higher than that of semi-skilled candidates. Candidates seeking a secure job prefer government sector. However, talented VI prefer corporate firms as their skills are better recognized, leading to job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, candidates have started to believe that being visually impaired is a proficiency to get a job. This is because of poor job definition. Further organisations believe that VI may not be of much value to the organisation and hence are more inclined towards merely filling seats as per government rules. Mind set of both employers and job seekers need to be changed. VI must be better skilled in their faculties than an able bodied person. They must improve upon their skills, memory and communication in order to compensate for lack of eyesight. Identifying roles based on functional ability is what can make VI an asset to the organisation and also pave way for correct education. In the present socio economic condition, the pragmatic solution to facilitating career prospects for VI is to design sustainable goals with foresight. A win-win equation between employer and VI is within reach, provided employers adopt global inclusion policies. Need of the hour is opportunity, not sympathy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A visually impaired student's inspiring journey to IIM-A - <https://m.rediff.com/getahead/slide-show/slide-show-1-career-visually-impaired-student-amit-jain-who-made-it-to-iim/20111101.htm>

Disabled Population in India as per census 2011 -
<https://enabled.in/wp/disabled-population-in-india-as-per-census-2011-2016-updated/>

Draft document on possible job profiles for visually impaired bank employees - https://www.aicb.org.in/images/employment/DOCUMENT%20ON%20POSSIBLE%20JOB%20PROFILES%20FOR%20%20VISUALLY%20%20IMPAIRED%20BANK_%20EMPLOYEES.docx

Employment Exchange Statistics 2016 - <https://www.ncs.gov.in/Documents/ Employment%20Exchange %20Statistics-2016.pdf>

Employment and Persons with disabilities - <https://punarbhava.in/index.php/14-connect/525-employment-and-persons-with-disabilities-pwds>

Employment of Disabled people in India - Baseline report (2009) <https://www.dnis.org/Employment.pdf>

Format of Medical certificate for person with disabilities - https://www.iocl.com/download/Format_of_Disability_Certificate_BR.pdf

Government of India - Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) - Annual Report 2018-19

Guidelines for conducting written examination for Persons with Benchmark disabilities -
<http://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/contents/pageguidelines.php>

Guidelines for providing certain facilities in respect of persons with disabilities who are already employed in Government for efficient performance of their duties -
<https://financialservices.gov.in/sites/default/files/Report%20as%20on%20Date30-10-2015%2016-42-55.pdf>

IBPS PO Cut Off 2019 - <https://www.careerpower.in/ibps-po-cut-off.html>

National Institute for the Visually Handicapped - Annual Report 2017-18
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GgrHgrqi0EaG4hn3EOlhcRzljst3ciH/view>

Persons with disability & the Indian labour market: Challenges and Opportunities -
<https://www.youth4jobs.org/pdf/ilo-study-pwd.pdf>

Rights for Person with Disabilities Act 2016 - <http://www.disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/page/acts.php>

Social welfare - Welfare of the disabled - Group A & B categories of posts - identification and reservation of posts in public services - Dated 2005 http://www.scd.tn.gov.in/gos/sw_e_53_2005.pdf

Special paper for Visually Impaired Students CBSE - <https://punarbhava.in/images/stories/cbse.pdf>

World Health Statistics (2019). Geneva: World Health Organization.