



# The impact of individual characteristics in self-esteem and locus of control of young adults with visual impairments



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## ABSTRACT

In this study the impact of personal/individual characteristics (gender, vision status, age, age at loss of sight, recency of vision loss, education level, employment status, and ability of independent movement) in locus of control (LOC) and self-esteem were examined. Eighty-four young adults with visual impairments (42 with blindness and 42 with low vision) took part in this study. The significant predictors of self-esteem were vision status, age at loss of sight, recency of vision loss and educational level. Moreover, significant predictors of LOC were vision status and independent movement.

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## 1. Introduction

Pinquart and Pfeiffer (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of studies that compared the psychological well-being of individuals with visual impairments and unimpaired control groups or population norms. With small or moderate differences between the studies, individuals with visual impairments showed lower psychological well-being scores compared to sighted participants (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2011).

The present study examines self-esteem among young adults with visual impairments. Visual impairment may cause people to feel inadequate and inferior, have low self-esteem or be depressed (Van Huijgevoort, 2002). A number of theorists suggested that loss of vision leads to lower self-esteem (Ponchillia & Ponchillia, 1996; Tuttle & Tuttle, 2004). However, a review of the relevant studies clearly indicated a lack of agreement amongst researchers (Huurre, Komulainen, & Aro, 1999).

The majority of the research on self-esteem problems of individuals with visual impairments has been conducted among children, teenagers, and older adults. There is relatively little research on self-esteem among adults with visual impairments. The existing research suggests that young adults with visual impairments experience moderate levels of self-esteem (Cardinali & D'Allura, 2001). Additionally, research indicated that differences between sighted and visually impaired college students (Beaty, 1994) or adults (Fok & Fung, 2004) do not exist. Recently, Papadopoulos, Montgomery and Chronopoulou (2013) found that sighted adults reported higher self-esteem compared to adults with blindness and adults with low vision.

The present study also examines locus of control (LOC) among young adults with visual impairments. LOC plays an equally crucial role during a person's adjustment period toward his/her visual impairment, as well as impacts upon the daily challenge of living with such an impairment (Dodds, 1993). However, there are a limited number of studies which have investigated LOC in adults with visual impairments. Moreover, these studies demonstrated controversial results. For example, in the study by Roy and MacKay (2002) where the participants were college/university students, sighted

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individuals appeared to have a higher internal LOC compared to participants with visual impairments. On the other hand, Klinkosz, Sekowski, and Brambring (2006) found a tendency for students with visual impairments to demonstrate a higher internal LOC compared to sighted students. In their recent research, Papadopoulos et al. (2013) found no statistically significant differences amongst sighted adults and adults with visual impairments with regard to LOC (Papadopoulos et al., 2013).

Personal/individual characteristics such as vision status, age at loss of sight, education level, and ability for independent movement can affect self-esteem and LOC. It has been suggested that people with low vision actually have more difficulties adapting to their environment in comparison with people who have severe visual impairments (Huurre, 2000). Sacks (1996) supported the view that adults with low vision demonstrate more negative self-perception compared to either adults with blindness and/or sighted adults. Other studies suggested that no significant differences exist with regard to the self-esteem experienced by people with various degrees of visual impairment (Huurre et al., 1999).

Another personal/individual characteristic that could affect self-esteem and LOC is the age at loss of sight. According to Tuttle and Tuttle (2004), during different periods of their life, e.g., infancy, childhood, adolescence, working years, retirement, individuals have different concerns related to their feelings, social development and status, health, etc. Tuttle and Tuttle (2004) suggested that the older the person is, the more difficult it is for them to adjust their behavior and learn how to live with a new condition since their behavioral pattern has become rigid and inflexible.

Beach, Robinet, and Hakim-Larson (1995) found that higher self-esteem in individuals with visual impairments results in lower levels of dependence regarding performing daily living skills, such as movement in unfamiliar places or using public transportation. In the same study, Beach et al. (1995) found that individuals with higher self-esteem received more formal education than those with lower self-esteem although self-esteem was not related to fulfillment of educational expectations.

Papadopoulos et al. (2013) found that adults with low vision demonstrated lower scores on self-esteem in relation to individuals with blindness. Moreover, individuals with low vision demonstrated more external LOC compared to individuals with blindness (Papadopoulos et al., 2013). Papadopoulos et al. (2013) also found that participants experiencing an adventitious (no congenital) visual impairment displayed lower self-esteem. Moreover, adults with visual impairments who are able to move independently demonstrate a more internal LOC (Papadopoulos et al., 2013).

From the above it is showed that there is relatively little research has been conducted on self-esteem and LOC among young adults with visual impairments. Moreover, personal/individual characteristics that influence self-esteem and LOC among young adults with visual impairments have not been fully investigated. The purpose of the present study was to address this gap in the literature. The aim was to examine the influence of individual features (gender, vision status, age, age at loss of sight, recency of vision loss, education level, employment status, and ability for independent movement) on self-esteem and LOC of young adults with visual impairments.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Eighty-four young adults with visual impairment (individuals with blindness and individuals with low vision) took part in this study. These two groups were matched in terms of age (based on the average age of each group) and educational level (based on the number of participants in each level of education).

The participants were selected from the members of the Panhellenic Association of the Blind. Initially, we contacted by phone a random selection of 90 young adults with visual impairments to invite them to participate in the study. From this group, 84 individuals agreed to participate. None of the participants with visual impairments had reported additional disabilities.

The participants were divided into two groups based on their visual acuity: (a) individuals with blindness (visual acuity less than 20/400), and (b) individuals with low vision (visual acuity less than 20/200 and greater than 20/400). Of the 84 participants with visual impairments, 42 were individuals with blindness and 42 were individuals with low vision. Moreover, the sample of young adults with visual impairments consisted of 51 men and 33 women. Overall, the age of all participants with visual impairments ranged from 18 to 40 years old ( $M = 28.50$ ,  $SD = 6.96$ ). The average age at vision loss was 8.60 ( $SD = 10.57$ ) years and the average number of years that participants lived with vision loss was 19.90 ( $SD = 9.66$ ). At the group level, the age of the participants with blindness ranged from 18 to 40 years old ( $M = 28.76$ ,  $SD = 7.32$ ), while the age of participants with low vision ranged from 18 to 40 years old ( $M = 28.25$ ,  $SD = 6.62$ ). Concerning educational level, 1 of the participants had primary school education, 13 had secondary school education (gymnasium), 25 had high school education (lyceum), 26 were university undergraduates and 19 were university graduates.

### 2.2. Measures and procedure

In the present study, the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2010) have been followed. Additionally, consent was obtained from the subjects, using the appropriate forms and according to the procedure suggested by the World Medical Association (2010).

The measures used in the present study assessed demographic/personal data, LOC and self-esteem. Interviews were employed one by one with the presence of the researcher (not by telephone) and participants answered the questions orally.

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