

## A LOOK INTO THOSE WHO CAN'T SEE: SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IN THE LIVES OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN THREE GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS OF SRI LANKA

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**Abstract:** Socioeconomic development of a nation is closely linked with the well-being of all communities and is dependent on several factors. Disability, including blindness is inevitably one such determinant that hamper a person's well-being. This situation is further aggravated when people with disabilities live in low socioeconomic settings, thus experiencing either no or limited access to health and social services. Out of the globally estimated figure of 285 million people with visual impairment and blindness, 90% live in low and middle-income countries. Vision impairment and blindness have hence been identified as a cause and consequence of investigating different dimensions of poor socioeconomic conditions. This study aims at exploring the socioeconomic profile of people with visual disabilities, and to examine the relationship of visual disabilities to socioeconomic status of three diverse geographical areas in Sri Lanka. Having obtained prior consent, data from 313 persons with visual impairment and blindness have been collected and analysed in this study. The underline socioeconomic conditions of this study—age, gender, education status, marital status, current economic activity, sector participation, and family income—are treated as independent to the impacts of visual disability according to the test of independence (Pearson chi square test). The results indicate that the visual disability condition does not play a role in determining each of the above social parameters of people with visual disabilities. However, past research highlights that disability-inclusion sector policies aimed at improving their socioeconomic conditions contribute substantially in addressing the social and economic problems of persons with visual disabilities. Targetted social assistance programmes and interventions alone would not be fruitful unless the economic development is not fairly distributed across all communities countrywide. Therefore,

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