

Self-Reliance of Blind and Visually Impaired Massage Therapists for Socio-Economic Sustainability

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Abstract

In today's world for inclusive hiring practices, blind and visually impaired individuals face significant challenges in finding suitable employment, particularly in massage therapy. This study explores the socio-economic experiences of blind and visually impaired massage therapists, aiming to understand their economic status, emotional resilience, social inclusion, well-being, and empowerment. The research employs a descriptive and quantitative approach, collecting data through surveys, interviews, and observations of 20 blind and visually impaired massage therapists in Manila, Philippines. The study aims to identify factors affecting the socio-economic sustainability of blind and visually impaired massage therapists, focusing on economic status, social inclusion, and self-perception. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The survey, adapted from the WHO's Model Disability Survey, was administered to blind and visually impaired massage therapists in various workplaces. Statistical analysis, including one-sample tests and ANOVA, was conducted using SPSS to evaluate the impact of social inclusion and economic status on well-being and empowerment. The study revealed that while the respondents generally perceive a moderate level of economic sustainability and social inclusion, their experiences vary significantly. Social inclusion was found to play a crucial role in their sense of empowerment, but it did not significantly affect their overall well-being. Moreover, strong social inclusions and inclusive practices were essential for improving their economic conditions, highlighting the importance of community support and inclusive policies. The study underscores the need for comprehensive support systems to enhance the self-reliance and socio-economic sustainability of blind and visually impaired massage therapists. It calls for targeted interventions to improve their well-being, empowerment, and social inclusion.

Keywords: Disability Studies, Massage Therapists, Socio-Economic Sustainability, Quantitative, Philippines

Introduction

In today's world, there is a noticeable push for more inclusive hiring practices, particularly for people with disabilities. Despite efforts to improve access across various professions, blind and visually impaired individuals still face challenges in finding suitable jobs, especially in fields like massage therapy.

Academic research has largely overlooked the specific experiences and needs of blind and visually impaired massage therapists, focusing instead on broader disability employment issues. This gap in understanding highlights the need to explore their unique challenges and opportunities, particularly in terms of economic status, emotional strength, relationships, well-being, and empowerment. This study aims to provide valuable insights for shaping policy, advocacy, and program development, promoting greater inclusivity and fairness in the workforce by addressing these aspects.

Bhan and Kim (2019) found that training programs in massage therapy can help these individuals by giving them the skills and certification needed to work, which boosts their confidence and ability to earn a living. Brown and Smith (2018) pointed out that emotional resilience, supported by having a strong sense of purpose and good support systems, is crucial for handling societal attitudes. Johnson and Lee (2020) noted that having strong social support is important for well-being and job satisfaction, while Patel and Jones (2017) showed that training in massage therapy can improve various aspects of well-being, such as physical and mental health, social connections, and overall life satisfaction. This research highlights the importance of empowerment, self-confidence, and social support in enhancing the lives of blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

Ultimately, a deeper understanding of these experiences can help stakeholders create more inclusive environments and opportunities, fostering a society that respects diversity and encourages full participation from all its members. Finding the level of self-reliance of the blind and visually impaired had to be considered to comprehend their difficulties and current situation because only by understanding would it assist them in becoming more independent and confident in their ability to adapt to daily changes.

Objectives of the Study

The study explored the various factors impacting the experiences of blind and visually impaired massage therapists within the socio-economic context. Specifically, the research objectives were to assess how these therapists perceived their socio-economic situations, focusing on economic status, social inclusion (including emotional resiliency and interpersonal relationships), and self-perception (including well-being and empowerment). Additionally, the study sought to investigate the influence of social inclusion on the well-being and empowerment of blind and visually impaired massage therapists and examine the impact of economic status on their well-being and empowerment. Furthermore, the research aimed to determine the effect of social inclusion on the economic status of these therapists. Based on the findings, the study endeavored to develop a framework for promoting the self-reliance and sustainability of blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

Methodology

This study investigated the socio-economic experiences of blind and visually impaired massage therapists in Manila, Philippines, utilizing a descriptive research design and quantitative approach. Data was collected from various locations where these therapists work, employing methods such as questionnaires, observations, interviews, and literature reviews. The sample consisted of 20 individuals (see Table 2), with data gathered through a modified version of the World Health Organization's "Model Disability Survey."

Table 1
Descriptive Profile of the Respondents

		Level of Blindness		
		Total Blind	Partial Blindness	Low Vision
Gender	Male	9	4	0
	Female	2	4	1
	Single	4	2	0
Marital Status	Married	1	1	0
	Companion	3	3	0
	Separated	1	1	1
	Widowed	2	1	0
Education	No Schooling	3	1	0
	Elementary	2	1	0
	Secondary	2	5	0
	University	1	1	1
	Vocational	3	0	0
	Others	0	0	0

The reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha, resulting a score of .794, confirming the questionnaire's consistency (refer to Table 2). The survey explored factors such as economic status, social inclusion, and self-perception, aiming to understand the relationships between these variables and how they impact the therapists' well-being and empowerment.

Table 2
Reliability Result of the Questionnaire Using Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.794	.794	23

The study was ethically conducted, with confidentiality agreements and no conflict of interest declared by the researcher. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, applying one-sample tests and ANOVA to assess the respondents' perceptions and the impact of social and economic factors on their well-being. The findings highlighted the importance of social inclusion, emotional resilience, and financial resources in promoting the well-being and empowerment of blind and visually impaired massage therapists. This research provided valuable insights for developing policies and interventions to enhance their socio-economic conditions and social integration.

Results and Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the socio-economic situation of blind and visually impaired massage therapists, focusing on their financial stability, independence, social belonging, and competitive edge in asserting their social rights. Primary data was gathered from a survey of 20 blind and visually impaired massage therapists and analyzed using statistical tools such as one-sample tests and ANOVA to evaluate relationships between variables and test hypotheses.

1. Perceived Economic Status of the Respondents

Table 3
Perceived economic status of the blind and visually impaired massage therapists

Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation
Monthly Income	Php 39,900.00	Php 12,855.06
Monthly Expenses	Php 17,300.00	Php 3,388.84
Net Income	Php 22,600.00	Php 13,347.19

The data in Table 3 indicated that the average monthly income among blind and visually impaired massage therapists was 39,900 pesos, exceeding the basic salary received by newly hired employees in a particular profession. In the Philippines, the daily minimum wage stood at 610 pesos (Philippines Daily Minimum Wages, 2023), resulting in a monthly salary of less than 19,000 pesos. The average monthly expenses of the respondents amounted to 17,300 pesos, suggesting a consistent spending pattern. Upon subtracting these expenses, the mean net income of the blind and visually impaired massage therapist was 22,600 pesos, representing approximately 56.64% of their income. This indicated that, on average, respondents were saving a significant portion of their earnings, surpassing the recommended saving rate of 15-20% (PNB, 2023) and implying economic sustainability among the respondents.

2. Perceived Social Inclusion of the Respondents as to Emotional Resilience

Table 4
Perceived Social Inclusion as to Emotional Resilience of the Blind and Visually Impaired Massage Therapists

Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
I feel sad or depressed most of the time	3.00	.562	Moderate
I feel anxious or worried most of the time	2.80	.410	High
I feel like I am all by myself	2.25	.639	Low
I feel left out often	2.35	.587	Low
I feel isolated from others	2.95	.510	Moderate
I have trouble dealing with stress	3.15	.587	Moderate
I have trouble concentrating or making a decision	3.20	.616	Moderate
I feel treated unfairly	3.40	.598	Moderate

Table 4 indicates the perceived emotional resilience of the respondents. Based on the data, blind and visually impaired massage therapists show moderate inclinations towards depression (3.00), anxiety (2.80), and social isolation (2.95). It is also observed that the respondents perceived a moderate degree of unfair treatment (3.40) from certain people. Moreover, the respondent demonstrated a high tendency towards experiencing stress (3.15) and encountering challenges in concentrating or making decisions (3.20). However, the respondents felt neither alone nor excluded, as evidenced by mean scores of 2.25 and 2.35, respectively.

3. Perceived Social Inclusion of the Respondents as to Interpersonal Relationships

Table 5 shows the perceived interpersonal relationships of the blind and visually impaired massage therapists. The data indicated generally positive interpersonal relationships among the respondents, yet

there remained areas for improvement, particularly in initiating and maintaining friendships and feeling respected by others.

Table 5

Perceived Social Inclusion as to Interpersonal Relationship of the Blind and Visually Impaired Massage Therapists

Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
It is easy for me to get along with people who are close to me, including my family and friends	3.75	.639	Very High
It is easy for me to initiate and maintain friendships	3.05	.394	Moderate
I can participate in family decisions	3.90	.308	High
I feel accepted by other people	3.65	.489	High
I feel that other people respect and value me as a person, and listen to what I have to say	3.25	.550	Moderate

The findings revealed that respondents found it easy to get along with those within their inner circle, such as friends and relatives (3.75). However, they might have encountered difficulties initiating and maintaining friendships outside this immediate circle (3.05). Despite this, the blind and visually impaired massage therapists actively participated in family decision-making processes (3.90) and felt highly accepted by others (3.65). Nevertheless, they faced challenges in receiving respect from others (3.25), which may impact their self-esteem and overall well-being.

4. Self-Perception of the Respondents as to Well-Being

Table 6

Self-Perception as to Well-being of the Blind and Visually Impaired Massage Therapists

Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
I am satisfied with my health	3.95	.224	High
I am satisfied with my ability to perform my daily living activities	3.40	.503	Moderate
I am satisfied with myself	3.90	.308	High
I am satisfied with the conditions of my living place	3.20	.410	Moderate
I am satisfied with my finances	2.45	.605	Low
I have no problem living with dignity despite the attitudes and actions of others	2.95	.394	Moderate

The results in Table 6 indicate that blind and visually impaired massage therapists generally perceive their well-being positively. Significantly, they reported high satisfaction with their health (3.95) and self (3.90). They also expressed moderate satisfaction with their ability to perform daily living activities (3.40) and living conditions (3.20). Additionally, they reported moderate satisfaction with their ability to live with dignity despite others' attitudes and actions (2.95). However, their financial satisfaction was relatively low (2.45), despite their net income being beyond the recommended saving ratio (see Table 3, page 4). These results suggest that while they generally feel positive about their health and self-image, there may be room for improvement in financial well-being and societal attitudes.

5. Self-Perception of the Respondents as to Empowerment

Table 7 results suggest that the respondents generally perceive positive empowerment. Respondents reported high levels of empowerment in terms of making decisions about their daily life (3.75), and essential life decisions (3.65). Moderate levels of empowerment were expressed in their ability to make choices and decisions (3.25) and their perceived value as contributing members of society (3.15). However, the

respondents reported relatively low levels of empowerment concerning the expectations placed on them by others (2.25).

Table 7

Self-Perception as to Empowerment of the Blind and Visually Impaired Massage Therapists

Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
I feel empowered to make choices and decisions in my life	3.25	.550	Moderate
I can make decisions about my daily life	3.75	.444	High
I can make important decisions about my life	3.65	.489	High
I am a valuable and contributing member of society	3.15	.366	Moderate
People around me expect much from me	2.25	.366	Low

While the respondents feel empowered in many aspects of their lives, there may be a need to address the expectations placed upon them by others to further enhance their sense of empowerment.

Table 8

Impact of Social Inclusion on Well-Being and Empowerment of the Blind and Visually Impaired Massage Therapists

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Interpretation
Empowerment	Between Groups	.391	9	.043			
	Within Groups	.137	10	.014	3.182	.043	Significant
	Total	.528	19				
Well-Being	Between Groups	.494	9	.055			
	Within Groups	.299	10	.030	1.840	.178	Not Significant
	Total	.793	19				

Based on the ANOVA analysis in Table 8, the result revealed that “empowerment” has a significant difference between groups ($F = 3.182$, $p = .043$). This indicated that social inclusion had an impact on the empowerment of the respondents, suggesting that it played a role in influencing the sense of empowerment among the blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

However, for “well-being,” the ANOVA results showed no significant difference between groups ($F = 1.840$, $p = .178$), concluding that social inclusion had no significant effect on well-being among blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

In conclusion, the study supported the alternate hypothesis (H1) for “empowerment”, proposing that social inclusion did have a significant influence on the empowerment of the respondents. However, for “well-being”, the null hypothesis (H0) is accepted as social inclusion did not significantly impact the well-being of the blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

6. Impact of Economic Status on Well-Being and Empowerment of the Respondents

Table 9

Impact of Economic Status on Well-Being and Empowerment of the Blind and Visually Impaired Massage Therapists

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Interpretation
Empowerment	Between Groups	.196	8	.024			
	Within Groups	.332	11	.030	.812	.607	Not Significant
	Total	.528	19				
Well-Being	Between Groups	.396	8	.049			
	Within Groups	.397	11	.036	1.370	.307	Not Significant
	Total	.793	19				

Table 9 illustrates the results of the ANOVA analysis examining the impact of economic status on the well-being and empowerment of blind and visually impaired massage therapists. Two hypotheses were tested: HO: Economic Status does not significantly affect the well-being and empowerment of blind and visually impaired massage therapists, and H1: Economic Status significantly affects the well-being and empowerment of blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

The ANOVA analysis revealed that “empowerment” has no significant difference between groups ($F = 812$, $p = .607$), indicating that economic status did not have a substantial impact on the empowerment levels of the blind and visually impaired massage therapists. Therefore, economic status did not play a significant role in influencing the sense of empowerment of the respondents.

Similarly, for “well-being,” the ANOVA results showed no significant difference between groups ($F = 1.370$, $p = .307$), concluding that economic status did not significantly affect the well-being of blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

In summary, both empowerment and well-being failed to reject the null hypothesis (HO) suggesting that economic status did not significantly impact the well-being and empowerment of the blind and visually impaired massage therapists. In other words, other than economic status, there may be other factors that are more influential in determining the well-being and empowerment of the respondents

7. Impact of Social Inclusion on the Economic Status of the Respondents

Table 10

Impact of Social Inclusion on the Economic Status of the Blind and Visually Impaired Massage Therapists

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Interpretation
Economic Status	Between Groups	2782800000	9	309200000			
	Within Groups	357000000	10	35700000	8.661	.001	Significant
	Total	3139800000	19				

Illustrated in Table 10 were the results of the ANOVA analysis examining the impact of social inclusion on the economic status of blind and visually impaired massage therapists. Two hypotheses were

tested: HO: Social inclusion does not have a significant effect on the economic status of blind and visually impaired massage therapists. H1: Social inclusion has a significant effect on the economic status of blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

The ANOVA results displayed a significant difference between groups concerning income ($F = 8.661$, $p = .001$). This suggests that social inclusion had a prominent impact on the economic status of the participants, and therefore, played a crucial role in influencing the economic status of the blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

In conclusion, the findings led to rejecting the null hypothesis (HO) and accepting the alternative hypothesis (H1). Social inclusion significantly affected the economic status of blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

8. Proposed Framework for the Self-Reliance of the Respondents

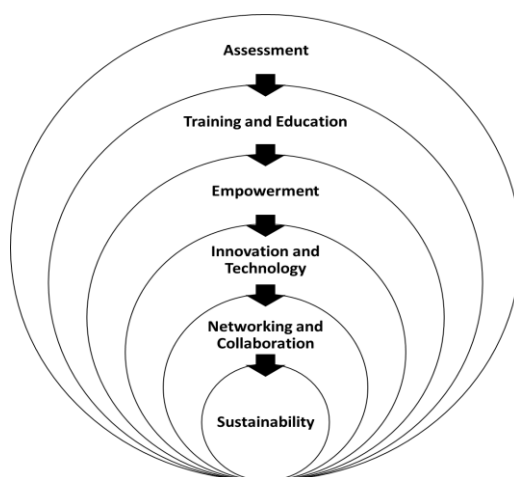


Figure 1. Framework in Enhancing the Self-Reliance of the Blind and Visually Impaired Massage Therapist for Socio-Economic Sustainability

The diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the sequential flow of activities in the framework, starting with assessment and progressing through training, empowerment, innovation, networking, and sustainability. Each component builds upon the previous one, contributing to the overall goal of enhancing the self-reliance and socio-economic sustainability of blind and visually impaired massage therapists.

Assessment: The purpose of this stage is to identify this group's strengths, weaknesses, and unique circumstances to tailor subsequent interventions effectively. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the skills, resources, and needs of the blind and visually impaired massage therapist.

Training and Education: This stage is to equip the blind and visually impaired with the necessary knowledge and skills to excel in their profession despite the visual impairment. Provide specialized training and education programs tailored to the unique needs of the blind and visually impaired in the field of massage therapy such as techniques, communication skills, and business management.

Empowerment: This stage builds confidence and belief in their abilities, enabling them to overcome challenges and pursue their goals with determination. Empower the blind and visually impaired by fostering

their sense of autonomy, self-efficacy, and confidence through mentorship, counseling, and advocacy efforts.

Innovation and Technology: This stage is to leverage technological advancements to create inclusive environments and enable these groups to perform their work effectively. Explore innovative technologies and adaptive tools to enhance accessibility and efficiency in massage therapy practice, enabling these individuals to overcome physical barriers and maximize their potential.

Networking and Collaboration: This stage aims to create supportive networks and partnerships to enhance opportunities for employment, professional growth, and social integration. Facilitate networking opportunities and collaborations with industry stakeholders, rehabilitation professionals, and community organizations to expand employment prospects and resource access.

Sustainability: This stage supports the blind and visually impaired in maintaining their economic stability and well-being over time through ongoing education, skills development, and financial planning. Promote long-term sustainability by encouraging continuous learning, professional development, and financial management skills to ensure economic independence and resilience.

By implementing this framework, blind and visually impaired massage therapists can enhance their self-reliance, socio-economic sustainability, and overall well-being, not only as massage therapists but also as active members of society.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study investigated how social inclusion and economic status affect the well-being, empowerment, and self-perception of blind and visually impaired massage therapists to better understand their self-reliance for socio-economic sustainability. Important insights were obtained through statistical analysis and hypothesis testing.

1. The investigation into the impact of social inclusion on the well-being and empowerment of blind and visually impaired massage therapists revealed intricate findings. While social inclusion demonstrated a significant influence on the sense of empowerment among the respondents, its effect on overall well-being was not statistically significant. These results underscored the multidimensional nature of well-being and empowerment among individuals with visual impairments, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to enhance both aspects. These results were consistent with earlier studies that highlighted the value of social support systems and community integration for those who are blind and visually impaired. Research by Brown and Smith (2018) and Bahn and Kim (2019) highlighted the importance of emotional resilience and vocational training programs in promoting psychological well-being and economic empowerment among visually impaired people who want to work as massage therapists. Furthermore, Johnson and Lee's (2020) research demonstrated the favorable association between strong social support networks and a higher level of well-being among blind and visually impaired massage therapists.
2. Analyses of how economic status affects the empowerment and well-being of blind and visually impaired massage therapists result in interesting findings. Contrary to early predictions, economic

status was found to have no significant effect on both empowerment and well-being, suggesting that other factors may have been more important in determining the participants' overall well-being and sense of empowerment. These results confirmed those of Patel and Jones (2017) and Smith et al. (2016), who emphasized the intricate relationship that blind and visually impaired people have between empowerment, self-efficacy, and quality of life. The studies of Gatchalian and de Vera (2014) and Chelette and Brannon (2019) show that blind and visually impaired massage therapists showed resilience and satisfaction in their chosen profession despite the difficulties they faced in accessing employment opportunities and support services.

3. The analysis of the relationship between social inclusion and economic status revealed significant findings. It was discovered that social inclusion has a significant impact on the financial situation of blind and visually impaired massage therapists. This underscores the significance of inclusive policies and support systems in fostering economic sustainability among this population. These results were in line with studies of Dusadeepanichkij (2015) and Boucher and Marchall (2017), who emphasized the need to address institutional hurdles to employment and training as well as the financial struggles that blind massage therapists confront in various cultural contexts.
4. In summary, this study contributed to the understanding of the multifaceted experiences of blind and visually impaired massage therapists. By highlighting the interconnections between social inclusion, economic status, well-being, and empowerment, it underscored the need for holistic support systems and empowerment initiatives to promote the success and well-being of this marginalized population.

Recommendations

Based on the findings presented, here are some recommendations that could be made to improve the situation:

1. Implement social support programs aimed at enhancing emotional resilience and addressing challenges such as stress and social isolation among blind and visually impaired massage therapists. These programs could include counseling services, peer support groups, and resilience-building workshops.
2. Encourage community engagement initiatives to facilitate meaningful interpersonal relationships beyond immediate circles. This could involve organizing social events, networking opportunities, and awareness campaigns to promote inclusivity and acceptance within the broader community.
3. Provide financial literacy workshops tailored to the unique needs of blind and visually impaired individuals, focusing on budgeting, saving, investment strategies, and navigating financial institutions. Empowering them with financial knowledge can further enhance their economic sustainability and well-being.
4. Advocate for policies and initiatives that promote the rights and inclusion of blind and visually impaired individuals in society. This includes raising awareness about their capabilities, addressing stigma and discrimination, and ensuring equal access to employment opportunities and social services.

5. Offer skill enhancement programs aimed at expanding employment opportunities for blind and visually impaired individuals beyond traditional roles such as massage therapy. This could include training in areas such as technology, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills to diversify their career options and increase economic empowerment.
6. Foster collaboration with government agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, and education institutions to create a holistic support ecosystem for blind and visually impaired individuals. By leveraging resources and expertise from various sectors, comprehensive solutions can be developed to address the socio-economic needs effectively.

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