

# Understanding The Testimonials: Play Activity Challenges and Need for Peer Support Among Visually Impaired Adolescents

Grace Anita Samuel<sup>1</sup>, Shankar Shanmugam Rajendran<sup>2</sup>, Kannan Kasinathan<sup>3</sup>, Marudhan Anbalagan<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Post Graduate, College of Nursing, Madras Medical College, Chennai-03.

<sup>2</sup>Principal, College of Nursing, Madras Medical College, Chennai.

<sup>3,4</sup>Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, Madras Medical College, Chennai-03.

## Abstract

Adolescents with visual impairment face numerous challenges, particularly in areas of growth and development such as socialization and physical milestones. This study explores the challenges in play activities and the perceived need for peer support among visually impaired adolescents. A qualitative approach was employed, targeting visually impaired adolescents aged 12–15 years studying at a government special school for the visually impaired in Chennai. Using purposive sampling, five students were individually interviewed, and their responses were analysed through thematic coding. Thematic analysis revealed three key themes: peer support as a central aspect of their lives, the importance of a healthy ecosystem, and the role of engagement in play activities. The findings highlight critical factors that influence the emotional, social, and physical development of visually impaired adolescents, providing insights into their experiences and the support needed to foster positive relationships and holistic growth.

**Keywords:** Visual impairment, Adolescents, Play activities, Peer support, Challenges

## Introduction

**“The Only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision”**

**-Helen Keller**

Vision, a dominant sense, plays a vital role in all stages of life, yet it is often taken for granted. Without it, individuals struggle with basic activities such as learning, walking, reading, and working. According to WHO, visual impairment is categorized into six levels, ranging from no or mild impairment to irreversible blindness. Vision impairment occurs when eye conditions affect the visual system, impacting life significantly unless addressed with timely eye care. For visually impaired children, play poses challenges like navigating spaces, understanding visual cues, and participating in group activities. Adaptation is often required to overcome these barriers. Peer support is crucial for visually impaired adolescents, fostering empathy, confidence, social skills, and reducing isolation. Common causes of vision impairment include refractive errors, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and macular degeneration. Physical activity, essential for health and socialization, is often reduced in visually impaired individuals, emphasizing the need for inclusive practices.

## Background of the Study

**Global Perspective:** Visual impairment is a challenging condition, with at least 2.2 billion people worldwide experiencing near or distance vision impairment, and 36 million individuals being blind. Non-correctable visual impairment significantly reduces functional ability and well-being, often having an impact similar to major medical conditions. Young children with early-onset severe vision impairment may face delays in motor, language, emotional, social, and cognitive development, leading to lifelong challenges. School-age children with vision impairment often have lower educational achievements, while adults face reduced employment opportunities and higher rates of depression and anxiety.

**National Perspective (India):** India has an estimated 4.95 million blind individuals (0.36% of the total population) and 35 million people with visual impairment (2.55%), including 0.24 million blind children. Cataracts and refractive errors are the leading causes of blindness and visual impairment, respectively. Adolescents with visual impairment in India face challenges such as limited sporting opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, social stigma, and discrimination. The National Blindness and Visual Impairment Survey (2015-2019), conducted on a sample size of 93,000, estimated blindness prevalence at 1.99%. Non-trachomatous corneal blindness accounted for 37.5% of cases, making it the second major cause of blindness. Prevalence of childhood blindness ranged between 0.6 and 1.06 per thousand, while visual impairment ranged between 2.05 and 13.6 per thousand in various studies.

**Tamil Nadu Perspective:** Adolescents with visual impairment in Tamil Nadu face significant challenges, including limited access to inclusive education, restricted social interactions, and inadequate facilities for mobility and safety. Issues like difficulty navigating physical environments, lack of adapted sporting infrastructure, and barriers to educational resources further hinder their development. Limited opportunities in physical activities and challenges in adapting to new environments are also reported, affecting their overall growth and quality of life.

## Need for the study

Adolescents with visual impairments benefit significantly from peer support, which positively impacts their well-being. While numerous studies address the general challenges faced by visually impaired children, there is limited research exploring the specific challenges in their play activities. Play behavior is essential for understanding and meeting the needs of children with visual impairments, as they often encounter barriers to physical activity and recreation outside of school settings. Peer interaction plays a critical role in the academic and social success of children with disabilities, fostering inclusive practices and enhancing relationships. However, visually impaired children face unique difficulties in social play due to challenges in interpreting non-verbal communication and social cues. Additionally, ensuring a safe and adapted play environment is vital to reducing the risk of accidents. Given the diverse barriers they face, this study focuses on the specific challenges of play activities and the importance of peer support for visually impaired children.

## Statement of the Problem

**“Exploring the Play Activity Challenges and Perceived Need for Peer Support Among the Visually Impaired Adolescents at a selected school in Chennai.” -A Qualitative Approach**

### Objectives

- To identify the challenges faced by visually impaired adolescents during play.
- To examine the nature of these challenges in play activities.

- To assess the importance and need for peer support among visually impaired adolescents.

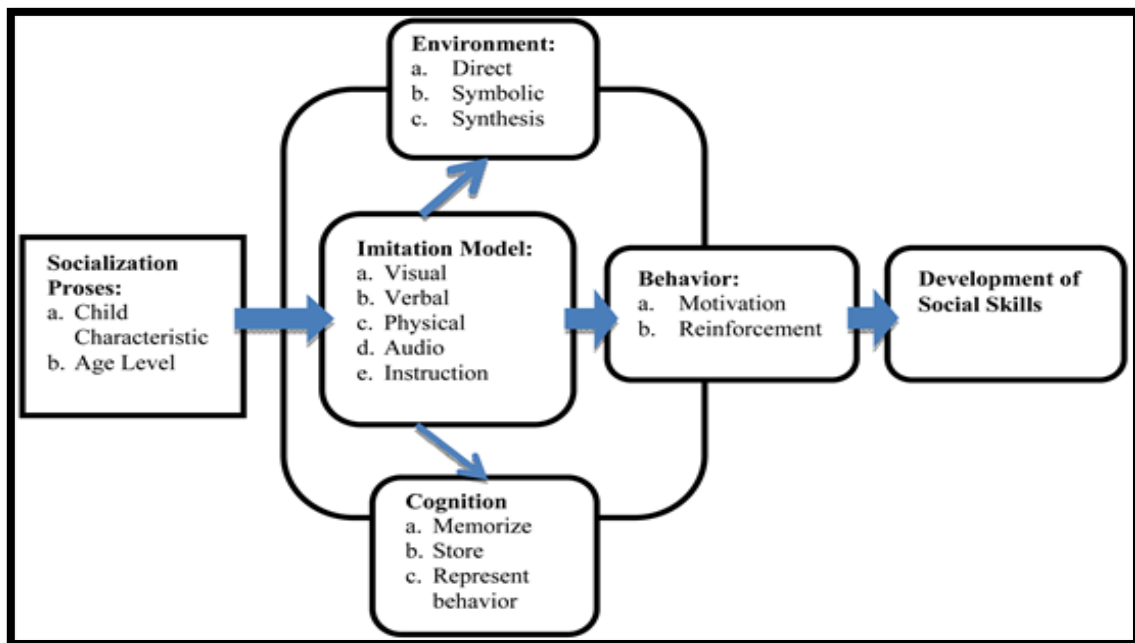
**Research Question**

What are the challenges during play activities and perceived need for peer support among visually impaired adolescents?

**Assumption**

The researcher assumes that visually impaired adolescents will provide honest and accurate responses to the interview questions. It is also assumed that they will actively engage and share their thoughts once a trusting and comfortable conversation is established.

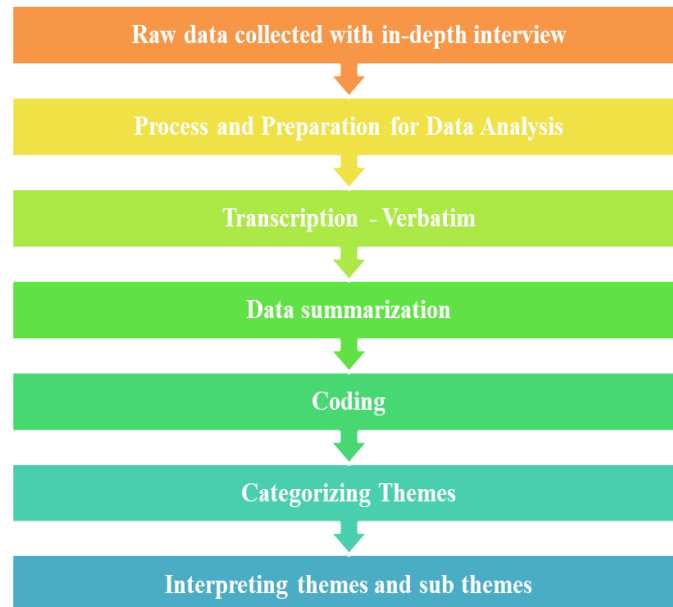
**Figure 1. Bandura’s Social Cognitive Learning Theory For developing social Skills In Visually Impaired Children**



**Methods & Materials**

The study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the challenges in play activities and the need for peer support among visually impaired adolescents. Conducted at Government Victory Memorial School for the Blind, Poonamallee, Chennai-56, the school exclusively educates visually impaired students from elementary to higher secondary levels, with a total of approximately 200 students. A purposive sampling technique was used to select five adolescents aged 12–15 years who met the inclusion criteria. Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews using a tool validated by experts. The interview guide included demographic questions and probes on games played, peer roles, perceived play challenges, and the need for peer support. Data collection was conducted over four weeks, recorded using an audio recorder, transcribed verbatim, and coded for thematic analysis. Ethical approval and necessary permissions were obtained, and participant confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the study.

**Figure 2. Thematic Analysis**



## Results

The study revealed three major themes: Peer Support, Healthy Ecosystem, and Physical Activities, each with significant subthemes highlighting the experiences and perspectives of visually impaired adolescents.

### Theme 1: Peer Support

Peer support emerged as the most prominent theme, emphasizing the vital role of friends in the emotional, social, and academic lives of visually impaired adolescents.

- **Subtheme: Being Positive:** Respondents demonstrated a positive attitude toward participation in activities, valuing the joy of playing over winning. Collaborative learning with peers boosted their confidence and motivation.
- **Subtheme: Support:** Peers provided academic assistance, emotional encouragement, and a collaborative learning environment, fostering inclusivity and improved academic performance.
- **Subtheme: Helpful:** Adolescents relied on peers for daily activities, building a strong bond of mutual dependence and companionship.
- **Subtheme: Standing with Support:** Friends supported them during conflicts, offering both defense and constructive feedback for personal growth.
- **Subtheme: Motivation:** Peer encouragement helped overcome challenges and maintain a positive outlook during difficult times.
- **Subtheme: Future:** Respondents expressed aspirations to maintain their friendships and continue education together, reflecting long-lasting peer bonds.

### Theme 2: Healthy Ecosystem

This theme highlighted the supportive role of the school environment, particularly the staff.

- **Subtheme: Staff Support:** Teachers and staff members, including the headmaster, were perceived as nurturing and instrumental in the students' academic and emotional well-being. Their guidance created a secure and inclusive atmosphere.

### Theme 3: Physical Activities

Physical engagement played a vital role in the adolescents' lives, serving as a source of enjoyment, social interaction, and skill development.

- **Subtheme: Play Time:** Playtime, occurring during evenings, weekends, or physical training sessions, was a cherished part of their routine.
- **Subtheme: Games Played:** Respondents actively participated in various sports, such as football, cricket, volleyball, and basketball, highlighting the importance of inclusive play in fostering happiness and fulfilment.

### Discussion

The present study revealed that 40% of visually impaired adolescents were aged 12 and 13 years, respectively. All participants were male, with 60% studying in class 7. Parental education analysis showed that 40% had completed high school and another 40% had bachelor's degrees. Additionally, 80% of the adolescents resided in the school hostel, emphasizing the importance of institutional support in shaping their academic and social experiences. The findings align with the National Blindness and Visual Impairment Survey (2015–2019), which identified corneal blindness as the second most common cause of visual impairment among children, highlighting the critical role of congenital causes and the need for early intervention. Similarly, **Suzanne H. Verver et al. (2023)** reported that visually impaired children rely heavily on auditory cues to facilitate peer play, which corresponds with the present study's findings that participants expressed satisfaction with institutional play opportunities and emphasized the role of play in their social lives. Furthermore, **Eline C. Hepe (2019)** found that peer support is intrinsic and develops naturally, a theme that emerged in this study, where adolescents described peer support as essential, involving motivation, positivity, and companionship. Consistently, **Lampart et al. (2016)** highlighted the importance of protection, support, and barriers to social participation, which parallels this study's observation of the healthy ecosystem created by peer and staff support, enabling visually impaired adolescents to thrive socially and recreationally.

### Implications of the Study

This study provides practical insights into nursing education, practice, administration, and research.

#### Nursing Education

- Teach students about the challenges of visually impaired adolescents in playing and learning.
- Educate on overcoming learning difficulties with support.
- Promote creating supportive environments for their holistic growth.

#### Nursing Practice

- Identify and analyze the unique needs of visually impaired children.
- Spread public awareness about supportive environments.
- Deliver need-based nursing care tailored to their requirements.

#### Nursing Administration

- Train nurses about the needs of visually impaired children in healthcare.
- Advocate for policies to support visually impaired children.
- Ensure institutions create inclusive care strategies.

**Nursing Research**

- Explore unexplored challenges faced by visually impaired adolescents.
- Expand knowledge by publishing related studies.
- Encourage evidence-based research in this field.

**Limitations**

- Focused on only one challenge and one need.
- Small sample size limits generalizability.
- Conducted in a single setting among 12–15-year-olds.

**Recommendations**

- Conduct studies to explore the unexplored challenges of visually impaired adolescents in various contexts.
- Investigate the effectiveness of peer support interventions on social and emotional well-being.
- Expand research to include diverse settings and age groups for broader generalizability.
- Focus on developing evidence-based strategies to improve social participation and inclusion.
- Publish findings to enhance awareness and knowledge in nursing practice and education.

**Conclusion**

This study explored peer support needs and play challenges of visually impaired adolescents. It highlights the unseen perspectives of these adolescents and calls for a comprehensive approach combining education, family involvement, and advocacy to meet their diverse needs and help them thrive.

**Acknowledgement**

Heartfelt gratitude to God for providing strength and wisdom throughout this journey. The researcher gratefully acknowledges the immense support and guidance of the Principal, whose encouragement made this study possible. Special thanks to family members for their unwavering love and support. The researcher also appreciates the friends who offered motivation and assistance during challenging times. Their collective contributions have been invaluable in completing this study successfully.

**References****Books**

1. Parthasarathy A. IAP Textbook of Paediatrics. 6th ed. New Delhi: Jaypee Publications; 2016. p. 176-177.
2. Swarna Rekha Bhat. Achar's Textbook of Paediatrics. 4th ed. Hyderabad: Universities Press; 2009. p. 598-599.
3. Park K. Park's Textbook of Preventive and Social Medicine. 22nd ed. Jabalpur: Banarasidas Bhanot Publishers; 2011. p. 332-333.
4. Lakshmanaswamy A. Clinical Paediatrics. 5th ed. Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer Publishers; 2023. p. 138-140.
5. Hockenberry MJ, Wilson D. Wong's Nursing Care of Infants and Children. 8th ed. St. Louis: Elsevier Publishers; 2011. p. 922-925.
6. Polit DF, Hungler BP. Nursing Research: Generating and Assessing Evidence for Nursing Practice. 9th



ed. Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer Publishers; 2012. p. 486-582.

7. Sharma SK. Nursing Research and Statistics. 4th ed. New Delhi: Elsevier Publishers; 2023. p. 148-152.
8. Bhaskara Raj DE. Nursing Theories: A Practical View. 1st ed. New Delhi: Jaypee Publications; 2011. p. 50, 218.

#### Journal

1. Eisenberg ML, Zibulsky J. The development of social skills in visually impaired adolescents. *J Vis Impair Blind*. 2010;104(6):353-64.
2. McDonnall MC, Smith DW. Predictors of academic achievement in adolescents with visual impairments. *J Spec Educ*. 2009;43(3):149-60.
3. Kirk SA, Karp J. Understanding the social experiences of children with visual impairments. *Int J Spec Educ*. 2011;26(3):1-10.
4. Kirk S, Gallagher JJ. The impact of visual impairment on the development of self-concept in children and adolescents. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry*. 2015;56(5):482-90.
5. Rosenblum LP. Social and emotional development of children with visual impairments. *J Vis Impair Blind*. 2007;101(2):94-103.
6. Blasch BB, Junker R. The impact of visual impairment on play and leisure activities. *J Vis Impair Blind*. 2013;107(3):187-99.
7. Jung JY, McGhee R. Barriers to play for children with visual impairments: A qualitative analysis. *Int J Spec Educ*. 2012;27(3):1-10.
8. Freedman R. Facilitating play in children with visual impairments: Strategies for educators and parents. *J Early Interv*. 2016;38(4):253-68.
9. Kumar R, Dey A. Exploring the play experiences of children with visual impairments. *Disabil Soc*. 2019;34(5):721-38.
10. Lund EM, Tan S. Understanding the role of play in the development of children with visual impairments. *Child Dev Perspect*. 2020;14(2):110-5.
11. McDonnall MC, O'Connor R. The role of peer relationships in the development of children with visual impairments. *J Vis Impair Blind*. 2015;109(2):145-57.
12. Kirk SA, Gallagher JJ. Peer support and social inclusion for children with visual impairments: Strategies for practitioners. *Int J Spec Educ*. 2014;29(2):95-105.
13. Eisenberg ML, Noyes K. Building social networks for visually impaired children: The importance of peer support. *Disabil Stud Q*. 2011;31(4):1-16.
14. Rosenblum LP. Peer relationships and social skills development in children with visual impairments. *J Spec Educ Leadersh*. 2014;27(1):23-34.
15. Lloyd M, Hurst S. Enhancing peer support for children with visual impairments: Perspectives from educators and parents. *Child Care Health Dev*. 2020;46(3):319-27.