

Challenges of Mobility and Access to Transport for People with Visual Impairment and Blindness: An Exploratory Study

Suraweera, T¹, Bandara S², Wickramaarachchi C³, Perera D⁴

Abstract: The ability to move around to get things done to fulfill one's wants, and needs is critical for independent living, irrespective of his or her age or existence of impairments or disabilities. Safe and efficient mobility with confidence is widely recognized as influential factors of the positive wellbeing of persons with visual impairment and blindness. Inability to confidently move around pushes persons with visual impairment and blindness to a risk of social exclusion. Even though research into this area is significant, such research in developing countries like Sri Lanka is quite limited. While aiming at bridging the said knowledge gap, this research intended to explore challenges and obstacles of mobility and transport experienced by people with visual impairment and blindness in Sri Lanka. This study adopted a qualitative method through in-depth interviews. Fifteen persons with visual impairment and blindness were purposively chosen to represent a wide range of social and economic boundaries and interviewed in May-August 2021. With the prior consent of respondents, interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview transcriptions were analyzed using a thematic approach. Data triangulation was done through focus group discussion and observation methods. The results confirmed that persons with visual impairment and blindness confronted challenges and obstacles in mobility and transport that is discussed in six themes: deficient infrastructure, access to information, improper attitudes of sighted persons, service provider issues, personal attitudes, and support. The findings urge the importance of implementing the existing provisions while introducing relevant public policies and social awareness.

Keywords: Mobility, Blindness, Access to transport

¹ Professor, SLIIT Business School, Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology, Malabe, Sri Lanka.

² Research Manager, SLIIT Business School, Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology, Malabe, Sri Lanka. samanthi.b@sliit.lk

³ Assistant Lecturer, SLIIT Business School, Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology, Malabe, Sri Lanka.

⁴ Management Associate, SLIIT Business School, Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology, Malabe, Sri Lanka.