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Visually Impaired Individuals' Perspectives on Obtaining and Maintaining Employment

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Abstract

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MS, Mercy College, 2007

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Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The employment rate among people with visual impairment is very low compared to sighted individuals. Negative attitudes, stereotypes, and misconceptions are held against people with visual impairment by employers, family members, and the general public. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of 10 people with visual impairment regarding challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment. A transcendental phenomenological conceptual framework was used to guide the study. Data from semistructured interviews were coded and categorized to identify themes. Results revealed 5 essential themes, which showed to be barriers to employment. The themes are: travel difficulties, closed-minded employers, lack of support, lack of accommodations, and job search difficulties. Results also showed a high level of discouragement among individuals with visual impairment regarding interest in seeking employment. Findings may be used to promote awareness and provide insights among employers and the general public to support individuals with visual impairment in seeking and maintaining employment.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family: my husband, Milton Donaldson, and my two daughters, Annecia and Abigail Donaldson. Your words of encouragement and push for tenacity have motivated me. A special thanks for being there for me throughout the entire doctoral process and for being my cheerleaders. I also dedicate this dissertation to my church friends who have supported me throughout this process. I appreciate all your prayers. I also dedicate my dissertation to my mother Aldith Brown, my father Lloyd Brown, and my two sisters, Traceyan Mendez and Karla Brown, for your encouragement and for teaching me that even the largest task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Employment is an indicator of success for adults, and it ensures a person's survival (Zhou, Smith, Parker, & Griffin-Shirley, 2013). Individuals with visual impairments experience a higher rate of unemployment and underemployment compared to individuals who are not visually impaired (Zhou et al., 2013). Visual impairment continues to increase among people in the United States (National Eye Institute [NEI], 2008). Reinhardt, Boerner, and Horowitz (2009) and Grant, Seiple, and Szlyk (2011) indicated that research has shown that 16.5 million Americans age 45 years and older are affected by visual impairment, and this number is expected to double by 2030. Visual impairment can have a profound effect on the quality of life of people who are visually impaired, affecting them physically and psychologically and interfering with other daily activities. Kaldenberg (2011) mentioned that visual impairment can cause a significant impact on people's ability to participate in their occupation of choice and can cause barriers to employment. The unemployment rate of people with disabilities including visual impairment has been out of proportion to the general community despite federal goals and mandates to ameliorate the problem (Strobel, Fossa, Arthanat, & Brace, 2006). Understanding the challenges that people with visual impairment encounter in obtaining and maintaining employment is essential because it will bring awareness to counselors, counselor educators, employers, and other stakeholders. That awareness may spur appropriate provisions for visually impaired individuals to successfully obtain and maintain employment, and may increase the employment rate among the visually

impaired population. This chapter includes the background of the study followed by the problem statement, purpose of the study, research question, framework of the study, nature of the study, terms and definitions, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background of the Study

The National Eye Institute (NEI) defined vision impairment as the better eye having a visual acuity of 20/200 or worse even with eyeglasses (Zambelle-Werner, Crews, & Friedman, 2012). According to Hans-Werner (2013), visual impairment is considered the second most common disability for middle-age and older adults. Vision impairment can result from a number of things such as macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, age-related eye diseases, strokes, and accidents (Friedman, 2008). Vision impairment affects more than one million Americans age 40 and older (Berger, 2012). The NEI found that more than 3.6 million older Americans are visually impaired including those with total blindness (Friedman, 2008). According to Friedman (2008), the number of people in the United States who suffer from vision loss continues to increase, and vision impairment is considered one of the most feared disabilities.

Individuals can experience many negative effects from vision impairment. For example, vision problems can negatively affect quality of life and lower morale for people who are visually impaired (Thurston, 2010). Berger (2012) indicated that vision impairment can negatively influence an individual's daily activities. Research studies showed that people with vision impairment are also at risk for depression and physical problems (Merkel, 1993; Rees, Fenwick, & Keefe, 2011; Senra, Vieira, Nicholls, & Leal,

2013). Boerner and Wang (2010) indicated that physical problems may create difficulties in pursuing careers, parenting, and meeting demands of relationships and family. Visual impairment can also interfere with the ability to gain independence and to maintain an active lifestyle. Vision impairment is a chronic condition that may impede relationships and life goals (Shu-Wen, 2008). Senra, Oliverira, and Leal (2011) mentioned that vision impairment may be a reason to stop working and may cause a significant loss of independence.

Vision impairment, which includes low vision and blindness, presents a significant burden not only to the person being affected but also to the national economy (NEI, 2008). According to Goleman (2009), studies have shown that unlike other individuals with another disability, people who are visually impaired have more difficulty in obtaining employment. DeMario (1992) indicated that many individuals with vision impairment have been unemployed or underemployed in the labor work force. Statistics have shown that only 33% of individuals who are visually impaired between the ages of 16 and 64 were in the labor force and only 20% were employed full-time (DeMario, 1992). The unemployment statistics for this population are also reflected in their reported poverty rates (Durr, 2008). For example, the poverty rates among people in the U.S. with vision impairments are 23%, which is double the poverty rate for people who are not visually impaired (Durr, 2008). Unemployment and poverty can create a burden on the national economy, and for the visually impaired population this can be a greater impact.

Professionals in the field of vision rehabilitation have recognized the lack of opportunity for work for individuals with visual impairment (Cavanaugh & Rogers, 2002). According to Zhou et al. (2013), employment is necessary to ensure survival.

Shaw, Gold, and Wolffe (2007) indicated that not working could affect a person's self-esteem and personality, increase feelings of hostility, and induce dependent relationships. According to Shaw et al. (2007), the American Foundation for the Blind found that the employment status of people who are visually impaired is a major concern for practitioners and scholars in the field of vocational rehabilitation and education because only approximately 32% of the individuals are employed. In addition, Cavanaugh and Rogers (2002) said employment remains an integral goal for some people who are visually impaired in the United States. Williams, Sabata, and Zolna (2006) found that as the workforce ages and people continue to desire to work, accommodation is necessary to sustain gainful employment. Gamble, Dowler, and Orslene (2006) indicated that accommodations such as assistive technology are an essential part of the rehabilitation plan for individuals who are visually impaired and want to work. However, accommodations can be ineffective if they are not applied appropriately or if the workers choose not to use them. Proper use of accommodations can ultimately lead to successful, competitive employment (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009).

Problem Statement

Overall, research has shown that people who are visually impaired tend to be at a disadvantage in terms of employment (DeMario, 1992; Durr, 2008; Jacko, Cobo, Cobo, Fleming, & Moore, 2010; Reinhardt, 2001). Two thirds of adults with vision impairment are not working, whereas 79% of the same age group who are not visually impaired are employed (Durr, 2008). According to Durr (2008), the employment rates among individuals who are visually impaired are decreasing as compared to individuals who are not visually impaired.

The need to explore the challenges that people with vision impairment encounter in regard to employment is imperative because many of these individuals are struggling. Furthermore, some employers hold unconstructive thoughts, stereotypes, and misconceptions against people with vision impairment, and the negative connotations can cause individuals to lose self-concept, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction and prevent them from obtaining an appropriate job to earn a living (Jacko et al., 2010). The lack of employment has economic consequences for this population, including poverty, which may lead to psychological disturbances and dysfunction that may affect obtaining and maintaining employment. When reviewing the literature, I noticed a gap in the lived experiences of people with vision impairment encounter regarding the challenges of obtaining and maintaining employment. Little is known about why some people who are visually impaired are unable to obtain and maintain employment. Counselor educators who teach and advocate for this population are limited by this dearth of information. As a result, counselor educators are unable to effectively train counselors in the area of career counseling to assist individuals who are visually impaired. Counselor educators are unable to promote positive social change and awareness regarding this population if they do not understand the barriers experienced by the visually impaired population in relation to employment and the general public.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of people with visual impairment who are seeking and maintaining employment. Many studies were conducted about the psychological effects and challenges people with visual impairment face, but a more in-depth understanding of

perceptions related to obtaining and maintaining employment is necessary. With additional insight regarding the lived experiences of this population, counselor educators may be better prepared to create awareness of this population among employers and the general public and promote social change by breaking barriers, misconceptions, and stereotypes.

I used a qualitative approach with a transcendental phenomenological design. The participants for this study were 10 individuals who met the inclusion criteria: (a) ages 18 through 60, (b) have had visual impairments within the last 10 years, (c) curremtly not working, but have had a job, (d) are currently seeking or not seeking employment, and (e) are English speaking. The research study was conducted at the New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) located in New York.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment?

Phenomenological Framework

I used a phenomenological framework to understand human experiences (see Moerer-Urdahi & Creswell, 2004). Transcendental phenomenology is based on the notion of putting aside all preconceived ideas and seeing the phenomenon objectively so that the true meaning of the phenomenon can emerge (Sheehan, 2014). Transcendental phenomenology is like perceiving the information for the first time. Transcendental phenomenology is also based on the principles identified by Husserl (1931) and has been translated into qualitative methods by Moustakas (1994). The essence of phenomenology

is meaning; researchers collect data to explicate the meaning of human experience (Moerer-Urdahi & Creswell, 2004).

Collecting descriptive information from others on a phenomenon is a way of obtaining meaningful information about the phenomenon (Englander, 2012). People with visual impairment encounter challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment, and collecting information about this phenomenon can create insight on how people with visual impairment can overcome these challenges and become more independent and successful. There are certain needs of the visually impaired populations that must be met for them to become independent and successful, such as accommodations, social support, psychological support, vocational and educational trainings, and work readiness trainings. Visually impaired people who are seeking employment need some kind of accommodation to successfully obtain and maintain employment. This accommodation can help the visually impaired person meet workplace demands and help them become more independent and successful; therefore, exploring the lived experience of people with visual impairment is meaningful and useful.

There are certain myths and misconceptions about the visually impaired that are held by people such as family members, the general public, and employers. It is imperative for them to understand vision impairment because their lack of support can influence the individuals who are visually impaired and affect their ability to meet their needs (Moore, Graves, & Patterson, 2007). In my study, I focused on describing the processes by which meanings are created. Working in the field with people of different cultures gave me the opportunity to view their experiences from different perspectives, link them together, and identify the meanings of their lived experiences. I got the

opportunity to gather information about the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals and understand how they can gain independence and success based on the description of what they have experienced. In addition, I got the opportunity to see how each person experiences the same phenomenon. The individuals who experience the phenomenon may be the best people to reveal the meaning of their experiences and express their challenges.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative with a transcendental phenomenological design. The phenomenological design was based on Moustakas's (1994) conception of describing the essence of the experience. Qualitative researchers seek to build a holistic, narrative description of a social or cultural phenomenon that is predicated on underlying assumptions and perspectives (Creswell, 2007). According to Rudestam and Newton (2007), phenomenological inquiry focuses on describing and elucidating the meanings of human experiences. Moustakas's (1994) approach was to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of a phenomenon. In addition, Patton (2015) indicated that phenomenological researchers study how people describe things and experience them through their senses. One of the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology is that individuals can know what they experience only by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken their conscious awareness (Patton, 2015).

Definition of Terms

Accommodations: Something supplied for convenience or to satisfy one's need and to reduce functional difficulties with functional limitations (Williams et al., 2006).

Activities of daily living: The tasks of everyday life, such as working, cooking, and cleaning (Heyl & Hans-Werner, 2007).

Assistive technology: Equipment or products that improve functional capabilities of the person who is visually impaired (Gamble et al., 2006).

Employment: The act of engaging in an activity in the labor force (Barnow, 2014).

Job access with speech (JAWS): A screen reader developed for computer users whose vision loss prevents them from seeing screen content or navigating with a mouse. It provides speech and Braille output (Inkster, Newman, Weiss, & Yeadon, 1997).

Legal blindness: Visual acuity with best correction in the better eye worse than or equal to 20/200 or a visual field extent of less than 20 degrees in diameter (NEI, 2008).

Unemployed: The condition of not working in the labor force (Barnow, 2014).

Vision impairment: Having 20/40 or worse vision in the better eye even with glasses (NEI, 2008).

Visual rehabilitation: The act of training visually impaired individuals to perform essential skills for activities of daily living (Southall & Wittich, 2012).

Zoomtext: A magnification and screen reading software for the visually impaired to help them see more clearly (Inkster et al., 1997).

Diabetic Retinopathy: is due to diabetes and typically affects the blood circulation of the retina, which causes blotchy vision (NEI, 2008).

Glaucoma: is when the pressure inside the eye is elevated and can cause damage to the optic nerve, which results in damage to peripheral vision (NEI, 2008).

Retinities Pigmentosa: is a degeneration of pigment in the eye that is needed to absorb light and create visual images, leading to tunnel vision and night blindness (NEI, 2008).

Cataracts: is the clouding of the eye's lens that causes loss of vision (NEI, 2008).

Assumptions

One of the assumptions for this study was that the participants would represent an accurate sample of the unemployed visually impaired population. Another assumption was that the results of the study were accurately analyzed. The final assumption was that the participants fully understood the interview questions and answered them honestly and to the best of their ability.

Delimitations

The study was limited to participants at the NYSCB. Individuals who were working or who had never worked were not included. Participants were adults ages 18 to 60.

Limitations

Qualitative studies usually involve a small sample size, which may be considered a limitation because it may not be an accurate representation of the visually impaired population. Another limitation was my presence as the researcher during the data gathering process may have affected the participants' responses. My presence was unavoidable due to the nature of this qualitative research study.

Significance of the Study

This study was unique because it focused on the lived experiences related to obtaining and maintaining employment from the perspectives of the visually impaired.

The results of this study may provide insight and promote awareness of the visually impaired population and the challenges they encounter in relation to employment. Employers and the public may gain a better understanding of how to provide support to the visually impaired population. Furthermore, counselors and counselor educators may help break the barriers of negative perceptions of the visually impaired. The results may provide knowledge to counselors and counselor educators to educate employers on how to improve retention of individuals who are visually impaired. The results may also reveal risk factors associated with low employment rates among this population. Results may be used to increase the level of functioning and independence of the visually impaired. Individuals who are visually impaired may be more inclined to seek and maintain their employment and as a result may become independent and live a better quality of life.

Summary

Chapter 1 included an introduction and background of the study. I also presented the problem statement, purpose of the study, significance of the study, phenomenological framework, social change implications, assumptions, limitations, and definition of terms. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem was the increased rate of unemployment among people who are visually impaired. There appear to be challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment for people who are visually impaired; furthermore, their daily activities such as seeking and maintaining a job can be negatively affected (Barnow, 2014; Crudden, 2002; Kaldenberg, 2011). According to Durr (2008), the employment rates among individuals who are visually impaired are decreasing compared to individuals who are not visually impaired. Two thirds of adults with a vision impairment are not working, whereas 79% of adults who are not visually impaired are employed (Durr, 2008). Only 37% of people who are visually impaired are employed, and only 13% of visually impaired people who are unemployed are actively pursuing work compared to 79% of the general population who are employed (BLS, 2014). The population of people with vision impairment has traditionally been underrepresented in the work force; preparing this population for employment may be a solution to this problem (DeMario, 1992).

People who are visually impaired tend to be at a disadvantage in terms of employment (DeMario, 1992; Durr, 2008; Jacko et al., 2010; Reinhardt, 2001). It is imperative that researchers explore the challenges that people with vision impairment encounter because many of these individuals are struggling due to having to rely on others to meet basic needs, as well as suffering loss of their independence after being diagnosed with vision impairment. Furthermore, some employers have negative thoughts, stereotypes, and misconceptions about people with vision impairment. These negative perceptions can cause visually impaired individuals to lose self-concept, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction and prevent them from obtaining an appropriate job to earn a living

(Jacko et al., 2010). I was not able to locate any studies that directly addressed the lived experiences of visually impaired people in relation to obtaining and maintaining employment. The purpose of this qualitative study was to bridge the gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals regarding obtaining and maintaining employment. The lack of literature in this area presents a challenge for counselors and counselor educators. Counselor educators are not prepared to advocate for this population and are underprepared to teach career counseling techniques relative to this population, such as identifying various levels of needs, skills, and attitudes before entering the work force. Also, counselors are unable to effectively promote social change and an awareness of this population if they do not understand barriers of visually impaired individuals.

Finding a part-time or full-time job is more difficult for people who are visually impaired than for people who are not visually impaired. According to the 2000 census, unemployment rates for people with disabilities are higher than for those in the general population (Williams et al., 2006). People may choose to work for various reasons, such as making money, feeling that they are making a difference, feeling independent, valuing the status of being employed, helping to reduce stigma, or feeling that they have an active role in society (Southall & Wittich, 2012). Understanding the impact of visual impairment on employment and other factors from the individuals' perspective in obtaining and maintaining employment is essential.

This chapter presents a review of literature that focuses on vision impairment and employment. I examine studies on workplace accommodations, social and psychological challenges of visual impairment, adaptation of visual impairment, effects of visual

impairment, assessment tools and preparedness for employment, and unemployment of individuals who are visually impaired. The literature was retrieved using various search engines, which are highlighted in this chapter. I also explain the phenomenological framework of Husserl's principles (Moran, 2012).

Literature Search Strategies

The search of literature was conducted through numerous channels. I searched peer-reviewed journals through databases such as PsycArticles, Academic Search Premier, PsycInfo, ERIC (Educational Resource Information Center), Sage Full-Text, American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), National Eye Institute (NEI), and the Census Bureau. I also used the Google Scholar search engine. Several key words were used to locate articles and information: *employment and vision loss*, *employment and visual impairment*, *employment after vision loss*, *low vision*, *blindness*, *vision rehabilitation*, *coping with vision loss*, *coping with vision impairment*, *psychological and social effects of vision loss*, *assistive devices and vision loss*, *adaptive technology and vision loss*, *depression and visual impairment*, *family support*, *social support*, *employment participation rate*, *labor force*, *coping disability*, *quality of life*, *mental health*, *visual functioning*, *accommodations*, *activities of daily living*, *employment rate*, *under-employment*, and *education and vision loss*. Most of the articles were less than 10 years old; however, there were a few older articles that provided a historical foundation of vision impairment.

Phenomenological Framework

Some of the challenges of the visually impaired population include lack of accommodations, lack of social support, lack of psychological support, lack of vocational

and educational training, lack of work readiness training, developing self-efficacy, developing work motivation, and traveling independently. To understand the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment, I used the phenomenological framework (Moustakas, 1994). Employing this framework allowed me to explore and understand the lived experiences of visually impaired people and to gain insight on how to increase their independence and employment rate. This framework also helped me to understand why people made certain decisions for themselves in relation to their challenges. The sources addressed in the literature review are relevant to the phenomenological framework because individuals who are visually impaired have challenges that prevent them from meeting their life goals and becoming successful in life. Overcoming these challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment will give people with visual impairment the potential to achieve, the ability to successfully contribute to society, and a feeling of self-worth and purpose in life (Steger, Fraizer, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006).

People with visual impairment need a supportive environment to be successful in obtaining and maintaining employment (Crudden, 2002). Describing the experiences of the participants helped me to better understand what major challenges existed, how they can overcome such challenges, and how to eliminate the challenges that people with visual impairment encounter. For example, visual impairment may impact a child's ability to meet developmental milestones, including interacting with others and learning skills (Kaldenberg, 2011), which affects the child's feelings of value, purpose, efficacy, and self-worth and may affect his or her ability to obtain and maintain employment as an adult. Therefore, it is imperative for individuals with visual impairments to get the

support they need from a young age for them to be successful. Overcoming the challenges faced by people with visual impairments also requires a focused team of researchers and counselors to meet their occupational needs. Encouragement and support from intervening counselors early in the life of a visually impaired individual can lead to greater confidence, increased effort, and ultimately greater success in obtaining and maintaining employment (Kelly, 2011).

Counselors can assist visually impaired individuals with their challenges based on the descriptions of the lived experiences presented by the participants, which can lead to self-fulfillment and successful employment. Crudden (2002) indicated that people who are visually impaired who successfully obtain and maintain employment have overcome a multitude of employment barriers. Fireison and Moore (1998) conducted a study with 270 adults who became visually impaired by age six and received various rehabilitative services while attending elementary school. The results showed that these individuals demonstrated better Braille literacy, earned a higher salary, experienced more job satisfaction, and encountered less challenges to being employed later in life than those who did not receive rehabilitative services at a young age.

Historical Relationship Between Employment and Visual Impairment

For the current study, it was important to consider the historical relationship between employment and visual impairment. Crudden and Hayne (1999) theorized that there are employment differences among individuals with congenital and adventitious vision loss. Congenital blindness was defined as blindness occurring before 2 years of age, and adventitious blindness was defined as blindness occurring after age five (Crudden & Hayne, 1999). Crudden and Hayne performed a study with 413 people who

were either congenital or adventitious blind at National Industries for the Blind. Most of the participants were male, White, and single. The study included a survey instrument designed to assess job satisfaction, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of working conditions. A two-group multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on four dependent variables including hours worked per week, hourly wages, job satisfaction, and the age onset of blindness (congenital or adventitious). The level of statistical significance was set at .05. The Hotelling's T2 criterion was used, and results indicated that the combined set of dependent variables was not different for the age at onset of vision loss, Hotelling's T2 =.014, $F(4,426)=1.49$, $p = .205$. Crudden and Hayne concluded that there were no statistical differences in employment of people with congenital or adventitious vision loss. People who were congenitally blind worked a comparable number of hours (x-37), earned just as much money (x = 5.32), were as satisfied (x = 3.60), and retained their jobs as long (x-11.44) as persons who were adventitiously blind (Crudden & Hanye, 1999).

Even though Crudden and Hanye (1999) found no significant employment difference among people with congenital and adventitious blindness, a more recent study by McDonnall and Crudden (2009) addressed four factors that may influence the success of employment among the visually impaired. The four factors were work experience, academic competence, self-determination, and use of assistive technology. McDonnall and Crudden found that work experience during high school, such as summer jobs, and part-time employment were associated with successful transition of youths with vision impairment to employment. Hands-on experience provided an opportunity to practice job skills and learn about career paths (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009). Academic competence

was also associated with better transition outcomes for youths with visual impairment, and educational programs that emphasize activities of daily living at the expense of academics can negatively impact academic achievement (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009). According to McDonnall and Crudden, self-determination received a significant amount of attention in regards to the transition of youth with visual impairment. Self-determination can be defined as the ability to make informed and positive choices about life events and is usually learned through life experiences and is associated with successful transition outcomes for youths with visual impairments (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009). Another factor that McDonnall and Crudden described is the use of assistive technology, which is a compensatory tool that allows a person with vision impairments to perform tasks that are routinely performed by sighted people. The importance of assisted technology for the success of young adults with visual impairments in college has been documented by researchers (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009).

This study by McDonnall and Crudden (2009) included 41 transition-age youths with visual impairments ages 14 to 21. Most participants were male and Caucasian and a small percentage were Hispanic. Data were collected through personal interviews and abstracts from vocational rehabilitation case records that were obtained from Cornell University's website for Longitudinal Study of the Vocational Rehabilitation services Program over a 3-year period. Univariate analysis was conducted, Fisher's exact test was used for categorical variables, and an alpha level of .10 was used to determine statistical significance for all the tests. The results showed that work experience did not reach statistical significance ($p > 5.07$), but academic competence was significantly associated

with employment in youth whose cases were closed successfully; such youth had higher

achievement in reading t(12.4) = 3.62, *p* = .003 and mathematics t(16) = 2.16, *p* = .046.

Self-determination and use of technology were also significantly associated with

employment at the closure of a case (*p* > .10). Findings indicated that self-determination

is a key for successful employment.

Like McDonnall and Crudden (2009), Shaw et al. (2007) also focused on

employment among youth with visual impairments. The employment status of youth was

a major concern to practitioners and scholars in the field of vocational studies and

education of people with visual impairments (Shaw et al., 2007). Shaw et al. (2007)

conducted a quantitative study that was part of a larger project that addressed the daily

lives of youth within four domains of life: vocational, social and leisure, academic, and

activities of daily living. The study focused on the findings of the larger project in the

vocational domain, specifically the work-related experience of youth and aspects of their

job-search endeavors. A total of 328 visually impaired participants were involved in the

study, and their ages ranged from 15 to 30 years old. Of the 328 participants, 131 were

totally blind and 197 had low vision. The participants were predominantly male and were

restricted to youth who were able to communicate in English or French and had no

secondary disabilities or health conditions. The participants were from various ethnic and

cultural backgrounds. The majority of the participants were randomly selected from the

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) database and the other participants were

recruited from W. Ross MacDonald School for the Blind in Ontario and the Atlantic

Provinces Special Education Authority in Nova Scotia. A lifestyle questionnaire was

utilized which included four items in lifestyle domains of vocational, social, academic,

and activities of daily living. The hypotheses were evaluated with t-tests and correlation analysis, and Chi-Square analysis showed that youths with low vision were more likely than those who were totally blind to have worked for pay ($X2=[1,N=321]=10.215$, $p<.001$). Overall, only 29% were currently employed and the result showed that youths with low vision were more likely than those who were totally blind to be currently employed ($X2=[1, N=321]=10.215$, $p<.001$). This study found that people with visual impairment do not appear to have long-term vocational success and supports the importance of the current study.

Working-age individuals including youth with visual impairments lag behind in their participation in the workplace (Zuckerman, 2004). Kelly (2013) conducted a quantitative study to examine labor force participation rates among working-age individuals with visual impairments. The participants' samples included working-age individuals between the ages of 16 and 64. Stratified random sampling methods were used to derive the participants' samples and reduce sampling error. The study was conducted for a period of four years, 2009 through 2012, and a total of 3,145 participants were selected from the Current Population Survey (CPS). CPS is a comprehensive source of employment data that is generated monthly by the Bureau of Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The data was collected voluntarily using a variety of self-reported data collection techniques including telephone, fax, internet, mail, and transcript. The result showed that less than half of working-age adults with visual impairments participated in the labor force as compared to the general working-age population. Also, the majority of the working-age individuals with visual impairments were not working or actively seeking work from 2009 through 2012. Furthermore, McCarty, Burgess, and Keeffe

(1999) conducted a quantitative study to describe the labor force status in Victorian Age Adults with vision impairment to see if there are any factors associated with unemployment and underemployment. The study consisted of 250 participants who were totally blind, of which 119 were males. The ages of the participants ranged from 19 to 59. All the participants were employed at some point in their lives, but only 149 were currently employed. Telephone interviews were conducted with each participant by trained interviewers. The results showed that employment service was under-used and the number of discouraged job seekers is high ($p>0.10$). This suggested that people who are visually impaired are not getting the encouragement and support they need to pursue employment; therefore, they appear to show a lack of interest in seeking employment services.

Two years later, Crudden (2002) conducted a qualitative case study to examine factors that influence the job retention of people with visual impairment. The study consisted of 10 participants, which included 7 males and 3 females. Some participants were completely blind and some had low vision. The participants' educational levels ranged from high school to graduate degrees. The researcher used content analysis to identify similarities and differences among the cases in terms of which factors influenced their job retention. The results showed that computer technology was a major negative influence and print access and technology were a source of stress for most participants. Subsequently, the significance of this result will negatively affect active participation in the labor market because many jobs require knowledge of computer and having print access only will be challenging for visual impaired population.

In 2013, Zhou, Smith, Parker, and Griffin-Shirley conducted an empirical, longitudinal quantitative study to explore the relationship between self-perceived computer competence and employment outcomes of transition-aged youths with visual impairments. The study was conducted from 2001 to 2005, compiling data on 200 in-school youths and 190 out of school youths, retrieved from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLST2) database. The youths' ages ranged from 13 to 16. In order for the youths to be eligible for the study they had to be enrolled in special education services for visual impairments, provide information on whether they had paid jobs in 2003 and 2004, and provide information on their perceptions of their own computer competence. The study used binomial logistic regression because it allowed the analyses of relationships between the independent variables and a dichotomous dependent variable. The results showed that both in-school and out-of-school youths with high self-perceived computer competence were significantly more likely to have paid jobs than those with a low self-perceived computer competence. The results also showed that the relationship between computer competence and visual impairment was significantly negative for both in-school youths (R=.09, T= -4.33, df=50, p=.000) and out-of-school youths (R=.11, T= -2.68, df=60, p=.009). The importance of this result is that visually impaired youths will need to be trained and gain computer competence in order to increase their chances of gaining vocational success.

Vocational placement services may help people who are visually impaired to be better prepared for employment success, which can strengthen the individuals' sense of control by increasing their sense of self-efficacy. Leonard, Allura, and Horowitz (1999) conducted a study focused on four objectives. The objectives were to determine the

current employment status of individuals who are visually impaired for an average of 2.5 years after being referred to vocational placement services, the factors predictive of employment, the factors predictive of job level, and the factors predictive of potential underemployment as measured by one's perceived match between one's abilities and job responsibilities. All participants were referred to vocational placement programs at the Lighthouse International between July 1, 1989 and June 30, 1994. The participants were 18 years old and older and were English speaking. Three hundred and thirty-seven consumers were eligible, however, only 167 consumers were available, while the others were not able to be reached by phone or the phone numbers were disconnected. The information gathered for this study came from 2 resources, which were structured telephone interviews and the Lighthouse Consumer Information System (CIS). The interviews were conducted by trained interns and volunteers. A coding manual was developed with strict coding guidelines in order to increase the reliability of coding. During the data analysis, Pearson correlations were conducted between the independent variables which were socio-demographic characteristics, social support, self-efficacy, work motivation, and services experience. The results indicated that the type of services variables and the number of hours in service variables were highly inter-correlated (X (12) = 40.3, $p < .05$), which means that employment status is associated with the bivariate level with greater self-efficacy, work motivation, and even higher education.

In addition, a ten-year quantitative study was conducted from 1997 to 2007 by Bell (2010) with individuals who were visually impaired (N=188,978) who applied for vocational rehabilitation services. Majority of the participants were females. Annual case closure data was obtained from all 50 states through the Rehabilitation Services

Administration (RSA) within the office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services under the United States Department of Education. The study utilized the RSA-911 data system for all analysis. The variables for the study included individuals who were unemployed at the time of application and remained unemployed at closure, lost employment or were employed at time of application but were unemployed at closure, retained employment, for example, were employed at application and remained employed at closure, and were unemployed at application, but became employed at case closure. In the results, Bell found that from 1997 to 2007, the vision rehabilitation consumers had an average employment rate of 31.79% which is considerably high compared to the employment rate in 1995 of 25.1%. However, even though there was an increase in the employment rate, it is still considerably low compared to the employment rate for people who are not visually impaired, which is approximately 79%. Although there have been many efforts to publicize the abilities of people with visual impairments and reduce barriers in the workforce, employment rates have not increased appreciably (Ajuwon et al., 2013). Furthermore, the impact of visual impairment can affect people in many ways, such as in their activities of daily living, physically, emotionally, and/or psychologically and as a result affect success in obtaining and maintaining employment.

The history among employment and visual impairment has shown barriers among working age individuals with vision impairments. The results of these studies indicated that vision impairment is a devastating disability that can lead to loss of employment. Furthermore, the studies have shown that successful employment is possible if rehabilitation is put into place, for example, rehabilitation can help to restore skills that

are needed to perform daily activities including mobility and seeking employment, and to restore quality of life.

Impact of Visual Impairment

Visual impairment can influence a person's ability to carry out a wide range of daily tasks such as reading, shopping, and working and, at the same time, it has been recognized that a person's quality of life involves other facets beyond task difficulty, such as independence autonomy, self-efficacy, and a sense of control over one's action and affairs. Montarzino, Ambrecht, Findlay, Hine, and Dhillon (2007) conducted a mixed method study with 66 participants who were visually impaired, which consisted of a mixture of those with low vision and those who are totally blind. The aim of the study was to identify the personal, environmental, and transportation factors that have an impact on visually impaired people's mobility and independence. At a low vision clinic, 66 patients were asked to complete a travel diary for the previous week, participate in an interview, and also complete a mobility questionnaire. A number of themes were explored in the qualitative part of the study such as travel patterns, changes in travel behaviors since they began to experience vision problems, travel routines in a typical week, and feelings and experiences when outside the home. The quantitative data from the questionnaire provided information on travel and mobility strategies, such as walking, buses, and taxis. The results showed that there is a significant difference across all acuity ranges at $p<.01$ and there is a significant reduction in bus use ($p = .01$) and walking ($p =.004$) due to eye sight problem. Based on the results, it appears that the inability to travel independently can interfere with employment status for people who are visually impaired.

Wright, McCarty, Burgess, and Keeffe (1999) conducted a quantitative study to examine the association between types of vision impairment and disability and the handicap or impact of vision loss on functioning. The study consisted of 250 participants, of which 130 were females. The participants were interviewed by phone for the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind Employment Survey. Questions were taken from the National Eye Institute Visual Function Questionnaire (NEI-VFQ). The questions included level of vision impairment on a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being completely blind and 10 being the best possible vision. Vision function items were related to household activities, personal care, mobility, social (home), social (public), and social (unfamiliar). The data was analyzed with SPSS version 8.0 using univariate analysis including chi-squared test. The results showed that a potential confounding effect of other disabilities on self-reported functioning (p-value of <0.05) was considered to be statistically significant. In addition, the results also showed that the number of years since the onset of vision impairment did not show any difference in the participants' functional tasks ($p>0.05$). This study showed that tremendous difficulties are experienced in everyday activities for the visually impaired population no matter what the type of visions loss is or when the vision loss started.

Likewise, Cimarolli, Boerner, Brennan-Ing, Reinhard, and Horowitz (2011) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study with the purpose of assessing and describing specific challenges that older adults with significant vision loss experienced due to age related macular degeneration in the aspects of functional, social, and psychological domains. The study consisted of 364 participants, age 65, with significant vision impairment. The study was conducted at a vision rehabilitation agency; however, the

interviews were conducted in the participants' homes by trained interviewers with a Master's degree in psychology or social work. The interview questions were open-ended and they assessed the challenges in functional, social, and psychological domains. The interviews were conducted at a baseline of one year and two years of the case being opened and were coded using a qualitative analytical approach and Cohen's kappa was used to evaluate inter-rater reliability. The results indicated that most participants faced a variety of challenges in all aforementioned domains ($p<0.05$); however, most challenges were in the functional domain ($p<0.001$). Over a two-year period, the functional challenges increased, social challenges remained the same, and psychological challenges decreased.

From these studies, I have learned that vision impairment can impede social participation and reduce the ability to remain independent with activities of daily living. These studies reviewed the impact of vision loss on daily activities and quality of life. The studies have shown that vision impairment has a significant effect on activities of daily living, such as resulting in poorer levels of functioning and increased symptoms of depression. In short, these studies showed that visually impaired youths face challenges of daily living. Likewise, visually impaired youths entering the workforce may encounter obstacles that may affect their level of functioning and induce dependent relationships. Therefore, for those entering the workforce, assistive technology and accommodations are imperative to increase levels of functioning and maintain independence with daily activities and quality of life, especially obtaining and maintaining employment.

Emotional/Psychological Impact Including Depression

Depression is common among people with vision impairment (Rees, Fenwick, & Keeffe, 2011); specifically, research has shown that people with vision impairment are at a greater risk of depression or depressive symptoms than people without visual impairments (Rees et al., 2011). Not working, or not working in a job for which one is qualified, can affect one's self-esteem, increase one's feelings of hostility, and induce dependent relationships (Shaw et al., 2007). Psychological challenges could prevent individuals who are visually impaired from meeting their full potential of self-esteem. Hans-Werner (2013) wrote an article on psychological challenges with people who are visually impaired. The article focused on psychological consequences of age-related vision impairment and how the consequences can become a significant component of efficient treatment and rehabilitation. The author introduced the field of Age-Related psycho-ophthalmology (APO) and discussed the important concepts and theories for a better understanding of adaptational processes in visually impaired older adults, such as everyday competence, cognitive functioning, social functioning, and depression. The author emphasized how cognitive status plays a crucial role for visual functioning. The author discussed in detail some of the major concepts, models, and theories for Age-Related psycho-ophthalmology, such as lifespan development orientation, self-regulatory competences, person-environment interactive views, and maintenance of and challenges related to well-being and cognitive functioning. Psycho-ophthalmology focused on the psychological issues that involved in the experience, behavioral, and emotional aspects of age-related visual impairment (Hans-Werner, 2013). In addition, ophthalmological treatment addresses the adjustment process**.** The author indicated that vision impairment

increases with age; nevertheless, severe and enduring vision loss may come as a surprise

for many individuals. Self-regulatory competences enable individuals with vision

impairment to adjust to critical life situations and achieve important life goals. Person-

environment interactive views help individuals to understand the day-to-day

consequences of vision impairment because vision impairments can bring challenges to

one's interaction with the environment. Finally, maintenance of, and challenges related to

well-being and cognitive functioning focus on the adaptational dynamics in individuals

who are visually impaired and are driven by human potential for habituation and

resilience. The article shows how lack of training, lack of support, lack of guidance, and

lack of confidence can negatively affect one's ability to reach life goals. It also

demonstrated useful and important models and theories to understand adaptational

processes of the visually impaired. Nevertheless, while the models and theories appeared

to be beneficial, the author believed that major subgroups of older adults with vision

impairment need to improve their psycho-social adaptation.

Thurston (2010) conducted a study that explored four factors that cause emotional

impact on individuals who lose their sight, which were mood, self-concept, social

connectedness, and loss. In addition, this mixed method study also aimed to explore

counseling experiences and needs of blind and partially sighted individuals. The study

consisted of 18 participants, of which, 11 were females, with an average age of 64. The

data was collected using mental health and social functioning sub-scales of the National

Eye Institute Visual Functioning Questionaire-25 and semi-structured interviews were

transcribed and analyzed using grounded theory. Some interviews were conducted face to

face and some were done by telephone, with the interviews lasting for 60 to 90 minutes.

The results indicated that individuals shared a common transitioning phase from having sight to being blind in areas such as diagnosis, deterioration of vision, and experiencing loss in different areas. Also, the individuals reported negative perceptions of counseling and loss of quality of life. Likewise, Crewe et al. (2011) completed a cross-sectional study that explored the interaction among vision impairment, perceived loss of quality of life and willingness to trade remaining life for vision gain. The study utilized two outcome measures, which are the impact of vision impairment profile quality of life assessment and time-trade-off evaluation. The study consisted of 156 participants, ages 19 to 97, who were randomly selected from the Western Australia Association for the Blind. The participants were pre-dominantly females. The results of the impact of vision impairment (IVI) questionnaire showed that the participants experienced high emotion (95% cl-30 to -3.8, $p = 0.012$) regarding the time trade off utility values (TTO-UVS), which means that the participants would trade the remainder of their lives for vision again. Participants also showed a significantly high rate of time trade-off for younger age groups, specifically age 40 and younger (TTOUVS, 95% cl 0.03 to 0.58, $p = 0.03$). The overall result showed that most participants reported being clinically depressed (95% cl-11.2 to -1.8, $p = 0.007$). According to Southall and Wittich (2012), individuals who are visually impaired can become depressed and this may negatively affect their ability to obtain and maintain employment. With the proposed study, I hope to document visually impaired participants lived experiences in regards to obtaining and maintaining employment and how psychological effects, such as depression, is or is not related to obtaining and maintaining employment. Several research studies have been conducted on visual impairment and its psychological effects.

Senra, Vieira, Nicholls, and Leal (2013) conducted a mixed-methods pilot study to explore if there are significant differences in the level of depression among adults with different vision loss experiences. The sample was composed of 38 participants, ranging in age from 20 to 65, who were recruited from two rehabilitation centers for people with vision impairment. The qualitative portion of the study focused on core themes of the adults' experiences of vision loss, while the quantitative portion focused on the level of depression and clinical data. The information was collected con-currently, analyzed separately, and then merged. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to explore the participants' experiences of vision loss and the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), which is a self-rating scale with a final score that ranges from 0 to 60, was used to assess depressive levels. Significant differences in levels of depression were identified between participants with differing levels of self-awareness ($p<0.05$; d=0.73) and participants with different perceptions of social support ($p<0.01$; d=1.099). In fact, the results showed that a higher level of depression ($p<0.05$) was identified in the participants who revealed greater self-awareness of impairment and inadequate social support. Nevertheless, no significant differences in levels of depression were found between participants with different types of visual impairments ($p>0.05$; d-0.17).

Nyman et al. (2012) found that people with visual impairment are more likely than sighted individuals to report impaired functioning, lower levels of participation in daily activities such as employment, social activities, lower levels of quality of life, anxiety and emotional distress, and depressive symptoms. Ballemans, Kempen, Ranchor, VanRens, Zylstra (2012) conducted a quantitative study to examine the impact of low

vision on the quality of life of people who are visually impaired including experiencing feelings of anxiety and depression and seeking rehabilitative services. The study consisted of 148 participants, ages 55 and older, who are visually impaired and who applied for low-vision rehabilitation services. The results showed that people with visual impairment reported poorer levels of functioning in activities of daily living, symptoms of depression, and feelings of anxiety ($p< .001$). The study concluded that visual impairments have a substantial negative impact on activities of daily living, symptoms of depression, and feelings of activities. Similarly, Berger (2012) in her study aimed to understand the importance for vision impaired individuals to participate in leisure activities. The study consisted of 26 adults, ages 70 and older, with vision impairment who perceived themselves to be in good to excellent health. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observation. The results showed that the participants had challenges, due to both personal and environmental factors, in participating in leisure activities. Some of the challenges included having feelings of vulnerability, struggling to get to places of importance, lacking assertiveness, having decreased energy, and having feelings of anxiety.

A qualitative cross-sectional study was conducted by Boerner, Wang, and Cimarolli (2006) to investigate the extent, nature, and implications of life changes related to functional loss for people who are visually impaired in the following four domains: goals, self-views, world-views, and relationships with others. The study consisted of 53 participants who were recruited from a pool of 126 adults with visual impairment between the ages of 22 and 65. They were recruited from a vision rehabilitation agency serving the greater New York Metropolitan area. The participants consisted of White,

African American, Hispanic, and other races. A 15-item index Functional Vision

Screening Questionnaire was used to indicate whether or not difficulty is experienced in

specific functional areas, such as reading newspaper print or recognizing faces across a

room. Data was collected by trained interviewers through telephone interviews that lasted

for approximately 30 minutes. The data analysis entailed content coding based on

common themes that emerged. The results showed that both positive and negative types

of changes occurred in all four domains being studied. However, negative changes were

more prevalent than positive changes. Similarly, Boerner and Wang (2010) conducted

another qualitative study to examine the impact of loss of vision on the same life domains

of goals, self-views, world-views, and relationships with others by comparing two groups

of visually impaired people: middle-aged and older adults. The middle-aged group

consisted of 44 participants between the ages of 42 and 64. These participants were

drawn from a study on vision loss among working-aged adults. The older adults group

consisted of 107 participants between the ages of 65 and 94 and they were selected from

an ongoing longitudinal study on coping with age-related vision loss in late life. All

participants from both groups were applicants at a vision rehabilitation agency serving

the greater New York Metropolitan area and experienced significant visual impairment.

All participants were English-speaking and from a diverse racial and ethnic background.

The middle-aged adult group was interviewed for approximately 30 minutes and the older

adult group was interviewed for approximately 90 minutes. The data analysis utilized

content codes based on common themes that emerged from the narratives. The results

showed that middle-aged individuals experienced more negative change in the four

aforementioned domains and the changes seemed to be more pronounced ($p = .001$). In

addition, the middle-aged individuals encountered more disruption in their lives and it came with a risk of negative long-term consequences such as depression (X=2.96, *p*< .10).

Cimarolli (2006) conducted a study with the aim to determine the interrelation among vision loss severity, functional disability, perceived social support, perceived overprotection, and distress. The study consisted of 114 participants, of which 74 were women and 40 were men. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 64. The setting of the study was in a vision rehabilitation agency that serves the greater New York Metropolitan area. The participants for this cross-sectional study were recruited from a pool of 227 adults with vision impairment. The participants were interviewed by phone by trained interviewers for an average of 40 minutes. The study used an 18-item overprotection scale for adults, a 20-item center for epidemiological studies depression scale, and a 21-item Beck Anxiety Inventory. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis demonstrated that higher levels of perceived overprotection were associated with higher levels of depressive symptomatology as well as higher levels of anxiety even after vision loss severity, functional disability, and perceived social support were controlled, n = 108.R = .08 (*p*s<.05). This study illustrates the connection between depression, overprotection, and employment. It was concluded that vision rehabilitation programs should address issues around perceived overprotection. One of the limitations of the study is that it does not permit causal interpretations of the findings because the study is cross-sectional. Other limitations include that the majority of the participants were females and support providers were not interviewed for the study.

A quantitative study conducted by Grant, Seiple, and Szlyk (2011) investigated the relationship between depression and quantitative measures of visual function. The study consisted of 18 participants who were enrolled in a reading rehabilitation program. The participants consisted of 8 females and 10 males and their ages ranged from 54 to 87 years old. The racial and ethnic breakdown of the participants was White, Black, and Asian. The study utilized Minnesota Low Vision Reading Acuity Chart (MNREAD) to measure reading acuity, maximum reading speed, and critical print size, which is the smallest print size the participants can read closest to their maximum reading rate. The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) was also utilized to assess the participants' levels of depression and the Adaptational to Age Related Vision Loss Scale (AVL) was utilized to assess the participants' levels of adaptation to their visual impairment. Pearson correlation analysis was used during the analysis process. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between levels of depression and change in levels of adaptation to visual impairment ($r(16)=0.62, p=0.01$) which indicated that participants who reported greater depression at the start of rehabilitation also reported a greater positive change in adaptation after rehabilitation. In addition, the results showed a significant relationship between levels of depression and change in MNREAD $r(16) = 0.54$, $p = 0.02$. The correlation showed that participants who reported less depression experienced greater improvement after rehabilitation training. These conclusions indicate that depression can negatively affect the ability of people who are visually impaired to engage in rehabilitative services, and as a result reduce their participation in the work force. One of the limitations of this study is that the sample size was too small. The researchers indicated that a larger sample size was needed for a more

powerful analysis. The success rate for obtaining and maintaining employment with the aforementioned challenges/negative impact will need successful coping strategies in order for this population to meet their needs, reach their full potential, and become successful employees. Successful coping strategies include accommodations/assistive devices, rehabilitation services, and family/friend support.

This section has shown that there is a relationship between vision impairment and emotional and psychological impact, including depression. These studies have suggested that depression following vision loss may be related to the emotional experiences of the impairment and adjustment and coping issues. These studies concluded that older adults with vision impairments experience psychological challenges and the transition phase from sight to blindness is common among individuals. Other conclusions for these studies were that a high number of visual impaired individuals expressed depression, different levels of depression are seen among people who are visually impaired, people with visual impairment have both personal and environmental challenges, and people with visual impairment experience changes in their lives. The results of these studies revealed that the aforementioned impact has a negative effect on the quality of life for the visually impaired, including obtaining and maintaining employment.

Successful Coping Strategies

Lack of participation in the workforce among visually impaired individuals may have resulted from unawareness of assisted technology and the lack of workplace accommodations. Information about how accommodations and assistive devices have been or have not been used for visually impaired employees will help describe how

information about these devices do or do not support the participation in the work force of visually impaired employees and will be presented next.

Individuals with vision impairment can increase their ability to perform specific tasks with accommodation, adaptive equipment, and assistive technology devices (Gamble, Dowler, & Hirsh, 2004). Nevertheless, some people who are visually impaired do not use assistive devices appropriately and do not accept them gracefully. Williams, Sabata, and Zolna (2006) sought to understand types of accommodations that are frequently used by visually impaired workers across various age groups. A user need survey was utilized with 510 visually impaired individuals to examine the types of technology and accommodation needed to perform work and employment related activities. The participants were recruited through various methods, such as through listservs, disability specific organizations, and mass mailings. Surveys were administered in three ways, either sent via email, submitted online, or conducted via telephone interview. The results showed that individuals with vision impairment used a variety of workplace accommodations to overcome difficulties with functional disabilities ($p<0.01$). Without accommodations their needs would not be met, which would have prevented them from being successful. The results also showed that there are some differences in the types of accommodations used by younger and older individuals, even though the accommodations targeted the younger individuals more than the older individuals ($p<0.05$). The types of accommodations that showed the difference included the use of braille, CCTVs, and ZoomText.

The authors communicated the research clearly, the method was not very difficult to follow, and a replication of the method appears to be doable. Nevertheless, the study

has some critical limitations. For example, the majority of the respondents needed access to a computer with an internet connection and had to be computer savvy because most of the surveys were required to be conducted online. Also, only well-known accommodations like CCTV, Braille, and ZoomText were discussed in detailed. This study demonstrated that accommodations are needed in the workplace for individuals who are visually impaired because it will help them to meet their needs in order to succeed. It also demonstrated the differences in accommodations for different age groups. The limitations showed that accommodations for this population are essential.

Kelly (2011) focused on high school students' current problems with the use of assistive technology and found out that sixty percent of the students could benefit from the use of assistive technology but they were not given the opportunity to use them. The study also showed the importance of family support because the results indicated that visually impaired students whose parents participated in school programs, parent meetings, or trainings for families were more likely to use assistive technology than those students whose parents were not involved ($p = .004$, p, .05). The students ranged in age from 13 to 16 and were all visually impaired and unable to sustain competitive employment. The quantitative study utilized two longitudinal child outcome surveys which were SEELS (Special Education Longitudinal Study) and NLTS2 (National Longitudinal Transition Study-2). Descriptive analysis and multilevel modeling were used during the analysis process. Similarly, Strobel, Fossa, Arthanat, and Brace (2006) indicated that some visually impaired individuals and their families often lack knowledge of what assistive technology is available, where to get it, and how to pay for it. Strobel et al., (2006) indicated that assistive technology provides many opportunities to people with

visual impairments. Individuals with visual impairments often require many devices to accomplish everyday tasks including duties at work; however, paying for assistive devices continues to be a major barrier (Strobel et al., 2006). Furthermore, employers are not aware of the assistive technology that can be used to assist people who are visually impaired to surmount their functional limitations, and in addition, some employers are reluctant to pay for the assistive devices (Strobel et al., 2006). Strobel et al., (2006) also indicated that print text and graphics are essential in the labor force but people who are visually impaired often encounter many obstacles in accessing textual information and print material, which is often seen as a major barrier for people with visual impairments as they attempt to secure employment.

Information about how accommodations and assistive devices have been or have not been used for visually impaired employees has helped describe how information about these devices do or do not support the participation in the work force of visually impaired employees. However, the literature remains limited and does not reveal the perspectives on obtaining and maintaining employment for the visually impaired population in their own words. Having a more in depth understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions related to unemployment is necessary and important. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to bridge the gap in literature and explore and understand the perspectives on obtaining and maintaining employment for the visually impaired population. As mentioned before, having a more in depth understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions related to obtaining and maintaining employment is necessary and important.

This section concluded that the need for reasonable accommodations is necessary in order for people who are visually impaired to increase their ability to perform specific tasks to reach their full potential. Accommodation will help to support successful employment outcomes for people who are visually impaired. The results of the studies in this section show that accommodations play an integral part in the employment success of individuals who are visually impaired. These elements are imperative to this current study because this study will focus on exploring and understanding the lived experiences of people who are visually impaired and their perspectives on obtaining and maintaining employment. As a result, the current study seeks to provide insight and promote awareness of the visually impaired population and the challenges they encounter in relation to obtaining and maintaining employment.

Need for Rehabilitation Services

The barriers to seeking employment can be better addressed and rehabilitative services can be better tailored to meet individuals' needs. Careers in Information Technology are usually seen as a barrier for people who are visually impaired. Information technology (IT) support has been rarely considered as a viable career choice for people who are visually impaired because computers are vision driven and people who are visually impaired would have difficulty seeing computer screens to diagnose and fix any problem (Bell, 2010). Nevertheless, Armstrong and Murray (2010) concluded that accessible e-learning environments can be developed to assist adults with visual impairments in achieving industry standard qualifications in IT networking. They conducted a study with three groups of adult students with visual impairments and each group consisted of 19 or 20 visually impaired students per semester who were

recommended by the local association for the blind in preparation for employment. The purpose of this quantitative study was to describe an accessible e-learning environment designed to provide advanced IT skills to visually impaired students who were in preparation for employment. The aim was to convert industry-standard training materials in print into accessible formats and to deliver the learning material in ways that are more suitable for adult students with visual impairments. The e-learning training courses were part of their undergraduate degree program and each group completed the same courses. The prerequisites for the students with visual impairments included basic knowledge of computers, proficiency in computerized assistive technology, a commitment to complete the training courses, and a willingness to work at the end of the program. The students who were visually impaired were all legally blind but had different levels of visually impairments (Murray, 2010).

Murray (2010) formed a central group with sighted students attending the same courses with the same number of students each semester. The 2 groups attended classes at different times; however, they used the same classroom, laboratory, and equipment and they completed the courses over the same period of time. The sighted group (central group) had sighted instructors whereas the visually impaired group had instructors who were totally blind and all the classes were supervised by sighted instructors who attended to network problems and ensured the safety of the students. Both groups took the same examinations, although the visually impaired group was provided with textual descriptions of images in the examination and the grades from both groups were compared.

The results showed that the examination grades achieved by both groups of students were similar with no significant difference in the mean and standard deviation between the sighted and visually impaired students. The visually impaired group received grades similar to or higher than the sighted group. This result shows that people with visual impairments are capable of achieving and have the potential to enhance their skills and become employable.

Shaw and Gold (2011) indicated that little is known about what factors enable some individuals with visual impairment to overcome barriers or obstacles and become successful, therefore, they conducted a study on employment preparedness with two objectives. The first objective was to identify factors, such as assistive technology devices or accommodations that are related to success of employment and the second objective was to use this information to develop a psychometric tool to assess the preparedness level for employment for individuals who are visually impaired. The study consisted of 239 working age adults who are visually impaired, including the totally blind and the partially blind. The participants were obtained by random selection from an agency client database as well as recruitment through advisements on list serves, consumer groups, and word of mouth. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 64 and they were either in the labor force or willing to work. The participants were invited to participate through a telephone call and, if the individuals were not home, two follow-up calls were made, one in the evening and one on the weekend. The study utilized a survey called the Tool to Assess Preparedness for Employment (TAPE) to assess the preparedness for employment. The participants were given 2 options to complete the survey. This first option was to complete the survey online and the second option was to

complete the survey by phone with an interviewer. The survey focused on 12 scales, each of which assessed a different factor related to employment. The scales are technology, support disability, communication, upbringing, work history, language, looking for work, networking, job search strategy, targeted job search, and access and support. The results showed that the scales had good to excellent reliability and the TAPE appeared to be an effective instrument for assessing preparedness of employment. Work readiness can be determined by personal attributes and the environment. For the purpose of this study by Shaw and Gold (2011), personal attributes can be defined as skills, behaviors, and psychological traits of individuals and environmental factors can be defined as labor market conditions, employers' attitudes, and inappropriate or inadequate vocational and educational training. The results show that it is important to assess the preparedness level of employment for people who are visually impaired so that appropriate rehabilitative service can be facilitated.

These studies show that the need for rehabilitative services is essential. Rehabilitative programs may help individuals with visual impairments to return to work, engage in activities that will increase their independence, and keep them competitive with their non-visually impaired counterparts. Rehabilitative programs may also increase level of functional ability which may help the individuals with vision impairment to meet their needs and empower them; subsequently, allowing them to achieve their full potential.

Need for Support from Family/Friends

The visually impaired elderly may be at the highest risk of obtaining and maintaining employment. Therefore, Reindhardt (2001) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study that examined the effects of positive (instrumental and affective) and

negative facets of family and friendship support, both received and provided on adaptation to chronic visual impairment. The study consisted of 570 elderly individuals with visual impairment, of which 288 were females and 282 were males. The participants were from a diverse racial and ethnic background including White, African American, and Hispanic. Their educational level varied from no high school education to college and professional degrees. The participants were drawn from a weekly list of new applicants of a vision rehabilitation agency. A multiple regression analysis was utilized to assess the impact of support received and support provided. The results showed that elders reported that they provided more affective support than they received, $t(569)= -6.04$, $p<.001$ and that they received more instrumental support than they provided, $t(569)= 3.65$, $p<.001$. Similar results were found for friendship support, where elders reported providing more affective support than they received, $t(569)= -5.47$, $p<.001$, and received more instrumental support than they provided, $t(569)= 3.32$, $p<.001$. Based on the results, this population needs more encouragement and support to engage in the work force.

A quantitative research study was conducted by Lee and Brennan (2006) to identify the different patterns of stress constellations and coping styles in regards to vision loss and to better understand the elements of vision loss adaptation. The quantitative data for this study was extracted from narrative qualitative data that were initially coded for self-reported stressors and coping strategies. The study consisted of 507 visually impaired participants ages 65 and older. The participants were from a diverse racial and ethnic background and their education level ranged from high school diploma to some college education. The study utilized cluster analysis to determine

whether individuals were similar enough to fall into groups of stress constellations and coping styles. The results of the study indicated that adaptation to visual impairment is facilitated by the individual's ability to integrate vision loss into his or her life-space. The results also showed that individuals withdrew socially because of their inability to cope with the stress that is involved in active community participation and as a result can negatively affect various life domains, such as employment.

Boerner (2012) conducted a cross-sectional quantitative study to examine the role of assimilative and accommodative coping dimensions for the mental health of people with visual impairment with the aim of informing rehabilitation planning. Assimilative coping involves effort to change one's situation in the moment of obstacles in order to pursue goals and accommodative coping refers to a re-evaluation of goals, and a disengagement from goals that are no longer feasible. The researcher interviewed 216 middle-aged adults with visual impairment by telephone for approximately 30 minutes. The ages of the participants ranged from 40 to 64 and they were first-time applicants at a vision rehabilitation agency serving the greater New York Metropolitan area. Most of the participants were females and the sample reflected an ethnically and racially diverse group. As for the eligibility criteria, the participants were required to be English-speaking, free from hearing and cognitive deficits, and their onset of vision loss must have occurred at age 18 or older. A 15-item self-reported Functional Vision Screening Questionnaire was used to measure their functional vision loss. The results showed that assimilation was used more ($t(216) = 17.77$; $p = .000$, a= .05) than accommodation ($t(216) = -2.83$; $p = .005$, a= .05) in goal-specific coping, which indicated that vision rehabilitation programs should encourage accommodative coping as a general life

approach which will help to eradicate goals that are not attainable, which in turn will reduce depressive symptoms. A higher level of accommodative coping can lead to greater life satisfaction if it is utilized, and as a result can help one to successfully obtain and maintain employment.

A study conducted by Reinhardt, Boerner, and Horowitz (2009) examined the effects of personal and social resources such as coping strategies, family support, and friendship support on adjustment to chronic vision impairment. The study focused on 313 English speaking participants in a community dwelling in the Northeast. The participants were selected from a list of new applicants who applied to the vision rehabilitation agency. The participants who were selected were interviewed in their homes. A functional vision loss scale was measured with a 15-item index assessing the extent of vision loss and difficulties in functional areas, such as maintaining employment, reading, mobility, and other activities of daily living. The results showed that high support from friends and families increased adaptation to vision impairment and also decreased the rate of depression (n=313, $p5$ 0.001). A limitation of the study is that the follow-up period should be longer. The authors' follow-up period was for 18 months which does not appear to be a significant amount of time because understanding the mechanics of friendship and family support is critical. Identifying the elements of friendship and family support that are helpful over time is important to health and functional well-being for visually impaired clients.

Owsley and McGwin (2007) aimed to describe the use of three research methods for assessing the personal burden of eye disease and vision impairment on health and functional well-being. The first method was a questionnaire that was patient-centered,

meaning that it provided the person's own self-reported perspective on his or her quality of life. It addressed domains such as difficulty engaging in daily activities, psychological status, and health status. The second method was direct assessment of actual behaviors and provided information regarding the patient's functional competencies. The third method was administrative records that were maintained by government, healthcare, and other agencies. These entities provided information relevant to the existence of circumstances that engendered a decrease in health and well-being. The article concluded that individuals respond to and cope with their vision impairment in various ways and there are several ways to measure the personal burden of vision impairment on a person's well-being and functional competencies.

Boerner and Wang (2011) conducted a cross-sectional qualitative study in 2011 to investigate how middle-aged adults manage their goals pursuits when diagnosed with vision impairment. The study consisted of 216 adults with visual impairment, ages 40 to 64. The participants were randomly selected from a pool of first-time applicants at a vision rehabilitation agency in the Northeast of the United States. The participants had to be English-speaking, be free from hearing and cognitive deficits, live in a community-dwelling, have the visual impairment onset occur at age 18 or older, and meet the age requirement of 40 to 64 to be considered for the study. The participants were mostly females and were from a diverse racial and ethnic background including White, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. The participants were interviewed by telephone for approximately 30 minutes. The functional vision loss scale, a 15-item index, was used to assess whether or not difficulty is experienced in specific functional areas, such as reading newspaper print. The data was coded using Atlas/ti. A coding

system was developed by using qualitative analytical approach and descriptive codes based on common themes. The results showed that individuals face interference with functional goals, psychological goals, and life goals due to their vision impairment. The results also showed that individuals develop a rich array of strategies, such as socialization, support group, and frequent contact with family and friends to deal with vision-related goal interference. These studies demonstrated a vital concern of employment status among people who are visually impaired and the importance for their needs to be met to empower them so that they can successfully obtain and maintain employment. Therefore, having a more in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions related to unemployment is necessary and important.

Support from family and friends can play an essential role in the lives of people with vision impairments. These studies in this section have shown that support and encouragement can help to motivate individuals with vision impairments to engage in work activities. Furthermore, support from family and friends may help to reduce isolation and help to improve health and functional well-being of individuals with visual impairments. Overall, the major findings for the studies in this section purport that lack of support can lead to interference with life goals and support from family and friends can help the coping process for people with visual impairment.

Summary

Vision impairment continues to increase and research has consistently indicated that visually impaired people operate at a detriment, bringing obstacles to meeting their employment needs, as well as challenges to their quality of life (Barnow, 2014; Jones, Crews, Rovner, Danielson, 2009; Pollard, Simpson, Lamoureuz, Keefee, 2003; &

Thompson, 2003). This chapter explored a broad range of literature on vision

impairment. The literature focused on unemployment among people who are visually

impaired, the challenges that people who are visually impaired encountered, and types of

preparedness and accommodations needed for them to become successful. The research

showed that participation in occupations of choice can be significantly impacted by visual

impairment and that people with visual impairments encounter many barriers to

employment (Kaldenberg, 2011). The research also indicated that individuals with visual

impairment will need to learn compensatory strategies and the use of assistive devices to

maintain independence and be successful (Gamble, Dowler, & Orslene, 2006). Many

studies have been conducted about the psychological effects and challenges people with

visual impairment face, but in fact, having a more in depth understanding of and

perceptions in relation to obtaining and maintain employment is necessary and important.

Based on my literature review, a presented gap is that no studies have directly explored

the lived experiences of visually impaired people related to obtaining and maintaining

employment from the perspectives of the visually impaired people in their own words. In

addition, the limited information available on the perceptions of individuals who are

visually impaired in relation to obtaining and maintaining employment presents a

challenge for both counselors and counselor educators. Several research studies (Cohen,

Katz, 2010; Nyman et al., 2012; & Reinhardt et al., 2009) have shown vision impairment

is a serious concern and imposes a challenge with daily activities including participating

in their occupation of choice and obtaining and maintaining employment. Chapter 3

focuses on the methodology of this research study, which includes a description of the

sample population, ethical issues, measures used, analysis procedures, and the

researcher's role.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to bridge the gap in the literature and explore and understand the perspectives on obtaining and maintaining employment for the visually impaired population. This chapter presents a description of the research design, setting and sample, materials, researcher's role, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The methodology described in this chapter supported the research purpose and question presented in Chapter 1.

Research Design

The research question for this study was the following: What are the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment? The research approach I chose was qualitative. A phenomenological design is used to understand social phenomena from the viewpoints of those being studied, and the goal is to understand the lived experiences of persons who share a common phenomenon (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Lein, Pauleen, Kuo, & Wang, 2014; Sousa, 2014). Rudestam and Newton (2007) indicated that qualitative research tends to focus on understanding experiences from the point of view of the participants. In addition, qualitative procedures rely on text and image data and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry (Creswell, 2009). Some characteristics of a qualitative design are natural setting where the data is collected in the field; the researcher is the key instrument of data collection, there are multiple sources of data such as interviews, observations, and documents; and inductive data analysis is used to identify patterns, categories, and themes from the data (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Pugsley, 2010). In qualitative research, the data analysis process involves making sense out of text and image data; in addition, researchers

examine the larger meaning of data (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative study may have

different types of designs such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case

study, and narrative. The current study focused on describing and elucidating the

meanings of the individuals' experiences by gaining a deeper understanding of the nature

or meaning of a phenomenon; therefore, I chose a phenomenological design.

Ethnography, grounded theory, case study, and narrative were not appropriate.

Ethnography focuses on describing and interpreting the shared patterns of a culture.

Grounded theory focuses on developing a theory grounded in data from the field in the

views of the participants. Case study focuses on developing an in-depth understanding

and analysis of a case or multiple cases, and narrative focuses on exploring the life of an

individual by hearing the stories of individual experiences. These designs were not

appropriate for the present study (see Patton, 2015).

   I chose a phenomenological design based on the problem statement and the

information lacking in the literature. The research question provided an opportunity to

address the research problem. This phenomenological design was most appropriate

because it focuses on understanding the essence of the experience, shared by individuals

(Kafle, 2011; Magrini, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) described the

phenomenological design in an inquiry that focused on the meanings of human

experiences. This design is used to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning

of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, Patton (2015) indicated that

phenomenological studies address how people describe things and experience them

through their senses. One of the basic philosophical assumptions of phenomenology is

that we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness (Patton, 2015).

Patton (2015) indicated that phenomenological studies address the meaning of life experiences or a concept or phenomenon shared by several individuals. This design focuses on the commonality of the participants as they experience a phenomenon. Lein, et al. (2014) indicated that phenomenology attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular phenomenon.

I conducted a 90-minute interview with each participant over a 7-week period to achieve data saturation of 8-10 participants. The interview presented an opportunity to describe the perceptions and perspectives of people who have visual impairments in relation to obtaining and maintaining employment. The data collection method that I used was face-to-face semistructured interviews. Rudestam and Newton (2007) indicated that phenomenological researchers typically use interviews as the source of data collection. The interviews helped me to elicit in-depth views and opinions from the participants' perspectives. If all the participants had not been asked the same questions, reliability issues could have arisen, and validity issues could have arisen if the questions were not clear for all of the participants to understand. Therefore, all participants were asked the same questions and the questions were clear to the participants. Not all participants were equally articulate and perceptive. Cleary et al. (2014) indicated that some participants may have limited education; therefore, it is essential for the questions to be clear. I addressed this concern by using a standardized open-ended interview guide, which kept me focused and structured. The questions were simple and clear for the participants to

understand. One example of an interview question was "What obstacles if any, have you encountered in relation to employment since you became visually impaired?

Role of the Researcher

One of my roles as the researcher was being the primary instrument to collect the data. My interest and investment wrought by my personal experiences on this subject matter. I have worked with the visually impaired population, I know individuals who are visually impaired, and I have seen the frustration and anger they expressed in relation to obtaining and maintaining employment. A reflection on my own experiences helped me to identify and balance my biases to better understand this population. Growing up in a small community in Jamaica, West Indies, I saw a few people who were active in the community and had jobs but then became visually impaired. Community members with visual impairments were not able to participate in routine daily activities or things they enjoyed; in addition, the visually impaired were unable to obtain or maintain employment and were notably less active in the community. They no longer worked or sought employment, and they became less active in the community. As a child, I did not question what happened. However, after I emigrated to the United States, I encountered more people who were visually impaired, including my aunt who was working but quit her job once she became visually impaired. She did not show any interest in trying to find a job. When I asked her about looking for a job, her comment was "employers do not cater to people who are blind." After getting my bachelor's degree, I started working in a social services agency as a case manager providing services such as direct case management to the poor and disenfranchised through advocacy, information and referral, crisis intervention, and referral to individual and family counseling. One of my first clients as a

case manager was an abused woman with a visually impaired child. After working

collaboratively with the Guild for the Blind Department to get services for my client's

child, I decided to pursue employment in that department, which was a success.

I have been working with people with visual impairment for the past 10 years.

Working with this diverse population has enhanced my awareness, knowledge, and

understanding of challenges that visually impaired people encounter. In addition, this

experience has enabled me to gain better insight of this phenomenon; however, I am

lacking an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences that this population encounters

regarding obtaining and maintaining employment, primarily due to the lack of

information in scholarly literature. One of my concerns was that my biases might have

been brought into the study based on my experiences and preconceived notions. I made

every effort to remain objective by using the bracketing technique. I did not allow my

knowledge of this subject to affect my data collection or influence the participants'

understanding of the phenomenon (see Chan et al., 2013; Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

According to Chan et al. (2013), bracketing refers to putting aside one's own belief about

a phenomenon or what is already known about the phenomenon under investigation. I

made every effort to put aside my knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences so that I

could accurately describe the participants' experiences. In addition, I shared my

experience with the visually impaired population, with my committee members, and with

my committee members to identify how biases or blind spots might have presented

challenges in analyzing the data and presenting the results. I kept my questions neutral;

made my questions simple, clear, and concrete; and asked the participants if they

understood the questions.

According to Barrett (2007), a researcher in a phenomenological study has many roles such as interviewing participants, collecting data, shaping raw data collected in the field into data records, organizing and reconstructing notes, and transcribing. My role as the researcher was multifaceted because not only was I the primary instrument who assumed the aforementioned roles, but I also had the desire to learn more about the lived experiences of people who are visually impaired in obtaining and maintaining employment. I wanted to gain awareness of and add to the body of knowledge of the experiences that people with vision impairment encounter, and to provide insight for various entities to better serve this population.

Methodology

The methodology included the procedure that I undertook to conduct my study. Choosing the right methodology was important because it guided my study. It also helped me to effectively manage my study.

Participants

The participants for this study included 10 individuals with visual impairment. Patton (2015) defined criterion sampling as seeking cases that meet some predetermined criteria of importance and seeking to understand cases that are likely to be information rich. I chose this type of sampling to determine inclusionary criteria and choose people accordingly. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) must be ages 18 through 60; (b) must have visual impairment within the last 10 years; (c) currently not working, but must have work experience; (d) must be seeking or not seeking employment; and (e) must be English speaking. All individuals who are served by the New York State Commission for

the Blind (NYSCB) are visually impaired. All participants were current clients at NYSCB and were selected using criterion sampling.

Participants were excluded if they were former clients of mine. Dworkin (2012) indicated that sample size in qualitative research is usually smaller than in quantitative research because qualitative research is often concerned with obtaining an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. I used purposive sampling, specifically criterion sampling, to identify qualified participants, which is an appropriate method for qualitative research (Patton, 2015). I sent invitation letters to NYSCB counselors with my research criteria. The NYSCB counselors disseminated information about my study to clients. The clients contacted me directly and were screened for appropriateness for the study. Screenings were conducted until anticipated data saturation was achieved. Due to the nature of the client's visual impairments, it was difficult for them to see posters on walls or in the office; therefore, the commission counselors had to provide them with the research information. Individual interviews were scheduled and conducted. The participants and I established and agreed on dates and times, and the participants were given the address of the interview location. During the interviews, the participants answered open-ended questions (see Appendix C) to give their views and opinions about this phenomenon. The participants included 10 individuals between the ages of 18 and 60 who identified as visually impaired within the last 10 years. The participants also had jobs in the past, were presently seeking or not seeking employment, and spoke English.

I used a qualitative approach with a transcendental phenomenological design. Transcendental phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research seeking to describe human experiences (Sheehan, 2014; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Qualitative research is a

means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a

social or human problem, and the transcendental phenomenological design is used to

identify the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon that is described by the

participants (Lein et al., 2014). Transcendental phenomenology was appropriate for this

study because I described the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals

attempting to obtain and maintain employment.

Recruitment Procedure

Once I obtained approval from Walden University's Internal Review Board (08-

13-16-0304763), I began the participant recruitment and data collection procedure. I

recruited participants through purposeful sampling, specifically criterion sampling,

because the participants had to meet certain criteria such as being visually impaired

within the last 10 years, ages 18-60, having had a job in the past, presently seeking or not

seeking employment, and English speaking. I contacted the district manager at NYSCB

by telephone to schedule a meeting to discuss the research project. At the meeting, I

asked for permission to conduct the study with the agency's clients and at the agency.

Once I was granted permission from NYSCB, and with IRB approval, I asked counselors

to distribute the letters of requirements to their clients (see Appendix D). The clients

contacted me directly if they were interested in participating, and I screened them to

make sure they met the study criteria. I invited qualified participants to meet with me for

the individual interviews at their convenience. I was flexible to make changes to my

schedule to accommodate the participants. I scheduled one 90-minute interview for each

participant, which allowed enough time for questions and clarification. The interview

process lasted for approximately seven weeks, which allowed data saturation to be

achieved. Upon availability of the participants, I scheduled up to two participants each day for 90 minutes each. After the voluntary agreement of the participants, I gave each participant informed consent that meets the requirements of the American Counseling Association (ACA). I informed participants that their participation is strictly voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. I provided the informed consent in two formats, which were, Braille and large print. The informed consent form was acknowledged that the participants' rights will be protected (Johnston, 2015).

After all the participants agreed to participate in the research, I scheduled a date for the interviews. I interviewed each participant separately. In order to build a good trusting rapport with the participants, I started the interview with basic background information to help the participants warmed up and feel comfortable (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I scheduled the interviews based on my schedule and each participant's availability. I conducted the interviews at NYSB office in Manhattan, New York. The building has multiple programs; therefore, if the participants' counselors were in the building, they did not specifically know why the participants were there. I conducted the interviews in a closed office to ensure privacy. The participants' answers to the interview questions helped me to describe their lived experiences in relation to obtaining and maintaining employment.

Instrumentation

The participants were interviewed for 90-minutes at the NYSCB office in Manhattan, New York. This timeframe ensured that the participants had adequate time to ask questions, to provide their responses, and to provide clarification of information presented. Participants got to the interview site based on their choice of transportation.

Participants utilized public transportation such as bus, train, or access-a-ride. I was

flexible for late arrival of the participants and/or rescheduling appointments. I recoded all

the interviews and this was made known to the participants before they agreed to

participate in the study. I transcribed the recorded information as soon as possible after

each interview session. The transcripts were checked and re-checked for accuracy. The

transcriptions of the data are stored on my computer which has a secure password to

ensure privacy and hard-copies of the field notes are stored in a lock box. I also took into

consideration, field notes, such as physical presentation, dress, and body language to

further contextualize the experiences described by the participants. I asked the

participants to elaborate and expound on their lived experiences of obtaining and

maintaining employment as a visually impaired person in order to attempt to answer the

research question.

Analysis

The analysis process includes coding and the use of NVivo software. Coding is a

systematic way for extensive data to be condensed into smaller analyzable units by

creating categories and concepts that are derived from the data (Lockyer, 2004). After I

transcribed the interviews, coding was begun. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014)

pointed out that coding is a deep reflection, analysis, and description of the data. The

purpose of coding is to enable the researcher to make sense of and analyze the data; it can

help generate a general theory, it facilitates the organization, retrieval, and description of

data and it can be done in different phases, such as pre-coding, primary coding, and

secondary coding (Janesick, 2011). The process of coding includes breaking down,

comparing, and categorizing the data, then making connections between categories, and

then selecting the core categories, relating theme to other categories, and confirming and explaining the relationships (Lockyer, 2004). I performed first hand and second hand coding. During the first-hand coding, I assigned codes to chunks of data based on the various themes. During the second-hand coding, I added additional codes based on the results of the first coding. Commonalities of experience among the participants were identified and related themes were grouped. For example, (1) I read and reread the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon to make sense of their experience; (2) I extracted important statements that is directly related to the phenomenon being under investigation; (3) I formulated descriptions for the significant statements; and (4) I formulated descriptions that will be categorized into clusters of themes that are common to all the participants.

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed for themes and patterns. I explored the most descriptive wording for topics and put them into categories in order to reduce long listings of themes. A line-by-line coding process was utilized using color-coding schemes. Lockyer (2004) indicated that using coding to create general themes or categories is useful during the analysis process. I identified commonalties of experience across all interviews of the participants. I seek to obtain common words and phrases that emerge from the participants' words in the interviews. The commonalities assisted in the organization of the data. A textual description was explored what it is like to be a visually impaired person and a structural description will integrate how environmental factors and other relative elements, such as employers and family, impact how this phenomenon was experienced by the participants (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). The important

commonalities between visually impaired people as they obtain and maintain employment was based on the textual and structural descriptions.

NVivo software was utilized to assist me in organizing, managing, and analyzing my data (Maxwell, 2013). Based on my coding, I sorted data into nodes by matching codes base on commonality of information. NVivo also allowed me to analyze the interviews quickly and accurately. According to Bazeley (2007), NVivo increases effectiveness and efficiency. I focused on common themes and perspectives of the participants to analyzed and described the results of the interviews. I conducted hand coding and NVivo further prioritize and honor the participants' voices and serve as an organizational aid in coding of the material.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness helped me to establish the credibility and reliability of my study. It was important for me to established credibility in my research findings so that readers would find my research true and accurate. In this study I established credibility, transferability, conformability, and ethical consideration.

Credibility and Accuracy

I employed appropriate strategies to establish credibility and accuracy. I checked transcripts for mistakes during the transcription and make sure that the definitions of codes were not shifted by comparing data with codes constantly and cross checking codes (Lockyer, 2004). Frankel and Devers (2000) indicated that one of the techniques to establish credibility, quality, and trustworthiness is to extend engagement in the field and the triangulation of data sources, methods, and investigators. Patton (2015) pointed out that the credibility of the researcher is important because the researcher is the instrument

in a qualitative study; therefore, the information about me as the researcher was essential to increase credibility, such as my experiences, training, and the perspectives I brought to the field. In order to ensure reliability of the data, I documented all the steps I have taken to gather the data to ensure consistency (Creswell, 2009; Shenton, 2004). I employed multiple strategies to ensure accuracy, such as clarifying any bias I brought into the study and spending extended time in the field to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Cleary et al., 2014).

Transferability

It was essential that I provided sufficient thick description of the phenomenon to allow readers to have a good understanding; therefore, I established transferability and confirmability. According to Shenton (2004), the findings of a qualitative research study are specific to a small number of particular environments or individuals; therefore, it is possible to demonstrate that the findings are applicable to other situations or populations. My research participants group may have some unique characteristics, but I have not seen any major regional differences related to employment for the visually impaired in my literature review; therefore, I can assume a relative degree of transferability of the results. I provided sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork so that the reader is able to determine if the prevailing environment is similar to another situation that he or she is familiar and if the findings can be applied to other settings (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability

The intrusion of researcher's biases is inevitable (Shenton, 2004); therefore, I utilized the technique of checking and rechecking the data to promote confirmability. It is imperative that my findings are the result of my participants' experiences; consequently,

confirmability helped me to be objective and in turn, reduce my bias. Confirmability

helped to reduce the effect of this researcher's bias (Shenton, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

There is always a possibility for ethical issues when collecting data. Therefore, I

used the American Psychological Association (APA) (2010) and the American

Counseling Association (ACA) (2014) codes of ethics as a guide throughout the study

(see Appendix A). I utilized a consent form so that all the participants must sign it before

engaging in the research. The consent form acknowledged that I would protect the

participants' rights during the collection of the data (Johnston, 2015). Participants were

informed that they could withdraw at any time and that their information will not be

shared or used for other purposes without their permission. I am aware that the purpose of

the interview is not to judge and staying focused on the interview is important because it

will gather high-quality data (Patton, 2015).

Another ethical concern that I addressed was the reporting of data. The APA code

of ethics indicates that it is important to avoid false or deceptive statements (Publication

Manual, 2010). Even though errors may occur, it is important to carefully prepare

manuscripts for publication. As mentioned in the Publication Manual (2010), if the errors

are discovered after the manuscript is published; it is the author's responsibility to make

the errors known to the public. By making the errors known, future users will have the

knowledge of the errors and corrections.

Gaining access to the research site and participants involves several steps and is

essential to the study; therefore, taking the proper protocol is essential. Consent forms

were stored in a locked box to ensure each participant's privacy. I informed all

participants that they have the rights to withdraw at any time. It is important for researchers to get permission from participants to access their information that is in archives (Johnston, 2015).

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the research designs, setting, and sample. It also addressed the researcher's role, procedure, ethical issues, and the analysis procedure of the data. Transcendental Phenomenology acquires and collects data that elucidates the essence of human experience which is best suited to meet the needs of the research question: What are the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment? A personal account of the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment will provide a rich description of the essence of the phenomenon. Chapter 4 addressed the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of people with visual impairment in relation to obtaining and maintaining employment. This study was designed to address this research question: What are the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment? This chapter presents the results of the study and is organized in the following sections: setting, textual description of each participant, themes (travel challenges, closed-minded employers, lack of support, lack of accommodations, and job search difficulties), subthemes (disability discrimination in hiring practices, employer discrimination, loss of independence, liability, feelings of frustration, and safety concerns), data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results of the study, and a summary.

Setting

All participants were interviewed at the New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) located in Manhattan, New York. The interviews were conducted in a closed office to ensure privacy. The room was not too cold or too hot; it was a very comfortable room temperature. There were no known conditions that influenced the participants. The building where the interviews were conducted is a multiservice facility; nevertheless, the floor that the interviews were conducted on was very quiet. I reached my saturation at the 10th participant. All 10 participants were chosen through purposive sampling. All participants came to the interview using a cane to help them to travel safely.

Data Collection

I reached data saturation after interviewing 10 participants. All 10 participants

were chosen for the study because they met the criteria. The participants were

interviewed at the NYSCB in Manhattan, New York. Most participants arrived on time.

Each participant came to their interview with a cane, which assists visually impaired

individuals with their mobility and is also used as an identifier for the general public to

indicate that they are visually impaired. The participants signed consent forms to indicate

their willingness to participate in the study. The consent forms were given in large print

and braille, and I also read the entire consent form to participants after they read it to

ensure that they fully understood what they had read. The participants used a signature

guide to sign their consent forms. I met with each participant once for an individual

interview, during which the participant described his or her lived experiences in relation

to obtaining and maintaining employment. Each participant was interviewed for

approximately 90 minutes. Each interview was recorded either on a voice recorder or a

tape recorder. During one of the interviews, the voice recorder malfunctioned, which was

a frustrating moment because I did not realize until halfway through the interview. Two

other interviews were conducted on a tape recorder because the voice recorder was not

working.

Textual Description of Each Participant

Ms. E.

On the day of the interview, I arrived at the location about 15 minutes before the

scheduled time. Ms. E. was already at the location waiting for me. After introductions,

we went to the interview room. I offered her some water and we talked for a few minutes

about the weather and her plans for the summer. She was planning to go to Boston for a week to visit her sister. She would be accompanied by another relative on this trip. Ms. E. was neatly dressed in a multicolor summer dress and black gladiator shoes. Her makeup was nicely done. I complimented her on her attire and makeup and she started to talk about the services she received from a rehabilitation instructor on how to identify clothing and how to apply her makeup.

We engaged in the informed consent process before we started the interview. Ms. E was a 56 year old woman who is legally blind due to a stroke. Other than her visual impairment, she does not have any other physical disability. She has her GED. Ms. E explained that before she had her stroke, she was a very active person. Ms. E used to travel very often and she likes to dress in nice clothing. She has four children. Ms. E explained that she did not complete high school because she got pregnant at the age of 16 and she had to find full-time employment so that she could take care of her child. At the age of 21, her daughter's father married her and they moved in together in a small apartment. She has a total of four children. She indicated that before her vision impairment, she always worked. "Since my first full-time job at age 16, I have never been out of a job until I had a stroke that damaged my eye sight. I've always believe in working hard to survive." Ms. E. indicated that after her stroke, her life was not the same. "Before my stroke, I thought I had the most wonderful husband but…." She started to cry and I asked her if she would like to take a break and she said no. She said her husband worked hard to care for the family. They worked as a team and tried to build a great life for the family. However, after her stroke, she went to a rehabilitative center directly from the hospital. She was in the rehabilitative center for 2 months before she was discharged

to go home. A social worker at the center helped her to apply for a home health aide for which she was approved. After going home, she realized that her husband seemed to be distant and was withdrawing from her. Ms. E. told me that her husband slept on the sofa in the living room and his explanation was that he was giving her space to recuperate.

She found herself asking her husband for things around the apartment, such as her shoes, clothing, and watch; her husband would get angry and say "you cannot see, are you blind? It is right there." This was happening more frequently so she went back to see her doctor who referred her to an ophthalmologist, and she was declared legally blind. She was told that her stroke caused her to become legally blind.

Ms. E. told me that she discussed what she was told by the doctor with her estranged husband, who was still not sleeping in the bedroom, and she was surprised at what he said. "My husband said if you can't see, then what are you good for?" She said she was stunned and all she could do was cry and asked him what he meant by that and he did not answer; instead, he walked out of the apartment. Later, when he went back to the apartment, he did not want to talk about it. Six months after the stroke she went back to work, but she did not disclose her vision problem. She continued to get home health aide services for the children even though she went back to work. A month after returning to work, she was terminated from her job because she was making too many mistakes and was asking for too much help on the job. She was told that she was not performing her work duties effectively.

Ms. E. told me that she discussed her termination with her husband, and his reaction was that she became blind and good for nothing. "I felt so alone and frustrated. I felt like my vision problem ripped my life apart." She said the next day her husband came

home from work and said he was leaving and came to get his belongings. "I begged him to stay. I felt like my life was ending. I thought about the children." Ms. E. told me that after he left, she felt alone. She did not leave her home for days and her children did not go to school. "I did not have a job. I did not know how my bills were going to be paid and I could not afford the rent by myself. It was a frustrating time in my life." She told me that her home health aide took her to the welfare office for her to apply for public assistance, for which she was approved. Part of the public assistance was to pay her rent. She said she did not have any family members to help her, and her two oldest children said they were also struggling financially. She said even though she has been on public assistance for the past 5 years, she is still searching for a job. "I sent out several resumes over the past 5 years and I went on several interviews, but I did not get a job, but I am not giving up. I'm staying motivated because I have my children who are depending on me."

As Ms. E continued to talk, she smiled, and it appeared to me that she had a sense of hope. She explained that she knew that with her condition, getting a job would be challenging, but with God, she would succeed. She believed that God had taken care of her and her children this far. "I go to church every week and I pray and God is always there for me and my children. After the stroke, I never thought that I would be walking and look…God is good." Ms. E. told me that on several of the interviews she has been on, she felt that she was qualified for the job, but she thinks she did not get the job because she has a cane and it identifies her as being blind. She said one of the job interviews she went on was for a receptionist position, and she told the interviewer that if she got hired she would need accommodation with JAWS software and she had to explain to the interviewers what that was. "The next thing I heard from the interviewer is,

thank you for coming in. We have other candidates to interview and you will hear from us. I never heard from them again." Ms. E. told me that at that moment she felt sad, but she whispered a prayer and said I will keep trying. She said her comfort level for seeking employment is still high. She feels like the worst is over and only better things will come. She said she is currently taking a computer class that is teaching her Excel, Microsoft, and PowerPoint and, after the class, her New York State Commission Counselor is going to place her in an employment program. She said her vocational goal is to get a job in customer service.

As we continued to discuss her challenges in obtaining employment, her main concerns were with job search because she does not have a computer and any computer she could use at the library or from a friend does not have the devices such as JAWS that she would need to help her effectively search for a job. Another concern was that an employer might not be open-minded to hire her because of her vision impairment.

When I am doing my job, I cannot go as fast as other workers because of my visual impairment. I am bumping into things some of the time. When I go on job interviews I become very pessimistic, they are going to discriminate because they think I cannot offer anything to the working environment. People do not want to hire me. When they find out I cannot look at a computer or I am not fast with certain machines as I should be, they just do not want to hire me. I would like to see equal opportunity from employers towards people with disabilities and challenges. I would like to see employers be a little more respectful, a little more considerate, and a little more humane. They treat you differently when you have a disability.

Another concern was the fear of traveling by herself. She said New York City is a fast--paced place, and there is always a chance of bumping into people; she does not want to get into a problem with anyone. She fears getting hurt by others or by vehicles.

> Not being able to travel without fear. Travelling is a challenge, making sure I get around safely. As a blind person, I feel helpless sometimes, I cannot move around as I would like to and sometimes I feel like I am in a dark place. No one seems to care or try to help. I constantly ask for help and most times the result is negative.

I noticed that Ms. E. pressed a button on her watch, which tells the time. I asked her if everything is OK and she said yes. She was checking the time because she did not want to miss her Access-A-Ride. "If Access-A-Ride comes and I am not there, they will leave and I will be stranded. Calling Access-A-Ride to get another pickup time is next to impossible." Ms. E. said she would like to go to the lobby 15 minutes before her pickup time. As we concluded the interview, Ms. E. told me that she wished that people would treat people with disabilities like human beings. I asked her what she meant by that and she said, "Some people are not very helpful and if you ask for help, some people think you are bothering them. My cane was taken away from me twice in the subway by some school kids." Ms. E. wished people would understand their disabilities and the challenges they encounter on a daily basis. She hopes that with the help of the employment program, she will be more successful in obtaining employment.

Ms. K

Ms. K. arrived on time for her interview. As I met with her in the lobby, I introduced myself to her and told her it was OK for her to hold onto my arm as a guide to the interview room. She held onto my right arm and held her cane in her right hand. As

we walked to the interview room, we talked about her trip to the interview site. She told me that Access-A-Ride took her all over the city to pick up and drop off other people before taking her to her destination. She told me that she felt like she was in the vehicle forever. Ms. K. was neatly dressed in a blue skirt suit and her hair was braided in one ponytail. I asked Ms. K if she should like some water and she said yes. She asked if it was OK for her to take off her jacket because she was a little warm in the room and I told her yes. After she took off her jacket, I asked her if she was comfortable and she said yes. I engaged in the consent form process with Ms. K. She read it in braille and then I read it again to her to ensure that she fully comprehended it.

As we started the interview, Ms. K introduced herself as an African American and said her family was from the Caribbean. Ms. K was a 31 year old woman who has been totally blind for the past 7 years due to glaucoma. She has a Master's Degree in Nursing. She told me that her parents were very supportive of her and did everything they could to ensure that she received a good education. She said she started college at the age of 16 and had her master's degree by age of 22; she earned her master's while working as a nurse at Long Island Jewish Hospital. After graduation, she married her high school sweetheart. She told me that she had problems with her eyes throughout college, but she thought it was due to using the computer so often and reading and staying up late to study. However, after graduation her vision got worse, so she decided to go and see a doctor. She sighed and started crying. "I was diagnosed with glaucoma and I had to resign from my position because of that. The doctor said I am legally blind." She told me that life is unfair and she worked so hard in school to accomplish her goal and then lost it all. As we spoke, I realized that she had been through a lot in 2 years. First, she was

diagnosed with glaucoma, then she was declared legally blind, then her parents passed

away in a car accident, and her husband left her.

> I went through a period in my life that I thought I was not going to make it. My
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> parents died in a car accident and I realized that I would not perform my work
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> duties because of my vision problem, so I had to resign from my job and then my
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> husband left me. He said what can a blind woman do for him; I am not of any use
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> to him anymore. I was devastated.

She told me that she was devastated, frustrated, and did not know what to do. She said

she felt like her whole world was crumbling down on her. After becoming totally blind,

she isolated herself from others, she did not know how to cope, and she did not want to

speak to anyone. Ms. K. told me that one day she went to her doctor and from their

conversation, the doctor gave her the contact information for the New York State

Commission for the Blind. She said she held onto the number for 7 months and did not

contact them until she got evicted from her home. "I got evicted from my home because I

could not afford the rent. I had no income and depleted all my savings. I was so scared

and I did not know where to go." She said she finally called the New York State

Commission for the Blind and was referred to a shelter and also completed an application

for the NYSCB. She said she was transferred from one shelter to the next. In one year,

she went to four different shelters. NYSCB assisted her to get social security benefits and

to get a room. She told me that the social security benefit was not enough to meet her

financial obligations and she got evicted again and had to go to the shelter again. Ms. K.

told me that after a year in the shelter system again, a housing specialist in the shelter

found her a subsidized apartment, in which the city pays 70 percent of the rent and she

pays 30 percent because of her limited income. "Should someone so educated struggle like this? I have a master's degree. I was making over seventy thousand dollars per year. I have been trying to find other jobs and have not gotten an offer. This is not fair."

For the past 4 years, she told me that she has been seeking employment. She has sent out resumes for positions in teaching, customer services, and reception. She has been on many interviews, but she did not receive any job offers. She expressed how frustrating it is to go on interviews and feel confident about how the interview went but then never receive a call back. As we spoke, I learned that Ms. K. likes her independence and does not want to depend on the system. She wants to work and earn her own money. "I have seen my parents work all their lives and not depend on the system and they were happy. I love my independence. Why should my blindness prevent me from getting a job?"

Ms. K. described her desire to carry on the legacy of her parents by working hard and becoming self-sufficient in life. Ms. K. went on to discuss one of her job interview experiences. She said that the interviewer asked her what she can do as a blind person and that made her very uncomfortable. She said the interviewer also asked how she could dial a number to make calls if she could not see the buttons on the phone. She said she felt belittled, degraded, and incompetent. "I have never felt so incompetent in all my life. The interviewer made me feel like I was stupid because I am blind." As we continued our discussion, I also learned that she has a fear of traveling alone. She thinks that public transportation is not reliable and she might get stranded on the street. She is also afraid of falling and hurting herself.

I have to ask people for information and directions a lot. Sometimes the trains and buses do not make announcements of the different stops, which makes me very

nervous and going to unfamiliar locations is even more frustrating. One time I got

off at the wrong stop and I was so afraid and there was no one around, so I called

911. Getting off at the wrong stop was not a good experience for me.

Ms. K told me that lack of support from family and friends can be devastating because

sometimes people need that extra help or support and sometimes she just needs someone

to talk to. "I miss my parents. I felt safe with them when they were alive." Ms. K. told me

that she keeps herself active by conducting a lot of job search on her computer and just

browsing the computer so that she does not lose her computer skills. She believes that her

computer skills will help her when she gets a job. She is not giving up on employment.

She is currently assigned to an employment specialist, but she does not think he is doing

an effective job. Her hope is to be re-assigned to another employment specialist who will

better help her in obtaining employment. She said she spoke with her NYSCB counselor

about getting assigned to another employment specialist and the NYSCB agreed to re-

assign her. She told me that she thinks it is essential for employment specialists to

advocate for visually impaired clients with various employers so they are more receptive

when they interview a person who is visually impaired and more open-minded to hiring

them. "Employers are not aware of our capabilities as blind people. We have a lot of

potential."

Ms. G.

As I sat in the interview room waiting for Ms. G to arrive, I heard the rain and the

wind pounding on the window. I wondered to myself if Ms. G was going to cancel her

appointment. Shortly after, my phone rang and it was Ms. G. who said she was in the

lobby. She was fifteen minutes late. As I met her in the lobby, she was wet from the rain.

We introduced ourselves to each other and as we headed upstairs to the interview room, we spoke about the dreadful weather. When we got up-stairs to the interview room, I showed her where the bathroom was so that she could clean up a little. When she got back to the interview room, I offered her some water. She drank her water and got settled. Before we started the interview, we engaged in the consent form process. She read the consent form in large print and signed it.

Ms. G. was a 25 year old female who is legally blind due to Cataracts which is not always correctable. She has never been married. Ms. G. told me that she grew up in a domestic violence environment, in which she watched her father beat her mother almost every day. "The constant fighting and arguments were unhealthy. I just wanted to get away from them. In my Hispanic culture women are expected to be submissive, but my mother…..mmm, she was not like that." Ms. G. told me that when she was 16 years old her mother finally got the courage to move out and leave her father. "My mom pulled me out of school while my dad was at work and she packed our bags and never looked back." She discussed the financial struggles they have been through because they did not have that second income from her dad. She said because of their financial difficulties, at the age of 16, she had to quit high school and get a full-time job to assist her mother. Her first job was at McDonalds and her second job a year later was a secretary job at a social service agency. She obtained her GED the first year of her secretary position. About a year later, still working as a secretary, she started to have difficulties with her vision. She realized that she was not able to see small font size letters as she used to and she had been making a lot of mistakes at work. She went to her eye doctor and was diagnosed with Cataracts, which is not always correctable and was diagnosed as legally blind. She

disclosed her legal blindness with her supervisor at work and the supervisor was not very receptive to her disability.

> I remember asking my supervisor for Zoomtext to help me better perform my duties and he said it was not in his budget, and he did not purchase it. I was terminated because my supervisor said I was incapable of performing my duties. I was devastated because I asked for help and did not get it and I have my family to support. My family depended on my income to survive. I was the sole provider. I am not being able to find a job. I went on several interviews and no one calls me back. My fixed income is not enough to meet my financial obligations. I am struggling to make ends meet financially and not able to meet my needs.

While she was working without accommodations, she made many mistakes. Consequently, she has gotten several written warnings about her job performance. This was new to her and she did not know what to do or who to go to for help.

> I am tired and frustrated. I have been on too many interviews for not getting a job. I never had a problem getting a job before, but as soon as employers realized that I have a problem with my vision their answer is no. They do not think I am capable of doing the work and providing accommodations, forget…you know….I always wanted to have a family. I wanted to have children and get married, but all hopes are gone.

Ms. G. told me about her desire to have a family and hoped that she would have a better life than her mother. She does not think that she can attain this as a legally blind person. She told me that no one will look at her with a cane. She feels that she will be living with her mother for the rest of her life.

I can't live by myself. I'm afraid of traveling alone. It's hard for me to cross the streets. I have a hard time traveling on buses without someone's help like my friends. It is difficult to do job searching on my own.

Ms. G went on to say that:

When I go to the library to search for jobs, I remember one librarian said I am not the only person there who needs help so she cannot help me all day. The few friends I have are always busy. And I do not get any help from family members. Lack of support and no accommodation creates many employment challenges in my life.

Ms. G. discussed how difficult it was to search for jobs. She does not have a computer at home and when she goes to the library, it is not easy to get assistance from others, even the librarian. She told me that people are not very helpful in today's society. Furthermore, the computers do not have proper devices such as Zoomtext to make the job search easier for her. She discussed how difficult it is to leave her house without being accompanied by someone. She said she feels unsafe, especially when she has to travel to a different borough or unfamiliar areas. She told me that people are not helpful which drives fear in her and this society does not look out for people with disabilities.

At this time, Ms. G asked what time it was because she wanted to get home before dark. She said she hates to travel at night. She reiterated that she has lost interest in seeking employment because employers do not want to hire anyone who is blind or has any form of problems with their vision. She said, "Life for me will never be the same again. My goal of becoming a domestic violence counselor has been shattered." Ms. G. told me that she was planning to go back to school, but she does not see the purpose of

that now because she will not get a job when she completed her degree. I provided her with resources for people with visual impairments. I also encouraged her to discuss the possibilities of going back to school with her NYSCB counselor.

Ms. Q

Ms. Q. arrived at the interview site ten minutes early. We introduced ourselves to each other. She came in with her home health aide, but the home health aide waited in the lobby for Ms. Q. As we got settled for the interview, we engaged in the informed consent process, and Ms. Q read the consent form in Braille and I re-read the consent form again to ensure she fully understood it and she signed her name using a signature guide.

Ms. Q was a 40 year old female who is totally blind due to Diabetic Retinopathy. She is married. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Communication. Ms. Q. is an only child and was raised by her mother alone. She told me that she always wanted to have a big family because it was lonely growing up as an only child. Her mother worked very hard to care for her. At one point, she remembered her mother having three jobs and she had to stay with her neighbor, while her mother was at work. She completed high school and got a full-time job at a local neighborhood supermarket. She worked for seven years at the supermarket and then decided to go to college. Her supervisor at the supermarket did not want to flex her hours so that she could attend college; therefore, she resigned from her position. She registered for college full-time and after her first semester, she got a part-time job on campus working in the financial aid office.

She met her husband on campus; they dated for two and a half years before getting married. "He is a great guy. He is always there for me." At the age of 20, she was diagnosed with Diabetes. She told me that she did not follow-up with her doctor and did

not take her medications on a regular basis. "I was young and I did not take my diagnosis seriously. Working and hanging out with my friends were more important to me. Now I'm paying the consequences." During her third year of college, she noticed that her vision started to bother her. She was not able to see things as she used to. Even at her job, working on the computer or completing paper work was difficult. She did not want her supervisor to know that she was having problems with her vision, so her close friend at the job helped her to do her work. As her vision got worse, she decided to go to the doctor. She was diagnosed with Diabetic Retinopathy. "I was devastated. I felt like my life came to a halt. I thought about not being able to drive again, what if I get totally blind? I was… (crying)."

Ms. Q. continued to work with the help of her friend and completed her last year of college. She graduated with honors with a degree in communication. After graduation, she got a job at call center for customer services without disclosing that she was legally blind. However, as her vision deteriorated, she realized that she could not perform her work effectively and she was constantly tripping over things at work and bumping into things. She felt unsafe at work and she was uncomfortable asking for help because she did not want anyone to know that she had a visual impairment. Nevertheless, she decided to disclose her vision impairment to her supervisor because she did not want to lose her job. Ms. Q told me that she asked for accommodations and provided the supervisor with a list of items she would need to effectively do her job, such as Zoomtext and JAWS. She also told the supervisor that she would need to have a cane with her at all times at work. "My supervisor told me that those things are expensive and they cannot cover it with their budget. As for the cane, he did not think it would be a good idea." Ms. Q. told me

that after the conversation with her supervisor she worked for two more months and within those two months she received three written warnings, which included a final warning about her job performance. Therefore, she decided to resign from her job. "I spoke to my husband about this and he was very supportive. He respected my decision to resign. This was new to him as well. He did not know what kind of help was available." Ms. Q. told me that that after she resigned she stayed home for awhile because she did not want people to know that she was getting blind. She did not tell her mother but her husband constantly encouraged her to seek help.

> One day I was home and I felt down and lonely so I decided to go for a walk. I fell down the stairs in the building and my neighbor saw and helped me. We talked and I told her about my situation. She told me that she has Cataracts and was getting a lot of help from the New York State Commission for the Blind and she gave me the contact information.

> Ms. Q. told me that she shared the information with her husband and he called NYSCB for her. She was registered and started to get rehabilitative training, such as mobility training, in which she was taught how to travel safely and how to use a cane safely. She also received rehabilitative therapy to help her increase and maintain her independence with daily activities. She also received training to learn Braille. She received computer training on how to use assistive devices, such as Zoomtext and JAWS. After receiving rehabilitative training, Ms. Q said she felt a little more confident with daily activities. However, even with rehabilitative training in mobility, she still does not feel comfortable traveling. "I am nervous to travel by myself and I have to ask people for information and some of them are very disrespectful. The road is too busy and people do

not have any regards for people with a disability." Ms. Q. also told me that she is assigned to an employment specialist and they have been working together sending out resumes and going out on interviews, but none came to fruition. "I am so frustrated with this job thing. I can't deal with this anymore. Employers think we are incompetent. I have a college degree and I cannot get a job, this doesn't may any sense." Ms. Q. expressed her frustration of not being able to obtain a job. Her morale is very low in seeking employment and she decided not to pursue employment anymore. "Searching for jobs was difficult because the library computers were not easily accessible with assistive devices and support from the librarian staff was poor. They were not friendly or willing to help at all."

Ms. Q told me that she wants to go back to school to do something in advocacy. She said society needs more advocates who can fight for people with a disability. She thinks that employment specialists are not prepared enough to assist people with vision impairment to obtain employment. Ms. Q. told me that because of her blindness, she is unable to accomplish all her desired goals in life. She said she wanted a family, but she cannot care for a child as she would like as a blind person and she does not want to put all the burden on her husband. She said her husband works full-time and works a lot of overtime in order for them to meet their financial obligations.

If employers were more open-minded, I would have gotten a job already because I know that I am qualified. I hope that one day, I will be able to advocate for people with vision impairment so that they can get a job like anyone else that does not have a disability.

Ms. P

Today was a busy day at the interview location. Several agencies are located in the building and one of the agencies was having an immigration intake day. As I met Ms. P in the lobby, we introduced ourselves to each other and started to talk about immigration as we walked to the interview room. When we got to the office, I asked her if she needed some water, coffee, or tea and she chose water. Before the interview started, we engaged in the informed consent process. Ms. P read the consent form in Braille and I read it a second time to her to ensure she understood what she had read; she used a signature guide to sign her name. Ms. P migrated from the Caribbean at the age of 12 to live with her mother and step-father. She did not like her step-father and showed it in a rebellious way. She said when she was in high school; she partied a lot and graduated from high school with minimal grades. After high school, she decided not to attend college. She got a full-time job at a clothing store and moved in as a roommate with one of her friends. She met her husband at a night club and they dated for 10 years before they got married.

Ms. P told me that she was always changing jobs when she was younger. She said she usually gets bored easily when she does the same thing over and over again. "When I was younger, the longest I would keep a job is two years, but I never had a problem finding another job." However, Ms. P told me that as she got older and became married, she looked at life differently and learned to maintain a job. She said she and her husband spoke about having children; therefore, she had to set a foundation.

I was looking forward to starting a family, but one cold winter morning I got up to get ready for work and my whole life change. I got up and my vision was not

cleared, I could barely see and I bumped into the bedroom door. I was so scared.

My husband took me to the doctor and…….(tears coming from her eyes) I was

diagnosed as legally blind.

Ms. P told me that she was diagnosed with a condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa

(RP). It is a condition that affects peripheral vision and leads to blindness. Nevertheless,

she continued to go to work as a sales person in a department store. At work, she was

constantly asking for help from her co-workers, but she never revealed her situation.

However, she realized that she was not performing her duties as she used to, so she

decided to be open about her vision impairment. She spoke to her supervisor and

requested accommodations for JAWS and to be assigned other duties; her requests were

denied. She asked for assistance from her co-workers and there were many complaints

that Ms. P was interrupting them and preventing them from doing their work. "I

remember asking one of my co-workers to tell me what was the code on a clothing tag

and she told me that she did not have time for that and I should ask someone else." Ms. P

told me that she was so frustrated that she got to the point of walking off the job, but her

husband encouraged her to submit her resignation. Since her resignation, her husband has

been the sole provider.

I have been trying for 4 years to get a job to take off some of the financial burden

from my husband, but no one is calling me for a job and trust me I have been on

many interviews and I know that I'm qualified for the positions I interviewed for.

Ms. P. told me that searching for jobs is difficult especially if you do not have the

appropriate assistive devices. For example, her computer at home did not have Zoomtext

or JAWS. Also, she said some of the computers at the library did not have those devices

either and her friends were always too busy to accompany her to the library. She only has

her husband to depend on to help her. She thinks her friends are ashamed to be seen with

her in public because she uses a cane. "My friends were always available to hang out

when I called them before my vision problem and now I can't even get them on the

phone." Ms. P told me that she got connected with NYSCB through her ophthalmologist.

She said she received computer training and mobility training from them. She said the

mobility training helped her to feel a bit more confident when traveling, but she still feels

unsafe at times especially in an unfamiliar environment. Ms. P told me that she travels to

all her interviews with a cane and she thinks that is the reason for not getting a job offer.

"Once the interviewer sees the cane, you can call it a done deal. You are not getting the

job." Ms. P. told me that looking for a job is pointless if the employers cannot see you as

a person and only see you for your disability or as a liability. "I cannot take the

disappointment anymore so I gave up on looking for jobs." Ms. P told me that she has

been trying to obtain employment for four years and has now given up on the idea of

successfully obtaining employment.

Ms. S

As I was on my way to the interview site to meet with Ms. S, I realized that I was

running late. The train had been delayed because of a broken rail. I called Ms. S and

informed her that I would be about 15 minutes late. As I met her in the lobby, I

introduced myself to her and apologized for being late. As we walked to the interview

room, we talked about the train system. Ms. S asked for some water as she settled for the

interview. We engaged in the informed consent process and Ms. S read the consent form

and she signed it.

Ms. S was a 47 year old female who is legally blind due to Diabetic Retinopathy. She has a high school diploma and she is married. Ms. S grew up in a home with her mother, father, and seven siblings. She told me they struggled financially to make ends meet. Both her mother and father were in low income jobs. As the oldest child, when she graduated from high school, she had no plans to attend college because she had to get a full-time job to help her parents financially. For over 15 years, Ms. S had worked in various food settings, such as McDonald, Dunkin Donuts, and Applebee's. Ms. S, an animated woman with a mild laugh, had never needed eye glasses by the time she was in her late 30's. Yet she was slowly losing her sight. At age 40, she was diagnosed with Diabetic Retinopathy and was declared legally blind. "At first, I didn't want to believe I was going blind. It was devastating and frustrating." A person's eyes ordinarily worked in tandem, but in the case of Ms. S, one of her eyes has its own story. Ms. P told me that the first eye to have problems was the left eye, then two years later it was the right eye. In the midst of this problem, a new problem arose, her ill mother. She said her mother became very sick and she and one of her sisters constantly clashed on how to take care of their ailing mother. "She wanted me to take care of our mother the way she wanted to, but I didn't think her way was helping my mother." Ms. S. and her sister were constantly in disagreement until their mother passed away. She told me that one time her sister used a folding shopping cart and hit her in her face. Since the death of her mother, she has not communicated with any of her siblings.

Ms. S. told me that sometimes she cannot sleep. However, her husband of 10 years is very supportive of her. He encourages her and helps her to have a sense of hope. In terms of support from work, her blindness was new to her yet she said her co-workers

were very unsympathetic. "I would panic at work when I knew that I couldn't see something and my co-workers would say that I am having a mental breakdown. I didn't feel like I belonged there (crying)." Ms. S. explained how unsupportive her co-workers were and how they would ignore her when she asked for help. She received a cane from NYSCB and some of her co-workers would make fun of her. Ms. S worked as a customer service representative and with the training she received from NYSCB, she has learned that the telephone buttons can be marked to make it easier for her to make phone calls. "I asked my supervisor for permission to mark the phone buttons and to install Zoomtext and he denied my requests." Ms. S. said, she received written warnings about her poor performance. Eventually, she was terminated from her job. "I asked for help, I asked for accommodations, but instead this is what I get…..fired."

Ms. S told me that that was an unfair decision. She said she applied for social security benefits and was approved. She told me that even though she is getting social security benefit, she is still looking for employment. She has been on some interviews and believes that she has been qualified for those positions, but no one has offered her a job. "Walking with a cane is like a curse. Once someone sees you with a cane especially employers, they think you are not capable of doing the job." Ms. S. told me that she does not see the point of pursing employment anymore. She told me that she also does not want to lose her social security benefits and if she gets a job she will lose it. Ms. S said the last two years of seeking employment was challenging. She said just conducting job search was a hassle and to go to an interview was nerve wracking because she had to plan her travel ahead and ask a lot of questions to get to her destination; she noted the people were not very friendly. In addition, she said the reactions from employers are not pleasant

when they see her with a cane or when she asks for accommodations. "Since I became legally blind, my life has been ravaged by violence, mistrust, and depression." Ms. S. has developed mistrust in society. She does not feel that enough provisions have been made to assist people who are visually impaired to obtain and maintain employment and she notes employers do not make it easy for visually impaired individuals to be employed.

Ms. T.

As I met this vibrant lady, Ms. T, in the lobby of the building where the interview took place, she started to talk about my perfume. She loved the fragrance and she talked about the types of perfumes that she likes. As we entered the interview room, I offered her some water. Before the interview began, we engaged in the consent process. Ms. T read her consent form in Braille and I read it to her again to ensure that she understood it and signed it with a signature guide.

Ms. T was a 54 year old female who is totally blind due to Diabetic Retinopathy. She has never been married. Ms. T. grew up in the South with both parents and two sisters. She is the eldest sister. Both of her parents and her two sisters are Teachers. She graduated from college with a Bachelor's Degree in Education, took a series of certification exams, and then got her license in Teaching. Not long after, she got a Teaching position in a private school. She taught fifth grade for many years before her vision changed her life.

Ms. T developed diabetes at the age of 22 and she has always tried to maintain good health by following-up with her doctor on a regular basis and complying with her medications. However, at the age of 43, she realized that her vision was not the same and at the age of 44, after seeing an ophthalmologist, she was declared legally blind. With her

vision deteriorating rapidly, fours year later she became totally blind. "This was devastating. I was not prepared for this. I felt like my life ended. I did not know what to do." Ms. T taught for four years after being diagnosed as legally blind and she received warnings from the principal because the principal received complaints about her. Students were complaining that she was marking their school work incorrectly and Teachers were complaining that she was constantly interrupting them when they were trying to do their work.

> I disclosed my vision problem to the principal and asked for all my work to be in large print and I asked for a CCTV to help me better see the student's work and she said no, that will take up too much time.

Ms. T said her request for accommodations was not granted and after she lost her vision completely, she went back to the principal and asked for all teaching materials to be given to her in audio format; again her request was denied. "After my vision was getting worse, I went to work with a cane that was given to me by my mobility trainer and I was told that I cannot use it because of safety reasons for the students." Ms. T told me that after she was declared legally blind, she received mobility training from NYSCB, which taught her how to use a cane safely. Nevertheless, two months after becoming totally blind, she was terminated from her teaching position. "I've always been working and losing my job I was heartbroken. I love teaching." Ms. T told me that she reached out to her sisters for help with finding a job and they both turned her down and told her to apply for disability benefits. "I was stunned by my sisters' comments. I was extremely disappointed with them."

Ms. T said she has been trying to find employment for six years and has not received an offer. She said she had difficulty with her job search as some computers did not have certain assistive devices that would have helped her with the process. She asked her friends to help her with job search, but her friends were always too busy. Ms. T. said she went to many interviews and she has encountered some atrocious interviewers. Ms. T. told me that when she gets a date for an interview she has to plan her travel days in advanced, especially if the interview is not in an area that she is familiar with. "Traveling by myself increases my anxiety level, but I know I have to do it. I get fearful and feel unsafe sometimes." Ms. T told me that searching for employment or getting a job and trying to keep the job comes with a lot of challenges. She said employers do not make it easy or comfortable for people who are blind to seek employment or to work as a blind person. In addition, she said that bother employers and employees tend to stereotype and discriminate against people with visual impairments. She told me she has lost all interest in seeking employment. "My vision loss has changed my life in every way." Ms. T told me that before her vision loss, she had friends, supportive family, and a job that she loves and now she has lost everything

Mr. C

As I met Mr. C in the lobby of the building where the interview took place, we introduced ourselves to each other. He was well shaved and wearing a black suit and a tie. I offered him some water and we engaged in the consent process. Mr. C was a 27 year old male who is legally blind due to Glaucoma. He holds a Master's Degree in Social Work. Mr. C grew up as a very active and energetic child. Though he was not a sports person, he kept himself active. As a child, he enjoyed running and being independent.

Mr. C did very well academically and his goal was to help others in need. He graduated from high school with honors decided to go to college. While in college, he worked at a garage with his dad.

Mr. C told me that he helped with the machines and spent sometimes around the welding site. He worked there until he completed his undergraduate degree. After graduating as a social worker, he got a job in a social service agency. He stated that his job presented him with the opportunity to help others in need. Mr. C worked very well as a social worker until he started noticing changes in his vision; they were not significant and he continued to do his job. He mentioned that:

> Years after my first experience feeling some difference in my eyes things started to change more and more. Due to my vision changes, I requested accommodations to help me better perform my work. I asked for Zoomtext to be installed on my computer but it was denied.

Mr. C told me that he continued to work without the accommodations he requested. His vision became worse. As he did not receive the accommodations he requested, he had to strain his eyes in order to use the computer. The pressure on his eyes kept increasing and this later caused him to resign. "I loved my job and I shouldn't have had to give it up because of my vision or an insensitive boss." Mr. C is married and is dealing with the changes along with his family. Since he resigned from his job seven years ago, he has sent out over 100 resumes to different places in hopes of obtaining employment. However, he has been on several interviews but unfortunately no luck in getting a job offer. He said:

I get very frustrated not being able to obtain a job to help support my family, and what makes me more frustrated is the fact that my resume is very appealing but once I get to the interview and they realize that I have a visual impairment then everything changes. My qualifications no longer take priority.

Mr. C told me that at times, he sometimes takes out his frustration on his wife. He said even though she understands what he is going through, she gets frustrated as well. Mr. C. stated that "My wife is the sole bread winner and the one who helps me around the house, and I often wonder if she is tired of taking care of me." Mr. C told me that after two years of seeking employment with no success, he has given up the idea of obtaining employment. He said he is currently not seeking employment because of his negative experiences in the past. "I get frustrated because I don't have the enough support to help me with job search. I am not as independent as I would like."

Mr. D

I met with Mr. D on a warm, cloudy morning at the site in Manhattan where the interview was conducted. Mr. D is a tall gentleman and he was wearing dark glasses. He arrived 15 minutes before our appointed time to meet. He was wearing a white dress shirt and black dress pants. He was neatly dressed and well shaved. I asked if he wanted to have some water before we began. He declined and mentioned that he just had a bottle of water. We engaged in the inform consent process, Mr. D signed the consent form and then began the interview.

Mr. D was a 46 year old male who is legally blind due to Retinitis Pigmentosa. He is married and lives with his wife and children. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. Mr. D is of a Caribbean decent. He was very active as a child playing several

different sports. During his school years, his teachers would always bring to the attention of his parents that he would squint when reading in class. This went on for a very long time. In response, his mother would say that is just how he is whenever he is looking at something. However, Mr. D said that "As the time went by I realize I was squinting more and more." Mr. D told me that due to the fact that his parents did not have money for doctor's fees and he kept excelling in his classes, they figured nothing was wrong with his vision. "I went on to high school, and did very well. I still squinted but overall I did very well."

Mr. D told me that he went on to study for his Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and after many years he got married and had two children. However, as the years went by, he started to feel more and more changes in his eyes. Upon doing a physical he was told that his vision was deteriorating. He was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa and declared legally blind. "I was frustrated and sad. So many things were going through my head. I knew my life would not be the same." Mr. D told me that throughout his career he has been helping those in need and now when he needs help, it was not there. He was denied accommodations that would have helped him to continue his career. "I worked well at what I do, but my vision started to interfere with my work. As it deteriorated I asked for help with devices such as Zoomtext and magnifiers, however, I was denied these things." Mr. D told me that he was terminated from his job because he was unable to perform his job effectively; he has been unemployed ever since.

Mr. D mentioned that at first, it was very difficult adjusting to the loss of his vision, due to the fact that before it all happened, he was a very independent person. He would go places by himself and never had to ask for much help looking for anything.

Now he is solely dependent on his family for help. "I feel safe traveling with my wife, but she is not always available. Without her, I am fearful of traveling alone. Thank God for my wife because without her I would not have any support." Mr. D told me that his wife has been very supportive but his other family members and friends are not. He told me that for the past four years he has been trying to obtain employment.

> I need my independence. I don't want to lose it (crying). I wish employers would be more willing to give us a chance and hire us, but with the disability there is that barrier that you are disabled. You walk in with a cane and that's the stigma, the first thing they see is this blind person, how are we going to hire this person, he may be a liability to the company than more of an asset.

Mr. F

I met with Mr. F one sunny morning in the lobby of the building where the interview was conducted. Mr. F is about 6 feet and 2 inches tall and he was neatly dressed. As we walked to the interview room, we talked about his passion for soccer. I offered him some water and we engaged in the informed consent process.

Mr. F was a 44 year old male who is totally blind due to Diabetic Retinopathy. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Programming and has obtained several certificates in computer training since he became blind. He is very proficient in computer programming and building computers. He has never been married. Mr. F talked about how he came here to the United States from Honduras to claim the American dream and vividly his memory was of his experience flying to New York. He said

> Here I'm on this aluminum alloy bird and other composites at approximately 39,000 feet above the earth. I could witness the different shapes of clouds mostly

oval and bright white clouds on a clear blue sky it looked wonderful. I was

traveling from Honduras, Central America to the United States of America. After

a 4 hour flight, the captain of this aluminum bird announced to prepare for

landing. I adjusted my seat belt and placed my seat back in a vertical position. I

glanced down through the bird's window and noticed these beautiful lightings

everywhere. I was arriving at John F. Kennedy airport in Queens, New York. The

airport setting was different from Honduras airport where the airplane taxis to the

gate unlike Honduras' airport where you will walk for at least 10 minutes to reach

the arrival gate entrance. We drove to a city named Yonkers, New York where my

new life in the United States began. My hopes were to accomplish all my dreams.

Mr. F told me that one of his dreams was to be a professional soccer player. He said when

he went to high school it was all about soccer; his father took him to a futbol field to try

out for a team and he was chosen to play on a soccer league. He stated that "We travelled

and played games through Westchester, New Jersey, Long Island, Virginia and Hawaii."

Mr. F told me that he received a college scholarship based on his excellence in playing

high school soccer. He said he was not doing well academically because playing soccer

was more important to him than studying. He lost his scholarship due to his grades and

was taken off the soccer team. Mr. F told me that with his disappointment he dropped out

of college for a few years. He got a job in repairing computers and he continues to play

soccer with his friends. His dream was still to become a professional soccer player. While

being out of school and working with computers, he realized that he has an interest in

computer, so he decided to go back to college to study computer programming. Mr. F

told me that while in college, he realized that his vision was changing. He was having

problem seeing and after getting his eye checked, he was diagnosed with Diabetic

Retinopathy. Mr. F. stated that:

> This diagnosis had a huge psychological impact on my life. I noticed changes
>
> when I drove at night and head lights from other cars impaired my vision even
>
> more. I began wondering about license renewal, keeping my job, and playing
>
> soccer.

Mr. F told me that he informed his supervisor about his vision loss and the adaptive

devices he would need to perform his job effectively; his supervisor told him that the

company could not provide the items. He said his vision got worse and he had to use a

cane, another issue with his job; eventually he was terminated for poor performance. "My

dream of playing professional soccer was shattered by losing my sight and on top of that I

lost my job because I was denied appropriate accommodations." Mr. F told me that he

has been trying to obtain employment in the area of computers, whether as a computer

technician or to teach computer courses. He has sent out many resumes and has been on

several interviews and he said all he heard was that they would call him, but he never

received a call. He has gotten to the point of no longer being interested in obtaining

employment.

> My family members do not help me, I have to do everything on my own and it is
>
> frustrating. If I go to the library to do job search, the librarians are usually very
>
> rude and the computers do not have the assistive devices that I need to conduct
>
> my job search.

Mr. F told me that he always wanted to have a family, but that dream is also shattered. He

does not think that he will find true love as a blind person. "Who is going to love a blind

person? And especially someone walking around with a cane (sighed)." Mr. F believes

that his American dreams are all gone and his disappointments in searching for jobs are

too much for him.

Data Analysis

The recorded data was transcribed and analyzed and emergent themes were

identified. The process of Epoche, another name for bracketing, was utilized to analyze

the data and allowed me to bracket my own perspectives. I set aside my pre-

understanding of the phenomenon and act non-judgmental. During the data collection, I

wrote memos of my engagement with the data. Epoche is the act of suspending judgment

about the phenomena and instead focusing on the analysis of the experience (Schwandt,

2007). The common themes were pulled from the participants' descriptions of their

experiences, which better help us to understand the lived experiences of visually impaired

individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment. Commonalities of experience

among the participants were identified by using color-coding. During the coding process,

I looked for words and phrases that were repeated frequently. Phrases with the same idea

or subject were put into groups and themes were developed based on each of the group

categories. I carefully de-identified the data to ensure participant anonymity.

Participants' experiences varied, nevertheless, there were some definite

similarities among them. The themes that were identified are: (a) traveling challenges, (b)

closed-minded employers, (c) lack of support, (d) lack of accommodation, and (e) job

search difficulties as shown in tables 2 and 3. The themes identified challenges that

people with visual impairment encounter, which represents the phenomenological

framework of this study. Also, shown in table 2 are six subthemes, which are disability

discrimination in hiring practices, employer discrimination, loss of independence, liability, feelings of frustration, and safety concerns.

Themes

Theme 1: Traveling Challenges

Relying on public transit for daily mobility can be challenging. Some individuals find it difficult or impossible to travel to work. People need to travel to various places such as work to maintain productive and independent lives. However, traveling on public transit usually requires voice or visual cues for people to know where they are. For example, if voice cues are not available, such as voice announcing a route number or route name, where they are, or what the next stop is, it is challenging for people who are visually impaired to travel. Participants emphasized the difficulties they encounter when traveling from one place to another. They indicated that they have to spend more time pre-planning their traveling in advance and need more assistance during the actual travel. They have to map out the route in their mind, or get someone to accompany them to their destination. Mr. F stated that:

> As a blind person, you have to be alert at all times making sure you do not walk the wrong direction. Having a description of where you are, so you pretty much have to have a map of where you are going in your mind at all times. You have to have this mental map for you to be able to function properly.

Ms. Q also said "I have to plan all my traveling in advanced. I can't just get up and go as I would like." In addition, Ms. S. stated that "I have to learn new mobility skills. I have to use a magnifier to read the signs on the trains and the signs at the bus stops."

In some cases, they had to take Access-A-Ride, which is very unreliable and many times gets to their destination late. Access-A-Ride is a door-to-door public transportation service for people who have a disability and the ride had to be reserved in advanced. Some people who are visually impaired travel only by Access-A-Ride. Taking Access-A-Ride to a job interview is a great chance of reaching the interview late, which is not a good impression on the employer. Below are the actual voices from the participants. As Ms. G said:

> One of the challenges that affects me is getting from one place to the next. I had to find my route like a day or two in advance before I get there. Also, another challenge is, is this place accessible for me to get around? As far as transportation you may have to walk a few blocks to get the local bus, then had to stand at the bus stop, and then you had to ask which bus is coming or which bus went by. Also, sometimes Access-A-Ride did not drop me in front of my destination so I had to walk and ask questions.

Ms. K stated that "Traveling from one place to another can be very challenging for me. I had to depend on access-a-ride or take the trains, so I had to plan my trips very carefully. "Ms. P said that "I am afraid of traveling by myself. I feel more comfortable accompanied by someone." Mr. D also stated that "During rush hour, I tend to bump into people and they are ready to fight and if I'm not moving fast enough, people are saying excuse me."

Theme 2: Closed-Minded Employers

Attitudinal barriers may contribute to low employment rates for people who are visually impaired. People who are visually impaired are often seen as helpless or a burden in the workplace (Crudden, 2002). Some people who are visually impaired feel like their chances of obtaining a job is limited because of preconceived notions by employers. Mr. D indicated that:

It is very challenging to pursue employment as a blind person. I have sent out so many resumes and been on so many interviews over the past five years and I cannot get a job. Why? I am frustrated, I feel like giving up on looking for employment. No one wants to hire a blind person. People think we are helpless and do not give us a chance. I'm at the point of not sending out anymore resumes.

Most of the participants indicated that they could sense a negative attitude from the interviewers when they walked into an interview room. As Ms. T said:

I would always be called for an interview, because my resume meets the requirements, but as soon as they see me walking with my cane the attitude changed. I could tell they were looking for a sighted person. They don't even want to give you a chance. That makes me feel like I am not given an equal opportunity. For example, a school in the Bronx, a charter school, they invited me for an interview, three separate times they realized that I was the same person and one of the time she did tell me I was not hired because I was visually impaired. It made me feel a little unhappy because I know it's not something I brought on myself, and I know that I can equally perform the same task like a sighted person.

My comfort level to seek employment is very low because of past experiences

when they find out my limitations. I get a call from one of the perspective

employers saying that the reason why I am not hiring you is because the

customers are parents of children whom I am expected to teach, and he doesn't

want the customer to pull out the children from the business, because of the risk

that a person with physical limitations may cause to their children. So because of

that now I am uncomfortable to pursue employment because of prior experiences.

Mr. F explained one of his obstacles in the interviewing process. He said:

Well the biggest obstacle is getting to the interview process. What do I mean?

You submit your resume, they see the qualifications, then you receive a call and

an email stating they want you to come in for an interview. You call to confirm,

everything is confirmed, a hand shake on the phone, but when you're in the

facility physically, they see you walk in with a cane and the first thing they ask is

who are you looking for? And you say I'm looking for John Stewart the

interviewer, he shows up, you can sense right away the guy is a bit puzzled, you

can sense that something is happening, but you don't know what it is, but I

assume I am not the guy he was expecting.

The participants believed that the potential employers appeared to be

closed-minded and are not receptive to what they can do and as a result they

were not given an opportunity. Ms. S stated that:

Convincing other people mostly employers that I can effectively do the job, with

the tools that are given to me, like the magnifiers, the adaptive aids, and

equipment, computer software and stuff like that, is not easy. It can be very

challenging to convince them that I can do it with the tools. I do not have any

interest in seeking employment anymore.

Ms. E stated that "The interviewer asked me what can I do as a blind person

and I think that was very disrespectful." Ms. Q also stated that "An

interviewer questioned my ability as a blind person to send faxes and

accurate emails and I think they should be focusing on my qualifications

and not my blindness."

Theme 3: Lack of Support

Family or other support systems such as friends can be a contributing factor to

successfully obtaining and maintaining employment for people who are visually

impaired. Whether it is emotional, psychological, financial, or physical support, it is

essential in obtaining and maintaining employment because it can serve as a motivator.

This can be evidenced from the view points of the participants. Conversely, inadequate

support may be a challenge for people with visual impairment to meet their needs. Ms. K

said "I do not have any support system to depend on. My husband left me because of my

vision problem. I never felt so alone in all my life." Ms. S expressed her frustration

because of lack of support. She said:

> In my previous job, when I asked for help, my co-workers said they were too busy
>
> or did not want to be bothered. As a blind employee, the support was terrible and
>
> no accommodation was made for me. I felt like I was alone. Every day I went to
>
> work I was frustrated. And I know that if I did not get terminated, eventually I
>
> would have walked off the job because of lack of support. I would cry every day
>
> at work."

Ms. Q explained that her co-workers were very insensitive and not

supportive. They only think about themselves.

> I find that people lose their patience with me and their temper, they talk down to
> me and they judge me. You feel isolated. There were a lot of obstacles in the store
> that I worked in, there were a lot of open containers and stuff, and I would fall
> over them. Employers sometimes can be very bullying and belittling to me.

Ms. G stated that:

> Most of my co-workers treated me differently when they became aware of my
> vision impairment. If I don't say good morning, most of them would just walk
> pass me and if I ask them for help, I would get the attitude.

Ms. E said "I remember over hearing a fellow colleague saying that with

my disability, I should be at home and not at work." Ms. T further stated

that:

> I feel like I am being treated differently with my disability compare to when I did
> not have a disability. I had a lot of support from others before my vision loss and
> now I do not get any support.

Ms. P said that "I remembered my supervisor told me that I am moving to

slow. And if I can't do the job I should leave."

Theme 4: Lack of Accommodation

Lack of accommodation can make it challenging to maintain independence.

Employers should make reasonable accommodations for people who are visually

impaired in order to minimize or eliminate workplace barriers and at the same time the

visually impaired employees will have the opportunity to maximize their productivity.

Reasonable accommodation is defined as any change or adjustment to a job or the work environment (Shaw, Gold, and Wolffe, 2007). Assistive technology, such as scanners, magnifiers, voice recorders, Braille writers, JAWS, Zoomtext, and Magic are essential accommodations for employees who are visually impaired because it helps them access computers and other systems in the workplace with ease. Even Guide Dogs should be accommodated by employers. Ms. P indicated that "Having the appropriate equipment in order to obtain and perform the job is basically the most difficulty I faced when looking for a job." Mr. F further discussed that "Some people do not really understand what accommodations are. So you have to explain to them exactly what your need is." Ms. P told me about her experience in regards to accommodations. She said:

> My experience was that I needed certain adaptive equipment to be able to do my tasks and I haven't been able to be accommodated. It was hard and unfair not to receive certain items that I need to do my job easier, because of my limited vision. When I had my vision, I just had regular equipment on my desk, now I need in my computer zoom text and CCTV to be able to read larger print; that was not a problem before when I had my sight. Some employers are not able to provide that and that's a problem in finding employment.

Mr. D indicated that:

> With my last employer, I was able to get a large screen monitor and they put in the Zoomtext so I could see larger prints, but the lighting was poor and I was told that I cannot get a light fixture.

Ms. C also expressed her frustration with lack of accommodations. She stated that:

I was told that I cannot use my voice recorder because it is disturbing other workers and when I asked for a head phone I was told that they do not have the funds in their budget to purchase the head phone.

Theme 5: Job Search Difficulty

Obtaining a job is an essential part of everyone's life. Preparing a resume and cover letter, getting an interview, and obtaining a job are all vital to the feelings of achievement and success. Nevertheless, success and achievement is not easily obtained when a person is visually impaired. Job search can also be challenging for people with visual impairment. Individuals who do not have a computer may find it difficult to get a computer in the library or other places that have assistive devices, such as JAWS, Zoomtext, or Magic. Job search without these devices would be extremely difficult for people who are visually impaired. According to Ms. G "Searching the computer to find employment is hard. Updating my resume is also a challenge within itself. I have not been able to prepare my resume and cover letter correctly. I have difficulties filling out applications." Ms. C said "When I go to the library, it is difficult to search for jobs because the computers do not have accessible program for me to use.**"** Ms. E stated that "Many jobs now-a-days, you have to apply for them online and it is difficult to do that if the computer does not have the appropriate adaptive devices to help blind people." Mr. D said "When I go to the library to do job search, the librarians are not very helpful. Mr. F further stated that:

> I have to rely on the librarians for help when I go to the library to search for jobs and it's never been pleasant with the negative attitudes that I received from them, so I tried to stay away from the library.

Subthemes

Disability Discrimination in Hiring Practices: Subtheme of Closed-Minded Employers

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against potential employees on the basis of disability (Barnow, 2014). If the potential employee is not given a chance to prove that he or she is capable to do the work and is rejected solely on the basis of his or her disability, it is a form of discrimination. According to the ADA, disability discrimination is when an employer or other entity treats a qualified individual with a disability as an unfavorable applicant or employee because of his or her disability. Mr. D said:

> Discrimination is a big factor because a lot of the times when going out on job interviews sometimes when they see me using my visual aids like my magnifying glass, they pretty much assume that I cannot do the job. I feel like I am being discriminated against because of my visual impairment and people are judging me.

Employer Discrimination: Subtheme of Closed-Minded Employers

The federal law prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. According to the American Disability Act (ADA), employers should not refuse to hire someone because of a disability and accommodations should be provided to employees with a disability so that they can receive an equal employment opportunity. Nevertheless, accommodations may vary depending on the need of the person with the disability. For example, a person with a disability may need assistive devices, Closed

Circuit Television System (CCTV), digital recorders, or Braille embosser. Mr. F stated that:

> I am well qualified for several of the positions I interviewed for, but the interviewer couldn't see beyond my disability. When I go on interviews I become very pessimistic they are going to discriminate because they think I cannot offer anything to the working environment.

Loss of Independence: Subtheme of Lack of Accommodations

According to Thomson (2013), approximately 25 million Americans have difficulty performing everyday tasks because of limited vision or no vision. Loss of independence may contribute to loss of self-esteem and loss of confidence (Kempen et al., 2012). Mr. F indicated that:

> I am not independent as I would like. I would like to pick up a book and read. I cannot just go to the movies of my choice. Everything I have to do now, I have to think about what adaptive technology I need or can I have someone to assist.

Ms. K also stated that "I do not want to lose my independence. I do not want to be a burden to anybody. I do not want people to feel pity for me."

Ms. T expressed her concerned of losing her independence.

> It is disturbing to the point where you say to yourself, you are not able to function; how will I get from one place to the next? how will I be able to drive? who is going to help me with my daily activities, cleaning, going to do the laundry, doing shopping? I lost my independence just to identify and read my mail, and identifying my money. Losing that independence of just leaving your house to go wherever you choose is devastating.

Liability: Subtheme of Closed-Minded Employers

Visually impaired individuals feel that they are a liability because of their vision impairment. They believe that one of the reasons for not obtaining employment is because they are considered to be a liability by employers. Mr. F stated that:

People are afraid that you will be a liability to them so they are not completely sure that you can handle the job requirements. They are concerned about you getting hurt, they are afraid of you presenting legal procedures, filing suits, and stuff like that.

Also, Ms. T said that "Private employers, everybody is concerned about making money, so they don't want to hire you because they do not want you to be a liability and to sue."

Feelings of Frustration: Subtheme of Lack of Support

Frustration may be a common reaction for a person who is visually impaired, especially when they are not able to do the things they usually do. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, frustration is a deep chronic sense or state of insecurity and dissatisfaction from unresolved problems or unfulfilled needs. Once a person becomes legally blind or totally blind, they may face certain changes in their lives. Furthermore, adjustment to any form of vision loss can be a gradual and usually an emotional process (Thurston, 2010). Frustration may occur when having to do things differently, especially with daily activities such as cooking, cleaning, traveling, and even dressing. Also, insufficient or no support at all from family, friends, and others may create frustration. Ms. E said "I am still trying, I mean it's still frustrating but I have to keep a positive

attitude. It can be frustrating not being able to accomplish the things that I need to get done."

Safety Concerns: Subtheme of Travel Difficulties

Everyone wants to feel safe. Some of the participants told me that as a vision impaired person, they are concerned about their safety. They have to travel to various places, such as doctor's appointments and the supermarket and not having that sense of safety makes them nervous. As Ms. S said:

> Access-A-Ride dropped me off a few blocks from my doctor's office because of the traffic. He did not want to detour because it would make him later for his next pick-up. I was terrified. I was so afraid I did not know what to do. I screamed for help and a gentleman helped me to the sidewalk and told me where I was. I asked him to get a taxi and he did and that's how I got to my doctor's office.

Traveling alone was a major challenge for all participants. They believed that most people are not very helpful and some can be very cruel. Three participants stated that their canes have been taken away from them in the past. One participant said she was pushed out of the way because she was waking too slowly. One participant said her cane got broken because someone stepped on it. Ms. G stated that:

> I was in Access-A-Ride and the driver was flirting with me and asked me if I wanted him to take me to his home. I was so afraid and nervous. I prayed and hoped that someone else would be picked up. I didn't know if he was taking me home or not. I told him I was going to report him. He did take me home, but it was a terrible experience and I should not have to go through this. It is hard to trust people when you can't see.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As mentioned before, trustworthiness is pertinent in qualitative research study. It helped me to established credibility, transferability, and conformability. It also allowed my audience to recognize the accurateness of my study.

Credibility

In order to ensure credibility, the transcripts were checked and rechecked multiple times for mistakes. The codes were constantly checked with the data collected. Information about this researcher such as experiences, training, and educational background was also presented to the participants to increase credibility. Irrelevant or redundant information that may have led to possible identification of the participants was eliminated. Participants got the opportunity to review their data provided to ensure accuracy. The validity of the data collection and analysis was also demonstrated by the process of bracketing, where this researcher made every effort to put aside her repertoires of knowledge, beliefs, or experiences in order to accurately describe the lived experiences of the participants.

To help ensure validity of my research study, I tried to establish honesty from the participants. The participants were given the opportunities to accept or refuse to participate in the research study. I believed this would allow honesty from the participants because only those who were genuinely willing to participate would be a part of the research study and they would freely provide data. Each participant was encouraged to be truthful and at the same time I aimed to establish a rapport with each participant. The participants were aware of their confidentiality and privacy rights and they knew they could withdraw at any time. By utilizing this tactic, it helped to ensure

trust and honesty when providing data. The participants were not afraid to contribute their ideas and provide information about their experiences in obtaining and maintaining employment. In addition, it is important for research data to be reliable and valid so that they can be of true value and be of essential use. If my research study was to be conducted a second time, it should give the same results.

Transferability

Transferability is applying the findings of a research study in one situation to similar situations (Shenton, 2004). The importance of transferability is that it may allow readers of research to make connections between other situations and populations and may also help us to develop and change practices. Even though transferability in qualitative research is a crucial way of utilizing research results and finding, there are limitations. Situations can change overtime which can be a limitation of transferability because it is difficult to predict the future. Transferability takes into account that there are not absolute answers to particular situations and not all results can be transferred; therefore, it is important to modify research accordingly (Shenton, 2004).

The knowledge obtained from my research study may be relevant to other situations and to other investigators who will perform research in another context because they will be able to utilize certain concepts that were developed. The thick descriptions that I provided is essential because it will enable the readers of my research study to make transfers to similar situations. It is essential to have detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being studied so that comparisons can be made and so transferability is possible.

As I gathered thick descriptions of the phenomenon from the participants in order for the reader to have a good understanding, it is noted that the findings may be applicable to other populations and areas. The participants were from different backgrounds and from different countries; nevertheless, they shared similar experiences in relation to obtaining and maintaining employment.

Confirmability

Confirmability in a qualitative research study is essential because it is concerned with the objectivity of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). In my research study, steps were taken to help ensure that my research study findings were the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants and not my own. The results of my findings were checked and rechecked multiple times against the data collected to promote confirmability. In addition, in order to ensure consistency, the interviews were conducted at the same location, in the same office, and the same questions were asked.

As stated before, I ensured that the outcomes of the results were the experiences of the participants. Even though I have been working with the visually impaired population indirectly, I did not allow any biases of my feelings or experiences to interfere with the research study through the use of bracketing. I was able to put aside my knowledge of the phenomenon being studied.

Results

The research question is "what are the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment?" Based on the analysis of the data collected, themes were developed to better understand the lived experiences of people with visual impairment as they obtain and maintain employment.

The results show that visually impaired individuals face different types of challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment, such as closed-minded employers, traveling difficulties, lack of support, lack of accommodation, and job search difficulties. The results have also shown that most people with visual impairment, as shown in table 4, are not interested or losing interest in obtaining and maintaining employment because of their past negative experiences. The results also show that people with visual impairment exhibit feelings of frustration, sadness, and helplessness during their experiences in obtaining and maintaining employment as indicated below.

I feel helpless sometimes.

On my last job, I was looking for a folder for my client and I could not find it quickly and that was frustrating.

I am frustrated, I feel like giving up on looking for employment.

I am not able to find a job which makes me sad.

The results also reveal attitudes of employers and their unwillingness to take chances with someone who is disabled or provide appropriate accommodations. The results of this study may help counselors, counselor educators, employers, and the general public to pinpoint and work on the factors that influence obtaining and maintaining employment. In addition, the results may help employers and coworkers to know and have a better understanding of how visually impaired people are experiencing employment and search. Also, it may create awareness for adaptive equipment to be explained and mandated at libraries and in offices.

Table 1

Demographic Information for Participants

Category	Percentage
Vision Status	
Totally Blind	40
Legally Blind	60
Gender	
Male	30
Female	70
Ethnicity	
Latino	60
African American	20
Other	20
Marital Status	
Married	50
Separated	20
Never Married	30
Education	
Master's Degree	20
Bachelor's Degree	40
High School Diploma/GED	40

Table 2_____

*Themes and Subthemes*_____

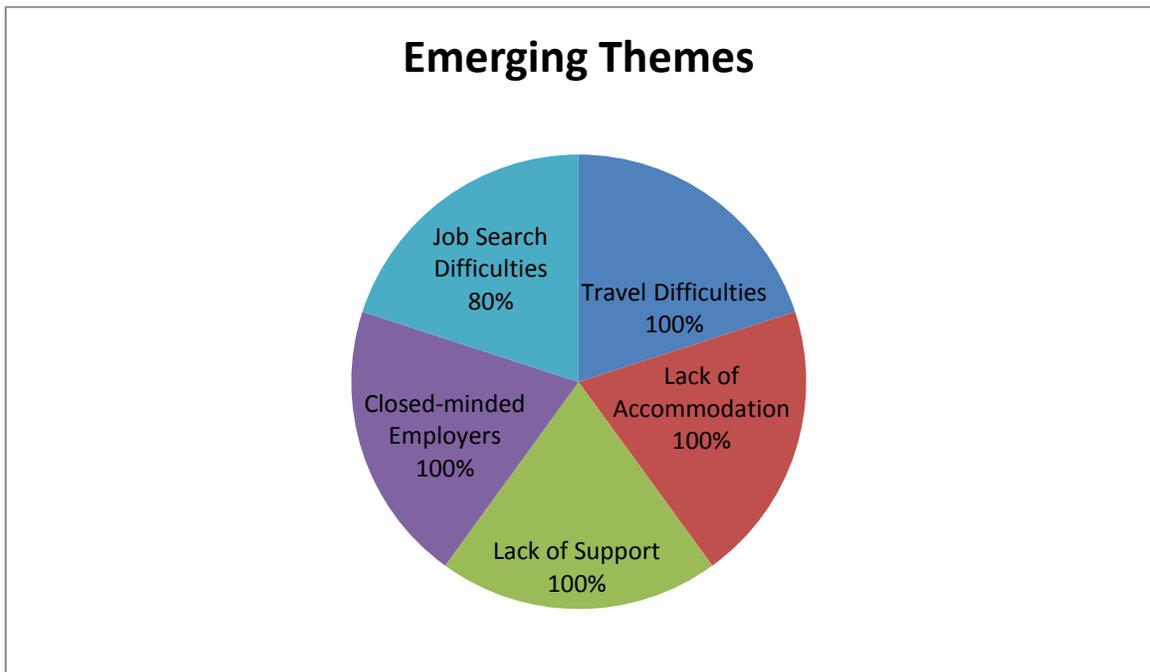|	
Travel Difficulties	Safety
Lack of Support	Frustration
Lack of Accommodation	Loss of Independence
Closed-Minded Employers	Employer Discrimination
	Discrimination in Hiring Practices
	Liability
Job Search Difficulties	

Emerging Themes

Figure 1: Emerging Themes.

Figure 2: Causes of Vision Loss

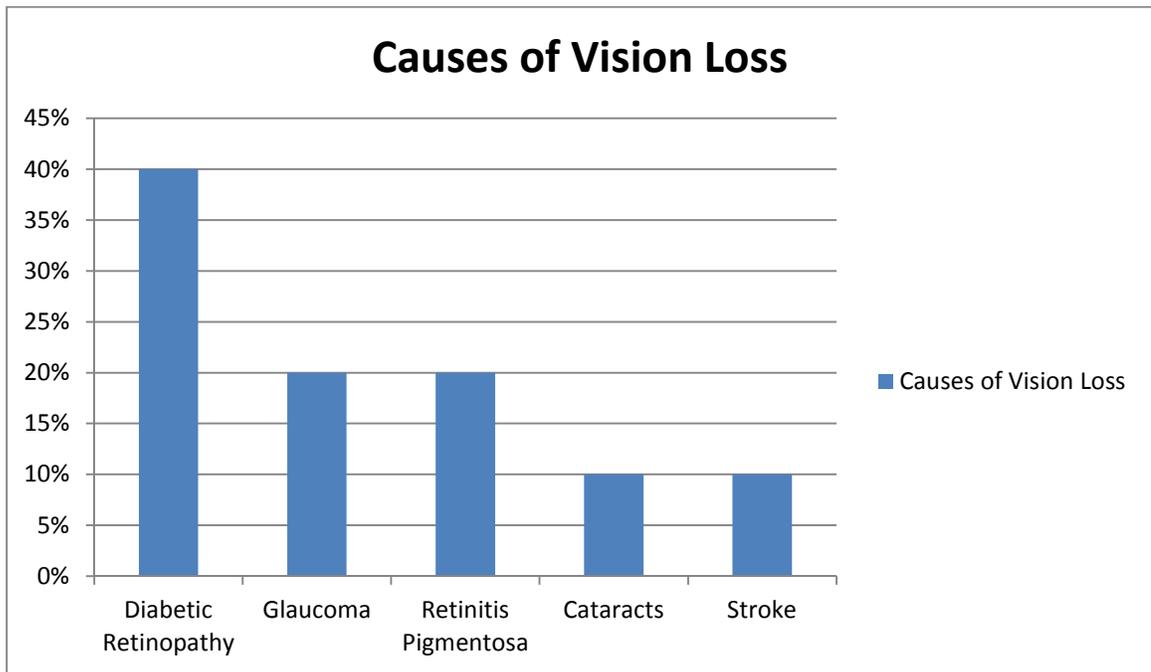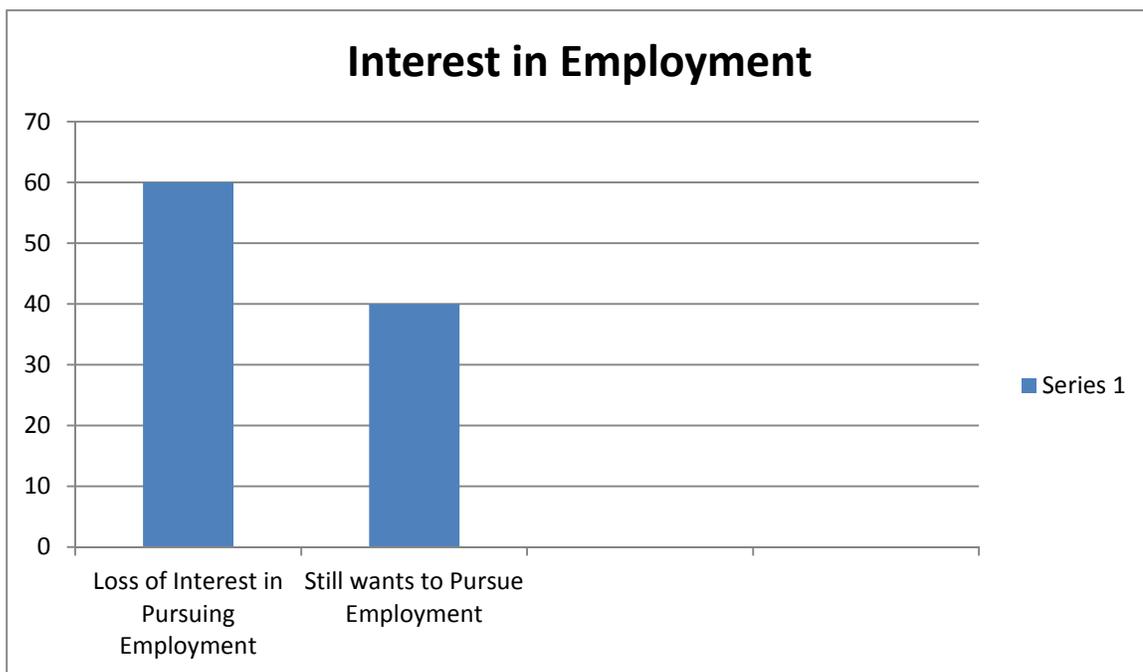## Interest in Employment

Figure 3: Level of Comfort in Pursuing Employment

Summary

Chapter 4 of this qualitative research study presents the data collection, data analysis, and results. It documented the lived experiences of ten individuals with visual impairment and the challenges they faced in obtaining and maintaining employment. In spite of the different experiences of each participant, there were five themes that emerged, three subthemes, and three negative feelings, which show the commonality among them when obtaining and maintaining employment. The results from this study have heightened our understanding of the lived experiences of people with visual

impairment in obtaining and maintaining employment. The results and themes identified

in the study have given us clear information about the challenges perceived by people

with visual impairment when obtaining and maintaining employment. The results have

also provided a foundation for future study. Future recommendations will be detailed in

the next chapter, which is the final chapter

Chapter 5: Implications and Discussions

This final chapter includes five sections. After the introduction, which recaps the purpose and nature of the study, why it was conducted, and the key findings, I provide an interpretation of the findings. I then present the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications, and a conclusion.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to bridge the gap in the literature and explore and understand the perspectives on obtaining and maintaining employment for the visually impaired population. The purpose was also to create awareness of this population and the struggles they encounter in obtaining and maintaining employment. Another purpose was to enable counselors and counselor educators to promote social change and break barriers, misconceptions, and stereotypes.

I used a transcendental phenomenological design focused on describing and explicating the meaning of the lived experiences of a phenomenon. I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of people with visual impairments in obtaining and maintaining employment. The key findings in this study showed that closed-minded employers, travel challenges, lack of accommodations, lack of support, and job search difficulties are major challenges for people with visual impairments to successfully obtain and maintain employment. The results also showed that most participants are no longer interested in obtaining and maintaining employment because of previous negative experiences.

Interpretations of the Findings

This study was unique because it focused on exploring and understanding the perspectives of the lived experiences of people with visual impairments in obtaining and

maintaining employment, which was an area that showed a lack of research. This study provided a unique contribution to counselor educators, counselors, employers, and the general public because it enhanced and supported existing literature by describing the lived experiences of people with visual impairments in obtaining and maintaining employment. In Chapter 2, I outline several studies that were conducted to explore the experiences of people with visual impairments in relation to employment. Researchers have identified employers' attitudes, transportation challenges, and accommodations to be major barriers to employment (Crudden, 2002). In addition, Zhou et al. (2013) described computer challenges that affect the job search. Zhou et al. mentioned that the lack of assistive devices and training with assistive devices can affect the job search process. Findings from the current study indicated that lack of support was a barrier to successfully obtaining and maintaining employment. Reinhardt (2001) addressed the importance of support and encouragement in the success of obtaining and maintaining employment. Reinhardt observed that the support of friends and family can help people with visual impairment in successfully obtaining and maintaining employment. Findings from the current study indicated that barriers to employment include closed-minded employers, transportation difficulty, lack of accommodations, lack of support, and job search challenges.

Closed-Minded Employers

A closed-minded employer was a major challenge described by participants in my study. Shaw et al. 2007 reported that employers were concerned with low productivity levels of visually impaired individuals, difficulty terminating people who are visually impaired, and delays that workers with a visual impairment may experience. An

employer's lack of knowledge and awareness of the visually impaired population may cause a hindrance for a visually impaired individual in being employed (Bell, 2010). Results from my study confirmed that employers are not willing to employ people who are visually impaired because of their disability. Employers are not willing to see beyond their disability.

Previous studies showed that employers are hesitant in employing people with visual impairment (Shaw et al., 2007), but my study expanded on this finding. My results showed that employers are very harsh when interviewing people with visual impairments. Some of the questions that employers had asked participants included "are you able to see at all?" "what can you do as a blind person?" and "how can you make a phone call as a blind person?" In addition, some of the reasons that employers gave interviewees with visual impairment as to why they would not be hired were cruel: "the staff would not feel comfortable with a guide dog in the building" and "the children's parents would pull their children away from my business if we hired you." These findings showed that employers need to be educated about the visually impaired population, legal discrimination, and cultural sensitivity. Employers need to be cognizant of their choice of words when talking to individuals with visual impairment. Employers' reactions to interviewees with visual impairments can have a great emotional impact on them. Negative responses can affect their self-worth and self-respect because they may feel that they are losing control of their lives. The lack of interest in pursuing employment that was shown in my study can be eliminated or reduced significantly if employers are more receptive to employing individuals with visual impairments.

Results from my study were similar to those from previous studies. For example, findings from my study indicated that most employers tend to have negative reactions when they encounter an interviewee who is visually impaired. Employers questioned visually impaired people's ability to perform their job. In addition, my study showed that employers did not have knowledge of the visually impaired population and what they were capable of achieving. Furthermore, based on participants' comments, it did not appear that employers were willing to take the time to familiarize themselves with this population. The results of my study and previous studies showed that it is important for employers to have an open mind and hire qualified people with a disability such as vision impairment. Doing so would help to boost the person's morale, and the employer would be adhering to the Americans with Disabilities Act. A lot of work needs to be done to change employers' misconception that people with visual impairments cannot be fully productive in the labor force.

Travel Challenges

Traveling has shown to be a challenge in obtaining and maintaining employment. Montarzino et al. (2007) found that the jobs of employed people with visual impairments can be hindered by their inability to travel independently. The participants in my study emphasized their travel difficulties from the perspectives of being a person with visual impairments. My results showed that lack of independent traveling can have a negative impact on successful employment. Some people who are visually impaired rely on public transportation such as buses and trains, but traveling to the bus or train can be difficult if they do not have someone to accompany them. In addition, most of the time no announcement is made on the bus or train to inform the person with visual impairment of

where they are and which stop is coming up next, which can cause anxiety and fear for the person with visual impairment. The results of my study also showed people with visual impairment had a fear of traveling in unfamiliar neighborhoods, a fear of crossing streets, and a sensitivity to the distance from where they get off the bus or train to their final destination such as their work facility. These impediments were also reported in previous studies. In my study, many participants feared traveling on their own, which negatively impacted obtaining and maintaining employment. In addition, traveling by Access-A-Ride has been shown to be a negative experience for individuals with visual impairment. When taking this type of transportation, participants reported that the possibility of reaching the destination late or being dropped off a far distance from that final destination was high. In addition, walking in unfamiliar areas and taking stairs could be a terrifying experience for individuals with visual impairments.

Nyman, Dibb, Victor, and Gosney (2012) showed that people with visual impairment have a lower participation rate in daily activities such as employment because of transportation difficulties. McDonnall and Crudden (2009) showed that the inability to travel independently has been a significant factor in obtaining and maintain employment among the visually impaired population. Traveling challenges reported in my study were also reported in previous studies; however, my study expanded previous findings to include traveling on foot, fear of traveling, and reactions from the general public when traveling. In my study, individuals spoke about their fear of traveling outdoors alone. They noted that they were afraid of crossing the street, climbing stairs, and bumping into people. Participants discussed bumping into people due to the place being crowded. Some visually impaired individuals spoke about negative experiences they encountered with the

public, such as their cane being taken away from them, their cane being stepped on and broken, and encountering sighted individuals who were too busy to answer their questions. Traveling is a daily activity; whatever one has to do outdoors requires traveling, and the fear of traveling can cause emotional distress. My study showed that traveling from one from place to another, such as a job or a store, is essential to independent living, but it is difficult getting around without proper training and a good support system. It is necessary for people with visual impairment to get appropriate mobility training so that they can be better independent travelers. As one participant said, "going outdoors is a challenge for me."

Lack of Accommodations

Studies have indicated that employers are concerned about expenses associated with workplace accommodations and believe that people with visual impairments would experience delays in reaching their full productivity (Shaw et al., 2007). Other research showed that accommodations are necessary for visually impaired individuals to achieve successful employment (Williams et al., 2006; Zhou et al., 2013). My study also showed how important it is to provide accommodations to people with visual impairment. My results indicated that most people with visual impairment have lost their jobs whether voluntarily or involuntarily because of lack of accommodations. Based on my findings, if appropriate accommodations were provided, the visually impaired individuals would have maintained their jobs and performed their work duties.

Both my study and previous studies showed that lack of accommodations plays a negative role in employment; unlike previous studies, my study showed that most people with visual impairment voluntarily or involuntarily left their jobs because of lack of

accommodations. In my literature review, I did not identify any studies that addressed individuals with visual impairment who voluntarily or involuntarily left their jobs because of lack of accommodations. In my study, participants tended to resign from their jobs when they did not get the accommodations because they were not able to do their jobs without the accommodations. These individuals felt frustrated, angry, and unproductive, and as a result they resigned from their jobs. Individuals who left their jobs involuntarily were terminated because of poor performance, which resulted from lack of accommodations. Individuals requested accommodations to effectively perform their jobs and were mostly denied the accommodations, which prevented them from doing their work; as a result they were terminated. Appropriate accommodations are an integral part of successful employment, and if accommodations were granted to individuals with visual impairment, there is a great possibility that the employment rate among this population would increase.

Lack of accommodations does not only result in loss of employment, it is a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Based on my findings, suitable accommodations will allow people with visual impairments to meet their needs and successfully obtain and maintain employment. Gamble et al. (2004) showed that people with visual impairments who received appropriate accommodations were successful in performing specific tasks in their job. Results of my study showed that the lack of accommodations prevented participants from maintaining employment.

Lack of Support

Lack of support was one of the major challenges that the participants in my study mentioned. In 2011, Kelly conducted a study on assistive technology with high school

students with visual impairments, and results showed that the students who received family support were more successful than those who did not receive family support. Other studies confirmed that the support of family members and friends is instrumental in obtaining and maintaining employment for people who are visually impaired (Crudden, 2012). In contrast, another study showed that family members and friends were a barrier to accessing low vision services (Pollard et al., 2003), which contradicted my findings. Crudden (2012) revealed that lack of support from family and friends can lead to failure in obtaining and maintaining employment, which was consistent with my findings.

Based on my findings, a lack of support reduces motivation to work toward independence, whereas individuals who receive encouragement and support feel more empowered and motivated to be independent. In addition, participants from the current study reported that lack of support from coworkers was disempowering and disheartening. Family members who show interest in and positive attitudes toward their family members who are visually impaired help these individuals to achieve their goals. In my study, findings showed that participants did not benefit from support from their coworkers, and as a result they tended to lose interest in working and eventually quit their jobs.

The participants in my study mentioned their feelings of loneliness, sadness, frustration, loss of independence, and isolation because of their experiences as a visually impaired person obtaining and maintaining employment and the lack of support they received. In a study conducted by Pollard, Simpson, Lamoureux, and Keffe (2003), vision impairment was associated with loss of independence, social isolation, and depression because of lack of support. Participants in my study have reported negative

comments from their co-workers in relation to using canes or guide dogs, for example, they comment on dog hair in the work place and co-workers' reluctance to provide assistance to them which is consistent with previous research (Leonard, 2002).

My study has shown that people with visual impairment who have not received any support whether from family or friends, and even coworkers, felt more incapable than individuals who received support. Coworkers have made harsh comments, such as "you should be staying home and not working" and "I have my own work, I cannot help you." The research study revealed that lack of support can be detrimental in meeting the needs of people with visual impairment. All participants stressed that lack of support prevented them from keeping a job, reduced their confidence level, and reduced their motivation. Providing support would be beneficial to individuals with visual impairment to meet their needs.

Job Search Difficulty

Another past research study has shown that people with vision impairment encounter more challenges than sighted people in finding and maintaining employment (McCarthy, Burgess, and Keeffe, 1999). Shaw and Gold (2011), conducted a study which showed that effective job search strategies are important for people who are visually impaired in the success of obtaining employment. Likewise, the results of my research study are similar to previous research studies also in that it showed that job search difficulty was a hindrance to successfully obtaining employment.

As shown in my research study, finding a job can be a difficult and frustrating task for individuals with visual impairment. Individuals with visual impairment have become discouraged from the rejection and rudeness they encountered during the job

search process. Individuals with visual impairment felt that they needed more support for successful job search. They felt that they needed more help with their resumes. A *resumé* is one of the key elements to help someone obtain a job interview and, without the support to help prepare a resume and cover letter, it can present challenges. In addition, the lack of appropriate assistive devices was another factor to the downside of conducting successful job search for individuals with visual impairment. The research findings suggest that people with visual impairment did not get the support they expected during their job search.

Individuals with visual impairments may need assistance and support during their job search process. Some individuals may not have a personal computer; therefore, they have to use public computers, such as the library to conduct their job search. The computers in the library may not have the appropriate assistive devices to successfully carry through their job search. Many jobs now have to be applied for online and not having the appropriate assistive devices can make the applying process challenging. Furthermore, some job applications online may not be compatible with some assistive devices; therefore, assistance and support is essential. The necessary supports and resources should be in place to help individuals with visual impairment to better search for jobs. Providing support and assistance can help individuals with visual impairments of various search strategies to better obtain employment. It is important to meet the needs for individuals with visual impairments so that they can successfully meet their goals and be productive in the labor force.

Overall Interpretation of Findings

  This transcendental phenomenological research study directly explored the lived experiences of people with visual impairments in relation to obtaining and maintaining employment and confirms and supports much of the previous research and presents findings that enhance and strengthen the previous research. Chapter 4 presents descriptions of the lived experiences of people with visual impairments in obtaining and maintaining employment and discloses insights into the types of needs that people with visual impairments have that need to be met in order for them to be successful in obtaining and maintaining employment. Based on my study, some of these needs are to have employers who are open-minded, to have better transportation systems and mobility training, to be provided with appropriate accommodations, to be supported, and to be provided with appropriate assistive devices to conduct job searches. If people with visual impairments do not get their needs met to overcome their challenges, the results indicate that they are likely to lose interest in pursuing employment due to negative experiences. If this continues to be the case, it may be very difficult for the employment rate to increase for this population. Therefore, it is imperative for these individuals' needs to be met to ensure success in obtaining and maintaining employment. If these needs are not met, reaching their full potential or becoming successful is difficult.

Delimitation and Limitation of the Study

Delimitations

  I utilized purposive sampling; therefore, delimitations associated with this study are that it is limited only to participants who are ages 18 through 60; who must have had an onset of visual impairments within the last 10 years; who must have work experiences;

and who must be English-Speaking. Also, all participants must be currently active with the New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSB). In addition, the only sources for information were from the participants in the study.

Limitations

The findings from this research study are specific to the lived experiences of the participants. The sample is limited to people with visual impairments who are receiving services from the New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB). In addition, a limitation of qualitative studies in general is the extensive amount of time needed to conduct the study. For example, in this study, I am the key instrument who conducted the interview, transcribed the interviews, and analyzed the data.

Qualitative research studies are time consuming. I anticipated conducting all the interviews in seven weeks, but it took me 10 weeks because of the rescheduling of appointments for some participants. Also, another limitation with "time" is that one participant arrived to the interview a few minutes late and another participant had to leave the interview a few minutes early because the participant's Access-A-Ride arrived early. Due to the shortening of time for these participants, the results could have been affected because these participants may not have had the time to tell me everything they wanted to say. Another limitation of my research study was the decision to employ a purposive sampling technique in order to have shared characteristics to allow saturation of the data presented by the participants.

The data collection type used for my research study was face-to-face interviews. In general, there are limitations to different types of data collections. As for interviews, some of the limitations are that the interviews provide indirect information filtered

through the views of the interviewees, the interviews were conducted at a designated place instead of a natural field setting, and the participants did not articulate themselves equally (Creswell, 2007).

While the sample size was sufficient to present the sampling frame, this study only includes participants who are registered with NYSCB from one institution and therefore, may not be fully representative of all people who are visually impaired in the United States. Nevertheless, in concordance with an extensive literature review, the findings are applicable to other situations or regions. I have not found research to indicate any major regional differences related to employment for the visually impaired population; therefore, I can assume a relative degree of transferability of the results.

Recommendations for Further Study

My research study "A Phenomenological Exploration of Visually Impaired Individuals' Perspectives on Obtaining and Maintaining Employment" has uncovered the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment. Many useful insights have been drawn from their perspectives and experiences, nevertheless, many questions remain that could expand this research and provide additional insights for counselor educators, counselors employers, and the general public. The loss of benefits such as Social Security Disability was not shown in this study to be a barrier to obtaining and maintaining employment except for the first participant who said "*the threat of losing my disability benefits prevents me from seeking employment.*" Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct further research in the area of the impact of social security disability benefits on obtaining and maintaining employment.

It would also be interesting to conduct further research on gaining the perspectives from employers to understand their reluctance of employing people with visual impairments or their reluctance of providing appropriate accommodations for employees with visual impairments. In addition, conducting further research with visually impaired individuals who are currently employed in order to learn about their experiences as a current employee and their level of functioning on the job would be appealing. It would also be very interesting to know the turnover rate of people with visual impairments on the job from the viewpoint of the employers. In addition, another recommendation for future study is to examine the impact of family dynamics after a partner becomes visually impaired. Therefore, conducting a research study on how can family and friends become a hindrance to success for visually impaired people would be important. Also, conducting a research study on the effectiveness of mobility training or the success rate of independent traveling after mobility training for people who are visually impaired would be interested. In addition, conducting a research study on the perspectives of the general public in relation to helping people who are visually impaired would also be interesting. Taking on these future research studies may provide more awareness and insight into the struggles and challenges people with visual impairments encounter and why they encounter such tribulations.

Many questions still remain that could expand this research and provide additional awareness and insights to counselor educators, the visually impaired population, employers, and the general public. This study focused on getting the perspectives from people who are visually impaired and no other viewpoints were collected; therefore, conducting a research study on counselor educators would be

beneficial in which they can identify factors that have impacted people who are visually impaired. Counselor educators can also focus on how vision impairment influences an individual's ability to conduct their daily activities. In addition, conducting a research study on how to prepare counselor educators to effectively prepare people who are visually impaired for the work world would be important.

Furthermore, conducting research in other fields, such as social work and special education in relation to the visually impaired would be interesting. The research can focus on advocating, advocates, providing awareness to the visually impaired population, such as job placement tools, placement planning, and job development, familiarizing social workers with the visually impaired population, increasing employers' knowledge of the visually impaired population, job search strategies, increasing awareness of vision impairment and its impact on quality of life, and assessing the level of education of people who are visually impaired and the types of jobs they seek.

Implications

Based on the lived experiences that the participants revealed, I have formed several implications. The implications are based on the findings in chapter 4. All participants mentioned the negative feedback they received from employers, co-workers, family members, friends, and the general public. Therefore, it is imperative to create an awareness of the challenges that people with visual impairments encounter on a daily basis and also find ways in which people can help instead of contributing to the problems. Participants specifically mentioned the lack of awareness and understanding about visual impairments amongst family, friends, employers, and others.

Employers are not aware of what visually impaired individuals are capable of
doing, so they simply reject us before giving us the chance to prove ourselves.
One of the negative experiences that I have encountered is from over hearing one
fellow colleague saying that being in the position that I am, I should be home and
not at work.

Insights need to be provided and awareness needs to be promoted about this
population and the challenges they encounter in relation to employment, as well as legal
issues under ADA guidelines. In addition, increasing the level of functioning and
independence for the visually impaired through the use of adaptive equipment and
accommodations is essential in order for them to successfully reach their full potential.
With proper training, counselors and counselor educators can help break the barriers of
negative connotations of the visually impaired by providing training and awareness
workshops to employers and the general public. Also, providing employers and the
general public with insights on how to develop sensitivity around this issue and
understanding how to provide support to the visually impaired population is imperative.

The support of employers, family members, friends, and the general public is
instrumental in the success for people with visual impairments in obtaining and
maintaining employment. The Commission for the Blind and other organizations that
serve the visually impaired can educate employers on the various resources and share
these findings with them; this can have a real positive impact. Instead of assuming the
person cannot do their job, they could actually tap into the resources and give the person
a chance. A recommendation for practice is that social service agencies and the
Commission for the Blind need to do more to make all employers aware of what is

available for this population, what employers need to know in terms of the abilities of visually impaired individuals, and also what discrimination means. They can also share how negative stereotypes have such a profound negative effect on people with visual impairments and share success stories to show what is possible. Most importantly, it is essential for counselors and counselor educators to be provided with the knowledge to educate employers on how to improve retention of employment for individuals who are visually impaired for positive social change.

Conclusion

Obtaining and maintaining employment is a major activity for many people of working age. Work provides economic rewards, a sense of identity, accomplishment, and meaning. It helps people to live an independent and productive life. Research has shown that people with visual impairments experience a higher unemployment rate than sighted individuals. The focus of this study was to understand the lived experiences of people with visual impairments in obtaining and maintaining employment.

The prevalent themes that were uncovered have shown the challenges that people with visual impairments encounter when obtaining and maintaining employment. The results also show the participants' lack of interest in participating in the workforce due to a history of negative experiences (see table 5). Visually impaired individuals find it difficult to successfully obtain and maintain employment when their needs are not addressed. Based on the results, there may be a real potential to improve the experiences and increase the employment rates among people with visual impairments if employers are more open-minded to hiring them and to providing appropriate accommodations, if employers, friends, and families provide visually impaired individuals with more support,

if their job search was more feasible and accessible, if transportation systems for the

visually impaired population was a little better, and if all visually impaired people

received better mobility training.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter to Potential Research Participants

Dear Potential Participants:

My name is Nadine Donaldson and I am a doctoral student at Walden University in the Counselor Education and Supervision Program, and I am conducting a research on individuals who are visually impaired experiences in obtaining and maintaining employment. The criteria for the study are:

1. Ages 18 and above
2. Visually impaired in the last 10 years
3. English-Speaking
4. Have work experiences
5. Currently, either seeking or not seeking employment

If you meet these criteria, you are invited to express your participation. Please be aware that your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you may discontinue at any time. There will be no consequences to you if you choose not to participate. My intention is to improve counseling related services for visually impaired and to get a better understanding of the challenges of obtaining and maintaining employment with this population. If you are interested in participating in this research study or need to get more information in order to make a decision to participate, please feel free to contact me at 646-244-9516.

Sincerely,

Nadine Donaldson

Student-Walden University

Appendix B: Standardized Open-Ended Interview Guide: Face-to-Face Interview

1. What is it like to pursue employment as a visually impaired person?
2. What obstacles if any, have you encountered in relation to employment since you became visually impaired?
3. What is your comfort level in seeking employment as a visually impaired person?
4. What have been your experiences as an employee who is visually impaired?
5. What challenges have you faced as a visually impaired employee as compared to when you were sighted?
6. What kind of support have you received or not received when seeking employment or being an employee from family, friends, and other employees?
7. Can you describe any challenges you have encountered since you became visually impaired?
8. What have been your experiences as a visually impaired person?

9. What were your feelings or concerns when you got diagnosed with your eye disease?

10. What has or has not happened since you got diagnosed as visually impaired?

11. What obstacles if any exist in your life since your diagnosis?

12. Please describe what is life like with your vision being deteriorating or as a blind person?

13. What was your life like before becoming visually impaired?

Potential Follow-up Questions

14. You mentioned x, please share a bit more about that.

15. When I asked you about y, mentioned x, please give an example of that.

16. I realized you mentioned x approximately 4 times, why is this so important to you?

17. And why is that so?

18. And why do you believe it is that way?

19. How did that make you feel and what changes would you like to see?

20. I heard you said x, can you describe what that was like for you?

Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer: Nadine Donaldson

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: "A Phenomenological Exploration of Visually Impaired Individuals' Perspectives on Obtaining and Maintaining Employment." I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: **Date:**