

Chapter I

Introduction

In 1930, Ritchi asked, "To what extent and in what manner does blindness affect temperament ? The importance of this question has long been recognised, yet little systematic effort has been reported on it. Most of the information available has been obtained from biographies or other books written by blind people. Pierre Villey's (1930) book is probably the first illuminating book in this respect. More recent books have added to our knowledge but few can give deep insight as intensive research efforts can (Pringle, 1964). An examination of available literature suggests that certain broad groups can be observed among these children (Pringle, 1964). The extreme grainy of blindness has certainly stirred mankind throughout the history, but as a class the blind do not want sympathy. They have a tendency to achieve comparative perfection.

Blind children experience the world in their own way which is different from that of most other children. Their personality is therefore, affected by these differences in perception. Because of the handicap, the blind children are more likely to be under nervous strain and prone to feelings of insecurity and frustration.

Visual impairment is a condition of visual system which affect every area of development, perceptual and non-perceptual.

Vision provides a detailed a precise a continuous source of information about objects and people. It also include information about self. The impairment of vision restricts this direct source of information, social interaction and socially oriented behaviour. The blind child although acquire many social skills, he is unable to monitor his own behaviour because of this disadvantage.

The important question thus emerge; when vision is absent or significantly impaired, what course his personality development will take ? To what extent he can perceive himself more accurately ? To what extent his cognitive and general activities are associated with this visual ability ? The answer to these questions are not simple. Indeed, there are such wide range of abilities and characteristics within the population of visual impairment that the fact of visual impairment itself must not be the determining factor. Thus, the above questions evolve into the more elaborate questions : If vision is seriously impaired what conditions influence the adequacy of progress in various abilities and performance in the process of development ? How is his personality organised ? How are the academic achievement affected by such constellations ?

Even these questions, though over generalisations, have unfortunately not been adequately differentiated in most published literature on visual impairment. Much of the available researches refer to the blind with the implication that these are the people with no visual function at all.

It is unfortunate that much of the research literature on visual impairment and development and on visual impairment generally has not taken the approach to identify optimal condition for adjustment to visual impairment, rather has simply attempted to characterise the nature of various function under visual impairment.

The extreme heterogeneity of abilities and characteristics, that is found in visual impaired population has been mentioned (Warren, 1981). Extremes are also seen in the cognitive areas, intelligence and utilisation of educational opportunities (Hayes, 1941; Warren, 1981). In social functioning they vary from autism to fully adjusted and emotionally stable. Therefore, there is no such thing as a typical visually impaired child, nor there is any single factor that produces such variation in abilities and characteristics.

Therefore, if there is a key word to characterise visually impaired population it is heterogeneity or lack of simple characterisation. The question now arises where does these extra heterogeneity comes from ? First, variation may result from other disabilities such as mental retardation. Second, there may be a set of important status variables such as Educational level, age. Thirdly, age of onset of impairment. But there may be another category of variables which is under potential control. These include environment in which the visually impaired child is raised and the characteristics of

learning environment. Each of these questions is potentially important but only partially understood. Therefore, there is a need to understand these variables more clearly.

Educationally it has serious implications. Educators should not assume that visual impairment is a simple and a unitary condition and that visually impaired children should be treated alike. In stead, educators must indicate full awareness of existence and significance population heterogeneity and should tailor educational approaches to the needs of each individual (Warren, 1977, 1978).

A considerable volume of research has produced a useful picture of development of visually impaired children. It indicates that blind children are not very much capable of sensory compensation. They lack discriminating ability, and functional use of informations. But there is evidence of focal sustained attention particularly auditory attention. Although the blind children have tactual perception but they lack conceptual development of spatial relation.

Vision is a very important source of information for cognitive and intellectual functioning. It forms as a integrity bridge between receipt of information and acquisition of information. Thus, visual impairment undoubtedly make a course of cognitive development potentially more difficult. Therefore, intellectual characteristics are likely to display discontinuity.

From another point of view research on visually impaired has been from a comparative point of view, very rarely, rather insignificantly the blind as a group has been studied providing a cross sectional developmental comparison. In stead of highlighting how a blind child progresses or functions over the years, the trend has been how does he compare with the sighted children. The purpose here is not to compare with others but intragroup similarities and differences when they grow chronologically and educationally.

The comparative approach is based on the assumption that the sighted child provides a suitable yardstick against which to evaluate the development of visually impaired child. This lead to the usual rationale that such an understanding of differences would lead to introducing an intervention to bridge the differences between the sighted and visually impaired children. Such a conception is terribly misleading because no research has shown that if such a goal is feasible in spite of intensive research (Fraiberg, Smith & Adelson, 1969).

There is no logic in thinking that the developmental lag is to be avoided because the development of visually impaired child occurs under a different set of circumstances than that of the sighted child. Hence, to compare the sighted children with visually impaired children on a developmental scale would be an inappropriate measure. It may be for this reason that intervention programmes do not lead to expected effectiveness.

A more suitable concept is one which evaluates the actual development of visually impaired children against the optimal development of visually impaired children. Such an objective will be served by the investigation of variation in the development of visually impaired children, together with the factors associated with such functioning. Even this approach is considered dangerous if heterogeneity of the population is not fully considered. Blind children may have different constellations. These are some of the cautions which should influence research in the area of visually impaired. But an understanding of the characteristics at different levels of age/education, their comparisons, inter-relationships, and structure would obviously contribute to a more clear understanding than sighted and non-sighted comparisons.

In fact, much of the literature on cognitive (Intellectual development) is pessimistic in finding that visually impaired children exhibit distinct developmental lags when compared to sighted children of comparable age. It is rather optimistic that there are many visually impaired children whose cognitive skills are impressive indeed, whether or not they fall into the sighted time-table. Further, optimization of the intellectual skills are possible if carried on a long-term scale. But the appropriate yardstick is not the norms of sighted children.

The question of how best to assess the visually impaired child has not been answered. The most common use of verbal test of IQ are the interim Hayes-Binet and the verbal scales of the WISC. Several variations on the Stanford Binet test have been normed on visually impaired samples, while the verbal scales of the WISC are typically used in a relatively straight forward fashion, without separate norming for visually impaired children. The results obtained from two tests are quite comparable (Gilbert & Rubin, 1965).

Both these tests suffer from the failure to evaluate effectively the performance aspect of intelligence that are normally tapped by the WISC test for the sighted child. Many attempts have been made to provide assessment vehicles for performance aspects of IQ ranging from the use of finger maze tests (Merry & Merry, 1934) to the fullfledged development of an adaptation of the Koh's Block Test for visually impaired children (Ohwaki, Tanno, Ohwaki, Harin, Hayasaka, & Miyake, 1960). Generally speaking, progress in this area has suffered from insufficient development of any one of the various tests available and insufficiently sensitive norming procedures for any of the tests.

Further, a question has been raised about the adequacy of the traditional approaches to intelligence testing as applied to visually impaired children. For example, Newland (1970) differentiates between product, which reflects

primarily achievement, and process, which reflects the psychological operations fundamental to learning. Binet and the WISC tests evaluate Blind Learning Aptitude Test (BLAT) which was designed by Newland to evaluate process, or learning aptitude, a dimension that is more closely consonant with the notion of intelligence as potential for learning or adaptation to environmental demand.

It is impossible to make meaningful statements about the relative IQ levels of sighted and visually impaired children of comparable ages and backgrounds. Test for sighted children rely heavily on vision, both in content and in administration. Much of the material is thus, inappropriate for the visually impaired in its regular form. Comparison of visually impaired and sighted children on the verbal scales, excluding as inappropriate items that require visual experience for response, does not constitute a satisfactory comparison of intelligence, since, the performance aspects are still omitted. Although several tests have been developed to tap aspects of performance IQ with visually impaired children, administration of such tests to blind folded sighted children in their tactual form is inappropriate for comparative purposes, since sighted children do not typically perform haptic tests without vision and would be at a disadvantage that would probably depress their performance artificially.

In short, it is probably impossible to make direct comparisons of visually impaired and sighted children an

identical instruments. The very issue of comparison is a false one. There is no real reason to make such comparisons, and effort should not be devoted to them. However, it is an interesting question whether the IQ tests that are used with visually impaired children evaluate them in a way that is comparable to the evaluation of sighted children. It is therefore, necessary to measure intelligence using tests exclusively meant for blind children.

It is more important to exercise caution in the interpretation and use of IQ scores with the visually impaired child, given the immense heterogeneity within the population of visually impaired children and given the need for individual tailoring of educational and other programs for the child. In particular, it would seem most inappropriate to use the results of IQ tests, with the visually impaired child to establish any kind of even rough approximation of a predicted "highest level of attainment". There is simply not enough known about intelligence itself or about the effective assessment of it to use the results of intelligence tests in any way that might forecast opportunities for an individual child.

Personality development may represent another area of concern in the characteristics of blind children. Visual impairment may heavily influence personality and socialisation characteristics. Therefore, the course of personality development may be somewhat different for visually impaired children. Since personality develops through an interaction process, it is essential that how the blind children are perceived by

themselves and by others, the ways in which they attribute causality to themselves and the extent to which they are self-dependent, are of significance in understanding the structure of personality, the relationship between different variables etc. Are there any cluster ?

Studies have shown (Schindele, 1974); McGuinness, 1970) increased social adjustment of visually handicapped in regular schools in comparison to residential schools. Moreover, there was a strong positive correlation between social adjustment and intelligence. More intelligent students are more likely to be successful in these efforts (Schindele, 1974). How does it hold good when nearly 100 percent institutions, however less they may be, are of residential character, until just recently.

One of the characteristics sometimes attributed to visually impaired children is, a relative dependence on other people as opposed to a personal independence. Sandler (1963) sees this pattern of passivity as a necessary concomitant of the impairment of vision. There is also evidence from a variety of studies using various personality inventories (Petrucci, 1953; Imamura, 1965; Wilson, 1967; Fraiberg, 1975) that visually impaired adolescents tend to be more dependent and less assertive than their sighted counterparts. Dependency behaviour is quite suitable for visually impaired children in certain situations. For adaptive purposes, dependency behaviour is a more desirable trait for blind children than sighted individuals. Dependency behaviour has a survival value for blind children. How far studies show such facts are yet to be observed. Closely related to such aspects are neuroticism and extraversion.

Attribution of responsibility and achievement motivations describe a person's perception. These are also related to self-concept, passivity, dependence. Land and Vineberg (1965) conducted a study on attribution of responsibility blind children and found them to be fairly external and there was no difference between the blind children of residential and integrated setting. Heterogeneity was also seen in this dimension of personality i.e. some are highly internal which is quite interesting. But further research is necessary about the developmental dynamics of the acquisition of locus of control, what is the developmental course and what is the functional significance of internal responsibility on every day behaviour. Same thing is true for achievement orientations of blind children, the area in which studies are lacking.

From the educational achievement and adjustment points of view the visually impaired child is gradually getting a renewed interest in the light of mainstreaming research. However, whether the residential setting is appropriate or not for educational achievement of blind children has to be analysed in terms of the statusquo and considered for providing better educational experience. McGuinness (1970) found higher social maturity scores in integrated settings. Not much concentration has been in the area of educational attainment. Comparison of overall performances between integrated and residential school setting is entirely a different dimension but whether a residential setting promotes academic achievement and if so, what are the possible factors. Such knowledge is essential to be ascertained before one visualises educational programmes for the visually handicapped.

What seems from the above discussions and reasoning that an understanding of blind children is essential with regard to their personality structure extensive enough to include different dimensions of behaviour and examine its functional relationships with each other. This will contribute to our understanding of blind children as an independent group in spite of the available research on comparative data. Appropriate assessment and analysis is therefore a major challenge in case of blind children. Otherwise why at all assess. In short, the sighted and visually impaired comparison is rejected and the group-normed assessment is acceptable for visually impaired children.

The present study therefore based its rationale in certain conceptual consensus : variables to be measured, the procedure of testing without bias to visually impairment, the rejection comparative studies on the sighted and the blind, and the functional utility of the variables and visual impairment on general behaviour, personality and achievement of blind children on a developmental perspective.

The problem therefore is to investigate the personality structure of blind children reading in residential schools as a function of their educational level, observe group differences if any, and find out the pattern of inter-relationships between different variables. It is believed that analysis of such characteristics would enable us to know whether the blind child is simply a regular child but unable to see or he has a different set of developmental characteristics that gives him a special status, by using more precise psychoeducational procedures of assessment.