

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

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The problem of puberty and the functioning of young people in society is the object of constant psychological studies. This question also pertains to teenagers with visual impairments for whom disability in itself is a difficult situation. My investigations using the Emotional Factors Inventory (EFI) of Bauman (1960), the Adjective Check List (ACL; Gough & Heilbrun, 1971) and an Unfinished Sentences Test of my own invention, permitted me to study the reactions of teenagers with visual disability in comparison to their nonimpaired peers. The age of the participants in the study ranged from 14 - 15 years and 18 - 19 years. The results do not imply a direct relationship between disability and behavior in difficult situations; reactions depend on other factors.

Keywords: blindness, visual impairment, difficult situations, stress, self-acceptance, emotional factors.

As the phrase “difficult situation” is relative, a scientific study requires a precise definition. A situation may be either easy or difficult according to when it is encountered and by whom. Referring to a difficult situation, we often use such synonymous terms as *stressful*, *frustrating*, *conflictual*, or *threatening*.

According to Selye (1956, 1973), *stress is a set of psychological reactions that constitute a nonspecific response of a system to a damaging element*. These

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reactions are of a defensive nature. Selye was mainly interested in biological stress, while psychologists are interested in psychological changes during stress.

The notion of stress is very closely related to the notion of *frustration*, which is concerned with situations of upsetting an activity that aims at something. The notion of stress includes an aspect of strain; the notion of frustration includes an aspect of deprivation as a result of something upsetting or a failure.

Coffer and Appley (1964) claim that stress originates in a situation when it is not possible for one to find a normal adaptable reaction. It is in such a state that a being's proper frame of mind (or its very life) is threatened, and it has to direct all of its power into self-defense (Ossowski, 1979).

A difficult situation is not always defined as stress. According to Jarosz, a difficult situation includes elements that constitute a threat or disturb an activity (such as meeting one's needs or solving a problem), or they lead to depriving one of goals s/he highly values. A difficult situation brings about a state of intensified activity and loads, or in cases overloads, the system that regulates behavior (Jarosz, 1988).

I shall abide by this definition since the research I carried out aimed at recording changes in behavior in difficult situations.

Analyses of various difficult situations caused by obstacles in realizing goals, proved that people with a disability, including those with visual impairments, come across such situations more frequently. But there is no direct connection between disability and the frequency of difficult situations bringing about an obstacle in realizing one's goals (Wright, 1960). Despite the fact that disability may function as an obstacle in achieving certain goals, it does not in itself determine the occurrence of stressful situations and reactions to them.

The loss of esteemed values causes a difficult situation and stress reaction as also does the loss of good health and physical efficiency.

A visually impaired person is not indifferent to his/her disability, and this in itself is a difficult situation. His/her reactions are very complex, and are characterized by emotional tension. In the case of visually impaired people, difficult situations arise mainly from the fact that they are not able to satisfy their needs. Fabienne Van Roy (1954) distinguished between cognitive and aesthetic limitations, personal limitations, and those of participating in social life. Carroll (1961) pointed to the disintegration of personality and the weakening of its dynamics. It is these changes that lead to the loss of ability to adapt to current circumstances and situations and make a visually impaired person helpless and dependent upon others.

The teenagers in this study are students, and school generates a lot of difficult situations. We do not study a pathology in their schools, but we are conscious that difficult situations could be an effect of violence and lack of tolerance of diversity.

Carter and Spencer (2006) and Mishna (2003) indicated that students with visual and other disabilities experience bullying more than do their nondisabled peers. Teachers' attitudes to the inclusion of students with impairments is not clear either (Lombardi & Hunka, 2001; Wizner, 2002).

METHOD

In this study I concentrated on blind and partially sighted teenagers aged 13-14 (last years of primary school) and 18-19 (last years of secondary school) who were students of special schools across Poland. Nondisabled teenagers, studying at a similar level, were chosen at random from schools and were examined as a control group. A total of 140 teenagers were examined including 80 visually disabled (40 blind and 40 partially sighted) and 60 nondisabled. Teenagers with mental disorders and other disabilities did not undergo this examination.

The goals of this examination were:

1. To determine the level of self-esteem for disabled and nondisabled teenagers.
2. To recognize the emotional difficulties of visually disabled teenagers.
3. To recognize the behavior of both visually handicapped and nondisabled in difficult situations.

Studies were carried out using the Emotional Factors Inventory of Bauman (Polish version by Klimasinski & Kotwica, 1975), the Adjective Check List (ACL) of Gough and Heilbrun, and the Unfinished Sentences Test prepared by the author of this article. This test includes 48 entries presenting a difficult situation or conflict situation from everyday life. Entries refer mainly to social situations and they evaluate:

- Attitude towards family,
- Relationships with casual friends,
- Relationships with society in general,
- Attitude towards the opposite sex,
- Relationships with teachers,
- Relationships with best friends.

Answers were analyzed in six categories: aggression, negative attitude, resignation and defeat, passive retreat, domination, and others not able to be categorized.

RESULTS

The analysis of results using the ACL test does not indicate any statistically significant differences with respect to self-esteem. Teenagers with visual disability of both age groups accept themselves to the same extent as do

nondisabled teenagers. One statistically significant difference ($t = 1.78$ and $p = 0.10$) in the group B₁ and B₂ is probably caused by the wide divergence between the real and ideal self-image of several teenagers (aged 13-14).

Referring to the possibility of taking advantage from the index of self-esteem in the ACL test as level of self-acceptance (Drwal, 1995), the following pattern

$$D_{12} = \sqrt{(x_{j1} - x_{j2})^2}$$

proposed by Drwal was used:

(ibidem p. 90)

Where: x_{j1} and x_{j2} are indexes of “j” scale in both profiles (“I-real” and “I-Ideal”).

TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF ACL TEST

| Groups | A ₁ - C ₁ | B ₁ - C ₁ | A ₁ - B ₁ | A ₂ - C ₂ | B ₂ - C ₂ | A ₂ - B ₂ | A ₁ - A ₂ | B ₁ - B ₂ | C ₁ - C ₂ |
|------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| X _{DI} | 11.09 | 9.89 | 11.09 | 10.97 | 12.97 | 10.97 | 11.09 | 9.89 | 10.87 |
| s | 3.69 | 4.51 | 3.69 | 4.56 | 6.28 | 4.56 | 3.69 | 4.51 | 6.07 |
| X _{DII} | 10.87 | 10.87 | 9.89 | 11.22 | 11.22 | 12.97 | 10.97 | 12.97 | 11.22 |
| s | 6.07 | 6.07 | 4.51 | 4.41 | 4.41 | 6.28 | 4.56 | 6.28 | 4.41 |
| t | 0.15 | -0.62 | 0.92 | -0.20 | 1.16 | -1.16 | -0.10 | 1.78 | 0.05 |
| p | | | | | | | | 0.1 | |

Notes: ^xD – self-acceptance; SD – standard deviation; t – value of Student t test;

p – statistically significant level;

A₁ – partially sighted teenagers aged 13-14; A₂ – partially sighted teenagers aged 18-19;

B₁ – blind teenagers aged 13-14; B₂ – blind teenagers aged 18-19

C₁ – nonimpaired teenagers aged 13-14; C₂ – nonimpaired teenagers aged 18-19

DI – index of the first compared group; DII – index of the second compared group

The Emotional Factors Inventory (EFI) is designed to measure emotional difficulties. On the basis of results seven metrics of the test were evaluated: Sensitivity, Somatic Symptoms, Social Competence, Attitudes of Distrust, Feelings of Inadequacy, Depression, Attitudes towards Blindness and Scale of Lies.

Student t test statistical techniques were applied to compare the average results in the respective groups. Statistically significant differences were found between partially sighted teenagers aged 13-14 and the group of nonhandicapped teenagers of the same age. The visually disabled group was more suspicious and distrustful towards people than the nondisabled group of the same age. They were more afraid of difficulties, had a stronger sense of helplessness, a lack of trust in their own decisions, depression, and somatic indispositions such as headaches, digestion problems, nightmares, and so on.

The blind teenagers aged 13-14 differed from the nondisabled group with respect to: somatic symptoms, community life, a sense of their own inefficiency. The results demonstrate that visually disabled teenagers easily maintain contact with others, and they have a lesser fear of confronting difficulties. However they experience more somatic indispositions associated with ergic tension.

The blind and partially sighted groups aged 13-14 differed from each other with respect to sensitivity, a sense of their own inefficiency, depression, and attitude towards their disability. The partially seeing group were more sensitive, suspicious, distrustful, and inclined to depression.

TABLE 2
ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONAL FACTORS INVENTORY

| Groups | Sensitivity | Somatic Symptoms | Social Compet. | Attitudes of Distr. | Feeling Inadequate | Depression | Attitudes - Blindness |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Teenagers aged 13-14 | | | | | | | |
| A ₁ - C ₁ | <i>t</i> = 2.43 | <i>t</i> = 2.08 <i>p</i> = 0.04 | <i>t</i> = 1.97 <i>p</i> = 0.06 | <i>t</i> = 2.62 <i>p</i> = 0.01 | <i>t</i> = 2.46 <i>p</i> = 0.02 | <i>t</i> = 2.33 <i>p</i> = 0.02 | <i>t</i> = -0.82 |
| B ₁ - C ₁ | <i>t</i> = 0.56 | <i>t</i> = 2.62 <i>p</i> = 0.01 | <i>t</i> = 1.73 <i>p</i> = 0.09 | <i>t</i> = -1.51 | <i>t</i> = -2.03 <i>p</i> = 0.05 | <i>t</i> = -1.58 | <i>t</i> = 1.60 |
| A ₁ - B ₁ | <i>t</i> = 1.83 <i>p</i> = 0.07 | <i>t</i> = -0.08 | <i>t</i> = 0.24 | <i>t</i> = 3.91 <i>p</i> = 0.001 | <i>t</i> = 3.67 <i>p</i> = 0.001 | <i>t</i> = 3.59 <i>p</i> = 0.001 | <i>t</i> = -1.92 <i>p</i> = 0.06 |
| Teenagers aged 18-19 | | | | | | | |
| A ₂ - C ₂ | <i>t</i> = -2.63 <i>p</i> = 0.01 | <i>t</i> = -2.19 <i>p</i> = 0.03 | <i>t</i> = -0.23 | <i>t</i> = -2.45 <i>p</i> = 0.02 | <i>t</i> = -0.66 | <i>t</i> = -1.93 <i>p</i> = 0.10 | <i>t</i> = 0.87 |
| B ₂ - C ₂ | <i>t</i> = -2.05 <i>p</i> = 0.05 | <i>t</i> = -1.83 <i>p</i> = 0.1 | <i>t</i> = -0.98 | <i>t</i> = -2.72 <i>p</i> = 0.01 | <i>t</i> = -3.85 <i>p</i> = 0.001 | <i>t</i> = -1.71 <i>p</i> = 0.10 | <i>t</i> = 2.49 <i>p</i> = 0.02 |
| A ₂ - B ₂ | <i>t</i> = -0.70 | <i>t</i> = -0.50 | <i>t</i> = 1.02 | <i>t</i> = 0.41 | <i>t</i> = 2.55 <i>p</i> = 0.02 | <i>t</i> = 0.01 | <i>t</i> = -1.39 |
| Teenagers aged 13-14 and 18-19 | | | | | | | |
| A ₁ - A ₂ | <i>t</i> = 0.49 | <i>t</i> = 0.24 | <i>t</i> = 1.21 | <i>t</i> = 2.11 | <i>t</i> = 0.95 | <i>t</i> = 1.18 | <i>t</i> = -1.51 |
| B ₁ - B ₂ | <i>t</i> = -2.04 <i>p</i> = 0.05 | <i>t</i> = -0.21 | <i>t</i> = 2.07 <i>p</i> = 0.05 | <i>t</i> = -1.16 | <i>t</i> = -0.30 | <i>t</i> = -2.02 <i>p</i> = 0.05 | <i>t</i> = -0.87 |
| C ₁ - C ₂ | <i>t</i> = -5.35 <i>p</i> = 0.001 | <i>t</i> = 5.30 <i>p</i> = 0.001 | <i>t</i> = 0.81 | <i>t</i> = 3.08 <i>p</i> = 0.003 | <i>t</i> = 2.52 <i>p</i> = 0.02 | <i>t</i> = 3.30 <i>p</i> = 0.002 | <i>t</i> = 0.11 |

Notes:

A₁ - partially sighted teenagers aged 13-14; A₂ - partially sighted teenagers aged 18-19;

B₁ - blind teenagers aged 13-14; B₂ - blind teenagers aged 18-19;

C₁ - nonimpaired teenagers aged 13-14; C₂ - nonimpaired teenagers aged 18-19

(These symbols will be used in the next tables).

The results of the study of the blind, partially sighted, and nonimpaired groups of teenagers aged 18-19 were:

1. There were statistically significant differences between nonimpaired and partially sighted teenagers with respect to: sensitivity, somatic symptoms, and suspiciousness. The group of nonimpaired teenagers was more sensitive, inclined to depression, and suspicious than the partially sighted group.
2. There were statistically significant differences between the visually and nonimpaired groups with respect to sensitivity, somatic symptoms, suspiciousness, and a sense of their own inefficiency, depression, and attitude towards disability. As in the younger group, the nonimpaired group of teenagers was more sensitive, suspicious, had a stronger sense of inefficiency, inclination to somatic symptoms and depression.
3. The only difference between the blind and partially sighted groups aged 18-19 was associated with the groups' sense of their own inefficiency.

Comparative analysis of the results between the partially sighted group aged 13-14 and the 18-19 year old group demonstrate that the younger group was more suspicious. The partially sighted teenagers of these two groups differed with respect to sensitivity, community life, and depression. The results showed that the group aged 18-19 was more sensitive and inclined to depression than were the 13-14-year-old group.

These studies demonstrated characteristics of both age groups. Findings were consistent across almost all examined factors, presenting a very high statistical significance. A similar result was achieved in the author's previous research (Konarska, 2002).

The Unfinished Sentences Test is not a parametric test, so data were interpreted using range of percentage.

The analysis of the results of the Unfinished Sentences Test demonstrates differences between the visually impaired and nonimpaired groups with respect to: passive retreat (distinct tendency to passive retreat among teenagers with visual impairments) and aggression (nonimpaired teenagers become less aggressive with maturity). Probably the passive retreat of teenagers with visual impairments is a verified and secure form of reaction in difficult situations. Also, teenagers with visual impairments aged 13-14 presented more negative attitudes and tendency to resignation than did teenagers of remaining groups.

TABLE 3
ANALYSIS OF FORMS OF REACTIONS IN UNFINISHED SENTENCES TEST

| Groups | Aggression | Negative attitude | Resignation and defeat | Passive retreat | Domination | Others |
|---------------------------------|------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------|--------|
| A ₁ + B ₁ | 62.5% | 100% | 67.5% | 72.5% | 0 | 15% |
| A ₂ + B ₂ | 55% | 67.5% | 35% | 55% | 0 | 32% |
| C ₁ | 33.3% | 55% | 23.3% | 3.33% | 0 | 3.33% |
| C ₂ | 6.67% | 35% | 33.3% | 3.33% | 0 | 6.67% |
| C ₁ + C ₂ | 20% | 60% | 28.3% | 5% | 0 | 7.5% |

When confronted with difficult situations within a family, teenagers reacted with aggression, passive retreat, and resignation most frequently. Aggressive behavior and retreat occurred more frequently in groups of teenagers with visual impairments than in their nonimpaired peers. When a family does not value the efforts of a teenager properly (when it controls too much, excuses him/her from work at home) then s/he reacts with revolt, protest, and either attempts to communicate with parents, or states s/he is independent.

TABLE 4
ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL SITUATIONS

| Attitude towards family | | | | | | |
|--|------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------|--------|
| Groups | Aggression | Negative attitude | Resignation and defeat | Passive retreat | Domination | Others |
| With visual impairments | 23.75% | 5% | 17.5% | 31.25% | 0 | 11.25% |
| Nonimpaired | 3.33% | 6.67% | 6.67% | 1.67% | 0 | 0 |
| Relationships with society in general | | | | | | |
| With visual impairments | 21.25% | 20% | 10% | 7.5% | 0 | 10% |
| Nonimpaired | 20% | 20% | 0 | 1.67% | 0 | 0 |
| Attitude towards the opposite sex | | | | | | |
| With visual impairments | 0 | 22.5% | 1.25% | 1.25% | 0 | 0 |
| Nonimpaired | 0 | 11.67% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Relationships with teachers | | | | | | |
| With visual impairments | 12.5% | 18.75% | 13.75% | 12.5% | 0 | 0 |
| Nonimpaired | 8.33% | 13.33% | 21.67% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Relationships with best friends | | | | | | |
| With visual impairments | 0 | 10% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Nonimpaired | 0 | 6.67% | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Attitude towards society in general was negative for all groups. When placed in a difficult situation, all groups usually reacted with aggression.

Generally all groups of teenagers had an acceptance of the opposite sex. Any negative attitude towards the different sex was found only in the groups aged 13-14 for the visually impaired teenagers as well as the nonimpaired groups. Boys value in girls: beauty, tenderness, intelligence, sincerity, loyalty, being protective, quietness and good mood. They do not accept: variability, conceit, gossip, insincerity, obstinacy and tendency to be equal to boys. Girls value in boys: intelligence, forbearance, faith, being protective, honesty, kindness, diligence. They do not accept: arrogance, lack of culture, addictions and impudence.

Teenagers usually did not accept their teachers, and in difficult situations, they reacted with retreat or aggression.

Casual friends and best friends were generally accepted by all groups in the study.

CONCLUSION

This research proved that visual disability does not imply any greater divergences between the real and ideal self-concept. It does not constitute a crucial determinant of increased sensitivity, suspiciousness, depression, and so on. It does not imply behavior resulting from protective mechanisms (aggression, domination, and resignation), although teenagers with visual impairments have a tendency for passive retreat. Younger teenagers often react with aggression or resignation. Behaviors socially not accepted like aggression and negative attitudes reduce with age. Aggression and passive retreat of teenagers with visual impairments in a family is rather a manifestation of independence from overprotective parents than a reaction connected with disability. Generally reactions to difficult situations are influenced by the same factors for both teenagers with visual disabilities and their nonimpaired peers.

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