

THE SOCIO - ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF BLINDNESS AT THE
COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL LEVELS IN THE SOUTH WEST
REGION OF CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

Blindness as a disability has been an age-old problem in the South West region of Cameroon. The gross stigmatization, marginalization and discrimination has been disseminated through generations in the community. This has some socio-economic effects on the daily dwellings of people living with blindness in this part of Cameroon. This research work is geared at identifying some of these effects both at the community and individual levels in this region . It is also to advocates and creates awareness to the national, international actors in this field of disability. A systematic literature review was the method used to depict the magnitude of blindness at individual and community levels. Publications, books, articles, magazines, video, news, testimonies and historical facts from various academic data bases were the means used to investigate the research hypothesis. Stigmatization, rejection, poverty, unemployment and inadequate educational training were some of the socio-economic effect of blindness seen at the community and individual levels. Even though the effects of blindness are inhuman, free philanthropic services was the only insignificant positive effect noticed.

Key concepts: Blindness, Disability, Visual Impairment, Socio-economic

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1 INTRODUCTION

In Cameroon, just like some other African countries and the Global South, disability has been generally highly stigmatized to witchcraft and curses. Communities believed when a child is delivered with a disability is a sign of punishment from sins, a curse and most at time is a shame in the community. The living situations of persons with disabilities are very inhuman as it is highly characterized with marginalization, segregation, exclusion and violence. With this situation, people living with disabilities have generally a bleak future in the entire Cameroonian communities. To make this situation worst, the negativities about children born with disabilities has been disseminated from centuries old traditional believes to today's generations (Block. 2002). Children born with physical and intellectual disability is associated to sins, witchcraft or evil spirits that can harm their family or members in the community. This has made life of disabled people in the society so vulnerable. (Foti et al.2017). As an origin from this part of the country, we were being told stories how in the early centuries children born here with disabilities were being taken into the heart of the forest, fast flowing Rivers and abandon there to the faith of dead.

Blindness is also considered in this region of the country as punishment from sin committed by ancestors or parents. (Eva et al .2007). People with visual impairments or other disability suffer from abuses, violence, discrimination, segregations, marginalization and exclusion from the society, schools and even in most cases from members of their family (Eva et al .2007). Blind people in Cameroon and the South West region are associated with poorer health, lower educational levels, fewer economic opportunities and higher rates of poverty (Minal et al .2007). This is because of the lack of services and facilities for people living with disability. More so, people living with disabilities are being given Nick Names describing their type of disability e.g., *Muumu* to be speech

impairment, Ngumbe to be hearing impairment, Eboa to be physical impairment etc. These numerous nick names further widen the gap of discrimination that people living with disabilities are facing in their daily dwellings in this part of the country and Cameroon as a whole.

Blindness is one attributes of disability where more attention is highly needed in Cameroon and the world in general. A person is considered blind when it visual acuity level is less than 3/60 (WHO, 2003). The high rate of socio-economic and cultural exclusion of the blind people in the South West region and Cameroon as a whole, is seen as inhuman. Children born with blindness are considered as punishment from sin. This leads to gross marginalization, rejection and exclusion which in most cases extends to the entire family. These are some of the motivations behind this study. This research findings will be based on investigating through a systematic literature review, the social and economic effects faced by blind people in the South West region of Cameroon.

In Cameroon, the first law protecting the right of people living with disabilities was the constitutional Law N° 83/13 of 21st July 1983. This famous 1983 law defines a person with disability as someone who stricken by physical or mental, congenital or accidental deficiency, experiences difficulties to carry out his /her duties.

This research finding is geared towards narrowing the gap between people living with blindness and their community. The objectives of this research study are to advocate for rights and protection of blind people in the South west region and Cameroon as a whole. This study will provide findings which can be used to change the negative mindset of the community and grassroot population about persons living with blindness. It will also go a long way to influence the policies and implementations approaches in the entire country and even in the African continent. This study is also geared toward empowerment and capacity

building of people living with blindness to enhance community development.

1.1 DISCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

The red portion of the Cameroon map below is the location of the south west region of Cameroon.



FIGURE 1.

The red section on the map is the South West region of Cameroon (Figure 1). Buea is the provincial capital of this region. It's located at the foot of the Cameroon mountain. This city harbors the first Anglo-Saxon university in Cameroon. Apart from the university of Buea, several other important government and private higher learning institutions are in this region . This region consists of

Fako, Koupe-Manengouba, Labialem, Manyu, Meme, Indian divisions . These divisions are further divided into sub divisions. The region is characterized with humid and cooler climatic conditions coupled with subsequent hot climatic condition. The dense equatorial forest extends to all the part of this region and has greatly influenced the hot and humid climatic conditions in this area. Furthermore, this region has a dense hydrologic network composed of stream, rivers and lakes which are serving as a conducive breathing ground for some mosquitoes like the black flies which is the cause of the high rate of river blindness in the region. The rich volcanic soil in the region has favored subsistence and commercial farming. This has made agriculture and its activities to be one of the main sources of income in this part of Cameroon. The socio-economic situation of blind people in this region has raised a lot of unanswered questions.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My interest to advocate for the human right of people living with blindness and in community development motivated me to choose this research questions. More so, blindness is often seen in Cameroon in the medical point of view while the social model is mostly neglected. A systematic literature review research method was used to gain a comprehensive search of literature depicting the socio-economic effects of people living with blindness in the community and individual levels south west region of Cameroon. The research questions chosen for this study were as follows;

- 1) What are the socio-economic effects of blindness in the South West part of Cameroon?
- 2) What can be the socio-economic effects of blindness in the community and at individual levels?

2.1 Objectives of this research

The objectives of this paper are to advocate and highlight the problems faced by people living with blindness as a disability in the Buea region of Cameroon. This will be done through a systematic literature review research method.

To encourage more Government policies and activities of Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) to promote the Human rights and the well-being of blind persons in this region of Cameroon and Africa as a whole. This paper is also geared towards edifying community development in this region.

3 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The definition of these concepts will provide a framework of the ideas used to explore the research hypothesis. This will help to attempt a clear understanding of this research findings, through a systematic literature review method.

3.1 Disability

The 2006 United Nations Convention of the Right of people with disability (CRPD) defines disability as those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Disability is any continuous impairment condition of a person which restricts him or her from normal or everyday activities. This can be physical, intellectual, cognitive and neurological, sensory impairments (WHO, 2011). It can also be a combination of the above attributes of impairments. Disability can be temporal or permanent. This may hinder the person's full and effective participation in the society like others. According to World Health organization (WHO, 2011), over a billion people in the world population have some form of disability. In this research I consider disability as the inability of full and effective participation of a

person in the society or community due to various barriers and my focus is on blindness.

3.2 Blindness

Blindness is strictly defined as the state of being totally sightless in both eyes. (medicinenet.com 2017). A completely blind person is unable to see at all. A person is considered blind when its visual acuity level is less than 3/60 (WHO, 2003). The word blindness is commonly used to mean visual impairments or low vision. This also means with prescribed eyeglasses, contact lenses, medical surgery the individual does not see well. Vision impairment can be mild or severe. There exists some disparity in the Classification of people living with blindness. According to (WHO,1992) blindness is best corrected visual acuity of less than 0.05 (VA of <0.05, Snellen 20/ 400) in the better eye or a visual field no greater than 10° around central fixation. Some types of vision change lead to medical emergencies. Examples can be glaucoma, eye injuries, retinal detachment etc. which in the case of treatment delayance, can lead to loss of sight or even life. In this research findings, blindness is considered as the inability to see at all when compared to a person who is visually impaired.

3.3 Visual Impairment

This is a decreased ability to see to a degree that causes problem not fixable by usual means, such as glasses (WHO,2015). It can also be a decreased ability to see because they don't have access to glasses or contact glasses. Center for disease control and prevention (CDC) defines visually impaired person as eyesight that cannot be corrected to normal level. It's the functional limitation of the eye or eyes vision system that leads to loss of visual acuity and inability of a person to see objects as clearly as

a healthy person. This can have socio-economic effects on the livelihood of a person with such disability.

3.4 Socio-economics

Socio-economic is a phrase that covers a range of concepts. Economics is a science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses. (Robins et. 2007,1932). Also, (Krugman et al. 2012) defines economics as a social science that studies production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Another definition states that's, it's the study how human being coordinate their wants and desires, given the decision- making mechanism, social customs and political realities of the society (Colander. 2006).

Oxford Dictionary defines social as relating to the society or its organization, needing companionship and therefore best suited to living in communities. Merriam-Webster. Defines social as "relating to or involving activities which people spend time talking to each other or doing enjoyable things with each other". In this research paper, the term social is seen in the dimension of how blind people relates to the society or with other people.

Socioeconomic is defined as the social science that studies how economics activities affect and is shaped by social process. It also analyses how societies progress, stagnate or regresses because of the local or global economy. It also refers as the use of economics to study the society (Eatwell et al.1987,1989). The concept socioeconomic is perceived in this research as how the economy can affect the social life of a person living with blindness in the society or community. This study is also investigating the extend that, people living with blindness meet up with their daily demands and services in the community.

4 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cameroon is a country situated in the Gulf of Guinea in the central part of African with a total surface area of 475,442sq km (183,568sq miles). This country shares vast and multiple boundaries with other African countries as follows, with Nigeria on the West, Chad to the North-East, Central African Republic to the East, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and The Republic of Congo to the South and the Gulf of Guinea to the South West. The terrain is characterized with a dense hydrological network which consists of rivers, lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. The dense Equatorial forest and savannah grassland serves as natural habitat of a variety of wildlife species including the various flies causing blindness.

The numerous natural resources are the main stay of the Cameroonian economy. This country has a rich cultural diversity but a poor economy. The UN Human Development index rated this country on a low rank of 152 (UN report.2015). This indicates that, a greater portion of the population lives below poverty rate. The high unemployment rate, inadequate infrastructure, poor health care system are examples of the numerous challenges faced by the Cameroonian population (UN report.2015). These challenges can also act as an indicator of the living conditions of blind people in the country and the south west region.

Cameroon is one of the countries in the Sub-Saharan African where, 5.4% of the population are people living with disability (Cameroon Survey 2011). Disability in Cameroon just like other countries in Africa is mostly associated with poverty (WHO 2012). The greater poor populations of the country are those highly

affected by disabilities of all forms. The lack or insufficient facilities and services for the disable people in the country, has left a big gap of marginalization, social exclusion, violence and abuse. This has led to socio -economic and cultural effects to the daily dwellings of people living with disability and blindness as a typical example.

According to the 2011 World Report on Disability by the World Health Organization WHO and the World Bank, about 15% of the world's population will experience a disability at some time in their lives. This means that approximately one billion persons around the world are already, or will become, persons with disabilities. This global report also estimated that 3.8% of the world's populations have significant disabilities. With the highest rates of disabilities in developing nations, this portrays that, the poor population in the world have higher rates of disabilities when compared to the rich portion of the world's population. (World Report 2011). In other words, there is a connection between disability and poverty.

Infectious diseases and injuries are more likely to be responsible for much of this burden although the evidence on causes is limited. (Durkin, 2004). In many regions in Cameroon disabilities are caused by traffic accidents and inappropriate medical interventions (Foti, et al 2016). This situation is still the same in the Buea South West region of Cameroon where the numerous traffic accidents and in appropriate medical care has been the cause of disability including blindness or visual impairments.

It has been estimated that, about 353 million people in the world live with vision impairment. Another 36million portion of the world's population is blind while 217 million people are suffering from severe visual impairment (WHO 2010, 2012). People with age above 50 are more likely to have vision impairment or blindness. According to (WHO 2010), 81% of the world population suffering from Blindness or severe visual impairment are above 50 years of

age. The same report portrays that; over 80% of global vision impairment can be prevented or cured.

Unlike any other type of disability, unequal distribution of blindness prevails globally. The developed countries have very low percentage when compared to the developing countries. (Auzemery et. al.2002, WHO 2012). Global blindness Statistics shows that, France has 0.2%, 0.7% in Eastern Europe and between 0.2 and 0.4% in the United States. While in sub-Saharan Africa it is estimated at 1.4%. Cameroon in Central African continent provided no statistics on the general survey of the blind population in Cameroon. WHO estimated the prevalence of Blindness in Cameroon is about 1%. Other studies done in some parts of the country like in the South West Provinces region estimated the prevalence of blindness at about 1% in Limbe urban area and the muyuka rural area to be 1.6%. (Oye et al. 2007). These two report shows that; the prevalence of blindness is high in rural areas when compared to the urban areas. The situation is also true between developed and developing countries.

5 TYPES AND CAUSES OF BLINDNESS IN SOUTH WEST REGION CAMEROON

5.1 Types of Blindness

There exist several types of blindness in the world today and most of the types are being cause by diseases, genetics, eye injury etc. Any types of vision loss be it blindness, Blurred vision, double vision, night or colure blindness should be taken as a serious medical concern because delays in treatment can lead to total blindness. Blindness can be treated depending on its state of development. Cameroon and the South west region, several types of blindness are major health problem faced in the community and individuals (Oye et.al 2007). The types of blindness ranges from Night blindness which occurs when its night time or when lights

are being dimmed. It's not completely vision impairment but significantly impaired vision. Diseases and vitamin A deficiency are some of the causes of night blindness.

Color blindness is another type of visual impairment. It is the inability to perceive differences in various shades of colors, particularly green and red, that others can distinguish (medicinenet.com 2017). It can be genetically inherited and affect dominantly men. But the rate can be 1 out of every 10 men. When someone is color blind, it is usually because their eyes do not have all the pigments needed for color vision (medicinenet.com 2017)

Blindness on one eye is another type of Blindness. This type of blindness is also known as unilateral blindness. In this type one eye can see an object while the other eye cannot identify any object at all.

5.1.1 Causes of Blindness

Globally, blindness or visual impairments are mostly caused by several untreated diseases. Also, genetics are some of the causes of blindness in the world today. Just like the other continents in the world, Africa in general and the south west region, cataract disease is largely responsible for the causes of blindness (Resnikoff et al 2002). Like some other developing countries, inadequate medical services which can help tackle the diseases appropriately also causes blindness (Lewallen et al 2001).

Uncorrected refractive errors and cataract accounted to be the two major causes of visual Impairment (WHO 2012). In this region of Cameroon onchocerciasis is also a leading cause of Blindness and severe visual impairments (Eballe et al 2009). Onchocerciasis accounts to 13.8% of blindness and 12.5% of severe visual impairment (Oye et al. 2005). Other eye diseases such as trachoma and posterior segment pathologies are also causes of vision impairments in this part of Cameroon (Oye et. al.2006,

2007). Illiteracy and ignorant are also seen as other causes of blindness or visual impairments in this region of Cameroon.

In the rural areas of this region, high rate of blindness is being recorded when compared to the urban areas. (Eballe et al. 2010). This is due to ignorance and lack of information about these diseases and above all illiteracy. Poor government policies and bureaucracies are also causes of Blindness in this part of Cameroon. The government and some stakeholders limit their sensitization programs and other preventive programs are in the accessible urban areas whereas the remote areas with the poor and vulnerable grassroots population are being abandoned by themselves.

6 LEGISLATION PROTECTING PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES (BLINDNESS)

Legislation is an important tool that can be used to protect people living with blindness as a disability from their daily dwellings in this region of Cameroon. The legislation protecting people living with disability can be regarded on International and National levels in Cameroon. This country has been a signatory of major international treaties of the protection of Human Right and the protection of persons living with disabilities including blindness which is my point of interest in this study.

At the international levels, Cameroon has been part of some treaties signed to protect the Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities (PLWD) and the protection of human and labour rights which also includes the right of persons living with disabilities.

The signing of the famous 2006 United Nations convention protecting the rights of persons living with disabilities is of one the international treaties still fresh in the minds of Cameroonians. But hopes are still high for this country's ratification of this important convention.

Nationally, the rights of persons living with disabilities are being protected by the Cameroon constitutional Law N° 83/13 of 21st

July 1983 (Cameroon constitution.1983). This law became applicable only in November 1990. In June 2005 a National forum for the solidarity of persons living with disabilities was held. This led to the signing of a joint decree between the Ministry of Social affairs and Ministry of secondary education for the provision of free educations for persons living with disabilities in Cameroon. More still, a presidential decree was signed which gave the right of persons living with disabilities to be issued national Identity cards. In 2010 the ministry of social affairs in Cameroon introduced a law to protect and promote disabled children, but activists say implementation has been slow.

The promulgation of the law N ° 2011/018 of 15 July 2011 on the organization and promotion of people living with disabilities whose preliminary drafts of text of application are in progress. The promulgation of Law N ° 2011/018 of 15 July 2011 on the organization and promotion of physical and sports activities, which makes the practice of physical and sports activities compulsory, particularly in the rehabilitation institutions of disabled people, creates the Cameroon National Paralympic Committee and advocates the creation of sports federations according to the order of handicap.

The transformation of the National Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities Cardinal Paul Emile Leger (CNRPH) into a Public Administrative Institution by Decree N 2009/096 of March 15, 2009, complex of holistic care of all types of disabilities, destined to become a real center of excellence in Cameroon and the sub-region in terms of rehabilitation. The actors promoting the human rights of blind people and persons with other types of disability are still on a relentless struggle to bring light in this field of study.

7 STAKEHOLDERS IN BLINDNESS IN SOUTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

The recognitions of the actors or stakeholders providing support to people living with blindness is important in this chapter. Several governments, International, religious and private none profitable organizations are working hard to promote the right of persons living with blindness as a disability. This also includes their integration into the mainstream society in Cameroon in general and this region. The ministry of social affairs coordinates all government programs geared towards the rights, integration, education, employment and the wellbeing of persons living with disabilities. This region has two schools training people living with disabilities.

The first ever school of the deaf in the south west region was open in 2003. The school was authorized by the ministry of social affair. There also exists a government owned Rehabilitation blind center known as the BULU blind center in Buea. It started operating since 1967 but became officially functional through a presidential decree of 1980. This center offers rehabilitation of the blind or visually impaired through learning life skills, vocational training with a motive geared towards their empowerment and integration into the society. Some other none governmental organizations and religious groups are also playing great role in supporting people living with blindness in their daily needs. The research method used in this study may provide information's that will enhance the activities of actors in this study area.

8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A Systematic literature review is the method I used to attempt answers to this research hypothesis. Systematic literature review research method establishes an understanding of topics and bringing together findings from numerous sources (Kiteley & Stogdon 2014, 10). Literature review it's a method that summarizes available information's on topics to gained new understanding on the phenomenon (Aveyard 2010, 6). This method consists of an effective critical review of present analyses and synthesizes materials from various search machines or sources.

This method is used to depict the current and past life situation of person living with disability in the south west region of Cameroon. It's also a research method which seeks to identify what has already being done. It also seeks for consolidation, building of previous work, for summation, avoidance of duplication and for identifying omission gaps (Aveyard 2010).

8.1 Data Analysis

Some selected articles and video from various websites or data bases were detailly analysed. The table.1 shows the data bases used and the search results obtained from different key words used. It also shows the sources of materials used for this research findings.

Table 1. Search data bases, results and key words used.

Data Bases	Key words used for search	Search Results
EBSCO Academic Premier	Cameroon, blindness and effects	16,371
CINAHL	Community, effects and blindness	432
Green file	Buea, effects, blindness, community	02
	Socio-economic, effects, blindness, Cameroon	11
Google search	Effects of Blindness Africa	9,150,000
YouTube	Testimonies of blind people south west region Cameroon	3 videos identified

All literature obtained from the various search machines or data base were review base on its content. Articles reviewed covered a wide range of subject matter at various levels of completeness and comprehensiveness based on analyses of literature that maybe included in research findings. These articles, books, news, journals, videos and historical facts were reviewed and analyzed. Literature were carefully identified and selected in their readiness for appraisals, extraction, and are being synthesis.

During the literature review, what is known recommendations for practices, what remained unknown, uncertainty around the findings and recommendations for future research were also priority during this literature review process. This paved the way to investigate deeply into the hypothesis of this research work. Quality assessment of material or literature was used to determined inclusion or exclusion of materials or references for this research findings. The search for literature was done in an exhaustive and comprehensive method to avoid the risk of introducing bias. Accurate guidance from Diaconia University of Applied sciences library was so helpful for me to combine phrases during the search of literature from the various data bases from the school library.

Also, Google search machine was beneficial for the systematic search and quality appraisals of material or literature. The reviewing of articles, books, Testimonies and historical facts were also part of the source of literature I used to seek for possible answers for the research hypothesis or research questions.

I documented the review process to ensure transparency which is recommended in a systematic literature review. This also demonstrated that the review is conducted in a systematic and

comprehensive manner (Aveyard 2010, 19). I also selected the best possible relevant materials on blindness and disability in the south west region and Cameroon as a whole. This helped to reduce the huge amount of literature seen during the search. My criteria of inclusion of literature were as follows. Literature concerning or describing causing of blindness, effects of blindness, legislations on disability, causes of disability, community prejudice on disabilities, treatment of Blindness, disability and inclusion policies. Even though French and English are the official languages in Cameroon only literature published in English language was included in the search.

I also excluded some literature during the classification of the review. Unpublished literature was not considered. Also, material that does not describe community development, blindness or disabilities were excluded. Materials in the French languages were also excluded.

Although other references were included in this search findings, some articles or literature were the core of this findings. The following are the articles and journals I used.

-Functioning and disability in recent research from Cameroon: a narrative synthesis (Minal et.al 2007)

- Prevalence and causes of blindness and visual Impairment in Muyuka: a rural health district in south west province Cameroon (Oye et al.2006)

-Prevalence and causes of blindness and visual impairment in Limbe urban area, South West province Cameroon (Oye et al.2007)

-Characterizing disability and perception of rehabilitation in the health District of Dschang Cameroon. (Foti et al.2016)

-The burden of disability in Cameroon (Foti et al.2017)

-Perceptions and Experiences of Persons with Disabilities on Access to Education in Buea Municipality, Cameroon (Opoku et al.2015).

9 FINDINGS

The socio-economic effects of blindness were seen in many articles , books and journals both at the community and individual levels in this part of Cameroon.

9.1 THE SOCIO- ECONOMIC EFFECT OF BLINDNESS AT COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL LEVELS

Blindness just like any other form or type of disability may have some social and economic effects in the community levels. In the South West region of Cameroon, Person living with visual disabilities were seen in this research to have both negative and positive effects at individual levels and community levels.

9.1.1 At the community level

This research findings revealed that, the Communities in this part of Cameroon, have negative perceptions about people living with disabilities in general and blind people. This negativity has been disseminated to various generations and these perceptions still exist till date (Bryan, 2010). In the nineteenth and twentieth century children born with disabilities including blindness in this region, were considered as sub- human organism. As a result, they are being regarded as evil, threat or menace that can harm others in the community (Block.2002). Also, they are considered in this community as objects of pity who are in constant need of charity or kind gestures. More so, the blinds are viewed as burden in the community who are constantly in demanding and draining of resources without any contribution to the society. They are the least poor people in the society who suffer from extreme marginalization, segregation and discrimination in this part of Cameroon (Minal et al.2007).

The Christian community in this region see blind people as vulnerable who constantly need help. This has resulted in a negative perception in the community towards people living with blindness as cared for and unproductive people who cannot do anything for themselves (Smith et al. 2007). On the other hand, the Muslim communities in this region just like other regions in Cameroon, sees the blind people and other forms of disability resulting from evil spirit or curse. They also see blindness as shame and pity (Marshall, et al. 2009). This perception or attitudes were seen to have deepened the already deplorable social relations between people living with blindness as a disability in the community.

Economically, this research finding portrayed that blind people in this community are being regarded as a burden. They see them as consumers not as producers. This community sees them as beggars who must beg for everything. They consider blind people as real waste as they need someone to lead them to everywhere they want to go or do (Cameroon Cinema for the blind 2016). Even at the expense of a family to sacrifice schooling and other productive activities just to be around to take care of a blind person. As most families are not rich enough to pay for a care giver as seen in the articles reviewed. The government as well don't provide such assistance for people living with blindness.

According to (Filmer et al.2008) and other articles, videos reviewed in this research portrayed that, blindness deepened poverty rate in this region as the poor families' struggles to provide the needs of their blind family member or child from an already empty coffer. Their health care cost is not covered by the government and are expensive to manage. This can be due to the lack implementation of existing legislations. Also, because there are no clear laws that covers the medical cost of people of blind people and persons living with disability in the country. Training centers, schools, learning materials like braille for blind people are unaffordable for most poor families (Opoku et al.2015)

This has increase the rate of poverty in the community and the family. The only functional blind vocational training school in this region known as the Bulu blind center. This training center is owned and run by the government through the ministry of social affairs. Admission into this lone and free school requires payment of a registration and insurance fees. (Ministry of social affairs 2007). This is still a burden for a blind child or person who is already leaving far below poverty rate to gain the so call free education or training from this center as an individual.

9.1.2 At the individual level

At the individual levels, the numerous negative attitudes about blindness in this part of Cameroon, was an evident why their social relationship is mostly limited around family members, family friends or other persons living with disabilities. (Odom, Horner and Snell, 2009). The negative perception does not only create social barrier between the blind and the community, it's also individually scares or discourages their socializations on the part of the blind people (Shackelford and Calibre 2011). As they are afraid of rejections, discrimination, violence or being victimized or humiliated, so they prefer to stay isolated.

Their rejection and marginalization in the community is hindering intermarriage and inclusion in the mainstream society. They were noticed to be the voiceless in the community .This is because their opinion or words are not considered vital when it comes to decision making in the community. These rejections are generally frustrating for any human being to accommodate and as a result it reduces their self-esteem.

Also, blind people in this region suffer from lack of mobility infrastructure like side walk path ways. This greatly hinders their integration into the society as navigation through the unplanned streets and neighborhoods is so challenging or at times impossible. This situation becomes more difficult during the rainy

season when the path ways becomes so muddy and slippery. The use of modern walking aid like the talking book player and GPS or the use of a guide dog is still a dream or mystery. More so, in this region no one is ready to get married to a blind person. The fear of shame or being labeled in the community and the fear of carrying the unbearable burden of a blind spouse scares people in the community. When compared to the physically disabled who are more productive economically were seen to have more chances of getting married (Bremer et al.2010)

Individually, the economic situation of blind people in this region is deplorable. Blindness affects a person's ability to perform some job duties. This have not only limited their chances of being hired or employed but has also led to gross discrimination in the job market. Therefore, high rate of unemployment and poverty was reported among people living with blindness. (Khanna. R et. al 2007). Articles reviewed in this research revealed that, people living with blindness in this area of the country are drowning in extreme poverty (Filmer et al.2008).

This is because they have no economic power, no job, insufficient or no educational skills and are unemployed (Filmer et al.2008). These limitations cause gross job discrimination by entrepreneurs. They live in total dependent from their relatives, friends, the community and, through charity or philanthropic organizations whose services are hardly sustainable enough. Begging has become their daily source of life.

On the other hand, some blind people in this part of Cameroon have proven to the community that, blind people still have a lot of potentials which needs to be exploited by the community. Through vocational training from the only operational vocational training school for the blind. Due to training obtained from this training center, some blind people have engaged in some small economic activities like craft work, selling of groceries in the community to gain some economic self-sufficiency. Also, some lucky ones are excelling in their professional field or activities. (Voices of Africa.

2008). More so, as blind persons, some services are freely donated in the community which serves as an advantage that people who are not blind do not benefit from free charity services.

10 LIMITATION OF THIS RESEARCH

The findings which portrayed the socio-economic effects of blindness at both individual and community level made this work successful. Also, the various proposals or recommendations toward the change of negative attitudes and perceptions of blind people in this region and the country, is seen as a success. On the other hand, these achievements in this research work was not without some difficulties or limitations. The search and selection of useful material was a difficult task. More so, the materials on the research topic were so limited. The searching and selection of materials from the various search machines were so time consuming and stressful. Some other materials available were not free. Clear statistics on the research topic in Cameroon in general and the research area was unavailable. Nevertheless, these limitations were not a total hindrance to the research findings.

11 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This chapter shows how important this research work has assisted to develop my professional skills in the field of social services and community development. This work has helped me to gain skills on how to identify problems some minority, groups, individual and community that exist in the society. Like the case of the blind people in this region of Cameroon. This skill is very important in this field of studies because it's through identification that actors can start seeking for means to solve them.

Another important skill I developed during this research is how to independently design and implement projects to sustainably solve problems community and individual are facing. To independently design and recommend solution base approaches geared towards

the protection of human rights of individual and groups of people is a huge contribution to community development and it's an important experience gained during this study. I also had the opportunity to learn about human behavior and the socio-economic effects it has on both individuals and the community. My skills in community development gained from this study will go a long way to reduce illiteracy rates, generate employment opportunities, eradicate poverty, gender inequality, discrimination, stigmatization, building the capacity and empowering the vulnerable population in the society.

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

This literature review analysis found that, traditional negative beliefs and attitudes towards people living with blindness as a disability has been passed on to the millennial generations of today in south west region and Cameroon as a whole. This need to be redress. The activities of stakeholders advocating for the human rights of blind people in this region cannot be underestimated. Even though more effort is highly recommended. The charity model approach dominated activity seen in this study. The human right approach is also another visible activity noticed during this literature review. Nevertheless, the government, educators, privates and grassroots stakeholders needs to put extra effort on awareness, sensitizations about blindness to the community.

More research work in this field of study is recommended in this region. This could act as a panacea to successfully integrate persons living with blindness as a disability into the main stream society. The mindset of the community needs a positive change. During this review most articles and activities were seen to be highly concentrated into urban areas. While the remote areas which are the strong holds of stigmatization are being neglected.

Also, projects aiming to integrate the blind people into the society are very insignificant.

The Government needs to put its policies to help integrate people living with blindness as a disability into the society into practice. Most of the policies to protect the rights of PLWD including blindness, mostly end on papers not in reality or in the field. Implementing policies in the field will go a long way to rescue blind people from the deplorable living conditions. Community development programs or projects need to be implemented or encouraged. For example, the training of trainers who will penetrate the remote areas to trained trainers who are based in these communities. This will create a cordial awareness environment and the education of the grassroots population. The local trainers will also indirectly supervise the level of consciousness of the rights of blind people in their communities. This will change the negative mindset of the community towards blind people.

This campaign can be extended into schools and other small social groups in the community. This will have a greater impact on the integration of people living with blindness in the society. Another recommendation is to use the participatory approach method in community development. This is to include both the blind people and the grassroots population in the community in all levels of projects geared to better living conditions. This will have greater impacts on the age-old negative beliefs about people living with blindness.

13 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This reviewed work found that, little research work is being carried out in this region to combat the strong traditional stigmatization and rejection of people living with blindness as a disability in this part of the country. This is partly because social model of

blindness was almost invisible in most articles. This means there is low sensitization activities to curb the negative attitudes present in this community and Cameroon as a whole. As a result, the traditional negative beliefs and attitudes towards people living with blindness as a disability has been passed on to the millennial generations in south west region of Cameroon. Most programmes are based only on the prevention and treatment of blindness. This is evident that, people who are already blind are not having proper care.

Also, during this research I found that even, the available prevention and treatment programmes are mostly limited in the urban areas. While high rates of blindness still occur in the grassroot population in the remote rural areas. More so, ignorance and illiteracy were major cause of blindness among these vulnerable grass root population in the rural areas. The ministry of social affairs in Cameroon is the main supervisory organ on disability and blindness pays little attention to the only outdated blind training center in this region. This center lacks modern training didactic materials and suffers from managerial problems as well. The staffs and training system are still not updated to meet up with today's technological development. This results in outdated training programmes which are insufficient to meet up with the modern demands in the job market and their integration into the society.

The legislation is seen in this work as a major source of weakness to ameliorate living condition of blind people in this region and the country. The legislations and policies protecting blind people are so weak and has huge implementation problems. The government of Cameroon has not yet ratified the 2006 UN Convention of the right of people living with disability. This shows the lack of will to spear head in protecting the human right of people living with disability including blind people. In some extend, it also portrays how deplorable the living conditions of people living with blindness in a class society like in Cameroon. It also shows the state of

vulnerability of blind people in this region and people living with other types of disability in the entire country.

The articles review in this research paper reveals that, blindness has some effects in both at the community and individual levels in the South west region of Cameroon. The free dependency life from charity and philanthropic groups was the only advantage of blindness seen in this study. This was also true in testimonies I watched in videos during the research findings. But on the other hand, this free dependency or charitable advantages are heavily paid back by stigmatization, rejections, poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. Most articles reviewed portrayed that, the status quo of the living conditions or the wellbeing of blind people in this region is still deplorable. As a result, the objectives of the millennium development goal are still far fetch dreams for people living with blindness in this region of Cameroon. But the activities of the different stakeholders to bring light into the life of blind people in the region can never be undermined. Changing the negative perceptions, costumes, practices and the mind set towards people living with blindness as a disability is possible due to the relentless efforts of the various actors in this field of studies. But the positive change can be slow but progressive due to human nature. The inclusion or participation of blind people and the grassroot populations in all levels of community development projects will go a long way to facilitate these positive changes in this society. As it will have empowered and build the capacity of blind people and the local grass root population.

During this literature review, I went through aspiring videos showing some successful blind people in the country and in the South West region. These blind people act as role models to proof that blind persons have other abilities which can be developed into skills that will be beneficial both for blind people and their communities. It will also edify the change of perceptions and attitudes towards blind people in the community.

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