Life pathways or lonely dead-ends?
The transition from secondary school to post-school life for adolescents with vision impairment

Jane Brown
Griffith University
School of Education and Professional Studies
janeemily_brown@hotmail.com

Abstract

This literature review confirms that, for all young people, including those with vision impairment, transition from secondary school to adult life is a period filled with challenges and complications (Konarska, 2007). For this reason, transition-to-post school has been well-researched. Yet, few studies have examined how adolescents with vision impairment are prepared for post-school life, how they transition, and how they partake in post-school life. Despite the provision of a disability-specific curriculum, ongoing support from specialist staff, and the design and implementation of individual transition plans, research has indicated that young people with vision impairment find the transition to post-school difficult, face social isolation, and experience high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Although many of these young people have the cognitive capacity to contribute to and participate in society, most encounter difficulties in the social world and the world of work that minimise their contributions and diminish their life satisfaction. This chapter reviews literature on the transition pathways of adolescents with vision impairment and identified difficulties within the world of work and the social world, including employer attitudes and concerns about hiring a person with vision impairment and initiating and maintaining friendships.

Introduction

Over the past 50 years, extensive research has been produced in the specialist area of vision impairment from early intervention services through to adults with deteriorating vision conditions. Despite this research history, few contemporary studies have investigated the transition from secondary school to post-school life for young people with vision impairment. Rather, a great deal of research has focused on enhancing educational provisions for students with vision impairment, especially within regular schools. According to Gil (2007), the transition from secondary school to post-school life presents a new range of challenges, including finding out about available post-school services and making decisions about disclosing disability-related information. This final hurdle confronting young people with vision

impairment in their education has been somewhat neglected in the literature. In particular, little is known about what adolescents with vision impairment are prepared *for* during secondary school and what such adolescents *actually do* in their post-school lives.

This literature review is anchored in research incorporating a scope of literatures across the last two centuries. Research has been scattered across many discipline areas, including education, special education, vision impairment, adolescence, secondary schooling, and transition. Predominately, peer-reviewed journal articles from the United States of America (USA) and Britain, practitioner-based textbooks, and selected chapters published in the specialised field of vision impairment have been drawn upon. In a broad sense, the specialised literature stems from North America, the United Kingdom, and countries across Europe, including the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Spain, and Poland. Some literature has also originated from other parts of the world, including Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Taiwan, Israel, and South Korea. This chapter provides an overview of the transition pathways of young people with vision impairment. First, adolescence and transition literature, primarily from the field of vision impairment, will be discussed. Second, specific difficulties experienced by these adolescents in their attempts to achieve post-school success in the world of work and in the social world will be identified. Finally, justification for further research regarding the post-school lives of adolescents with vision impairment will be put forward.

Adolescence and disability

The period of adolescence is recognised as a complicated and challenging time (Kef & Bos, 2006; Uttermohlen, 1997) that is critical to success in later life (Scanlon, 2008). During this life phase, adolescents typically yearn for freedom from their parents (Berzonsky, 2000), undergo self-exploration (Mergler & Patton, 2007), develop self-identity (Dembo & Eaton, 2000), and understand the importance of friendships and social life (Brown & Klute, 2003). According to Mergler and Patton (2007), adolescence is a time when complex cognitive development takes place and adolescents "make independent choices and assessments about who they are, who they will be, and how they will act in the world" (p. 58).

For young people with disabilities, adolescence presents additional complexities and challenges, such as specific difficulties associated with their disability and/or their ability to operate in society (Abel, 1961b; Kef & Bos, 2006; Konarska, 2007; McAnarney, 1985; Rosenblum, 2000). Konarska (2007) and Uttermohlen (1997) have suggested that challenges that may arise during adolescence are experienced more frequently by those with

disabilities, including those with vision impairment. Despite many young people with and without disabilities having similar future aspirations, the reality for many adolescents with disabilities "is different from that of their peers without disabilities" (Nagle, 2001, p. 725). It also is likely to be different from the image in parents' minds about what their child with a disability will do after the completion of high school (Zbornik, 2008).

Research concerning adolescents with vision impairment came to the forefront during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. At this time, the literature acknowledged that adolescents who were blind faced unique difficulties (e.g., Abel, 1961a; Abel, 1961b; Lowenfeld, 1959; Wagner, 1961) and consideration was given to the factors affecting young people who were adjusting to vision loss during adolescence (Underberg, Benham, Verillo, & Cowen, 1961). Additionally, the quality of specialised school and summer programs for students with vision impairment were evaluated (Derganc, 1964; Maloney, 1965), and the usefulness of such programs emphasised. Recent international studies about adolescents with vision impairment have been widespread across a range of areas. Studies have investigated adolescents' lifestyles (Sacks & Wolffe, 1998), self-concepts (Lopez-Justicia, Pichardo, Amezcua, & Fernandez, 2001), social support networks (Huurre, Komulainen, & Aro, 1999; Kef, Hox, & Habekothe, 2000), level of sexual knowledge and behaviour (Duh, 2000; Kef & Bos, 2006), support received from parents (Chien-Huey Chang, 2000), and ability to adjust to vision impairment (Kef & Bos, 2006). Some contemporary studies have also examined topics that can directly affect adolescents' transition to post-school life, including the impact of vision impairment on adolescents' lives (Rosenblum, 2000), the degree to which they have been socially accepted (Peavey & Leff, 2002), methods to enhance their social skills (Kim, 2003), and the factors that contribute to their post-school choices (Wong, 2004).

The transition to post-school life

A wealth of literature has detailed recommended practices for the transition to post-school life for students with disabilities. Such practices have included interagency collaboration, strong family support, vocational skills training, cooperative employers (McBroom & Tedder, 1993), instruction in self-advocacy, instruction in self-determination skills, and collaboration between post-school service providers and secondary educators (Gil, 2007). For young people with vision impairment, the transition from secondary school to post-school life has been documented as a very challenging time (McBroom & Tedder, 1993; Wolffe, 2000; Wong, 2004). However, in spite of adolescents with vision impairment in secondary

schools receiving innovative transition programs, community experiences, and access to the regular school curriculum, parents, educators, and professional in the rehabilitation area "grapple with issues related to social isolation, dependence, and potential employment" (Sacks, Wolffe, & Tierney, 1998, p. 476).

Within the specialised field of vision impairment, transition literature has been less abundant and mainly derived from the United States of America. The 1970s saw "transition" and "vocational education" emerge as significant topics for adolescents within the field of vision impairment (e.g., Davidson, 1975; Monahan, Giddan, & Emener, 1978), along with "job seeking skills" (Dickson, 1979), and the notion of "work experience" (Dickson, 1978). In the 1980s, training in social skills and occupational interests of adolescents with vision impairment were investigated (Corn & Bishop, 1985; VanHasselt, Hersey, Kazdin, Simon, & Mastanuono, 1983). During the 1990s, the academic skills and study strategies of adolescents and young adults with vision impairment received attention (Erin, Corn, & Wolffe, 1993; McEwan, Wier, & McBride, 1992), and the concerns, interests, attitudes, and ambitions of these adolescents were re-considered (Tobin & Hill, 1988, 1989).

Over the last 20 years, transition literature continued to feature within the field of vision impairment, with a more refined focus on the difficulties related to transition and the need to consider adolescents' career education needs. McBroom, Tedder, and Ji (1991) investigated the difficulties faced by 12 young people (aged 16-27 years) with vision impairment during transition and found that difficulties such young people face include limited choice of careers, overprotection by families and the system, negative perspectives on disability, and poor development of leisure time skills. A little later, McInerney Leonard, Allura, and Simpson (1997) examined the effectiveness of a transition program in preparing young people with vision impairment for work. This study found that the program facilitated opportunities for parent and adolescent socialisation and encouraged awareness of job responsibilities and careers (McInerney Leonard et al., 1997). Additionally, McConnell (1999) conducted a study to determine adolescent and parent perceptions of career plans of students with vision impairment. He found that "a structured career-exploration program that includes parents is a viable method to consider as part of a transition plan" (McConnell, 1999, p. 513). McConnell (1999) also indicated that the career development needs of these young people are best catered for when all educational team members involved in the transition process have well-defined roles. More recently, Jorgensen-Smith and Lewis (2004) detailed a pilot transition program aimed at addressing the career-education needs of students with vision impairment. In doing so, they identified features that support success in transition, such as

student motivation and collaboration among agencies (Jorgensen-Smith & Lewis, 2004).

Skills for post-school success

Trief and Feeney (2003) have pointed out that during the transition from secondary school to post-school life, adolescents with vision impairment move from having numerous supports in secondary school, to being independent. Nagle's (2001) report on data from the USA's National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) proposed that young people with vision impairment "can compete in the sighted world and be successful in all aspects of adult life, but...professionals in both the education and rehabilitation fields need to take a critical look at the services they offer" (pp. 736-737). Nagle (2001) reported that evidence suggests agencies involved in the transition process have not collaborated to a degree that would promote successful relationships between team members. Additionally, Nagle (2001) highlighted the somewhat bleak status of youths with vision impairment transitioning to community life and employment in the USA, suggesting that "postsecondary education does not translate into increased employment opportunities" (p. 725).

In order for young people with vision impairment to participate and compete "in a rapidly changing technological marketplace" (Nagle, 2001, p. 731), they need to gain skills they will need to utilise independently in their post-school lives. More contemporary studies have highlighted the discrepancy between the skills acquired by people with vision impairment and the type of skills required in order to thrive and survive in the workforce and/or a tertiary institution (e.g., Kirchner, Johnson, & Harkins, 1997; Roy et al., 1996; Trief & Feeney, 2003). It has been broadly acknowledged that students with vision impairment need to learn the skills within the disability-specific areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) (Koenig & Holbrook, 2004; Hatlen, 1996; Hazecamp & Huebner, 1989; Koenig, 2000). This disability-specific curriculum encompasses competence in areas beyond the regular curriculum that young people with vision impairment need to become productive and contributing citizens (Wolffe et al., 2002). The ECC includes functional or compensatory academic skills, orientation and mobility, social skills, daily or independent living skills, recreational skills, assistive technology, career education, visual efficiency skills (Hatlen, 2000), and self-determination (American Foundation for the Blind, 2008b).

Three major North American studies clearly demonstrated the progression behind this thinking. Sacks and Wolffe (1992) proposed that students with vision impairment in regular schools require more than academic success if they are to live satisfied and contributing lives within

society Webster and Roe (1998) also advocated that educational team members recognise the competencies beyond the academic curriculum that students with vision impairment need to attain in order to develop independence and become individuals who contribute to society. More recently, Trief and Feeney (2003) formally acknowledged that a "typical high school curriculum might not address all of the additional needs of a learner who is blind or [vision] impaired" (p. 137). In other words, access to core curriculum areas within secondary schools were not assisting in the development of social networks, a sense of independence (Kroksmark & Nordell, 2001), and the ability to live independently (Sacks & Wolffe, 1998; Webster & Roe, 1998; Wolffe & Sacks, 1997).

In order to maximise knowledge of available post-school options, literature has recommended that education teams that work with students with vision impairment teach students career education. Findings from a number of studies indicate that young people with vision impairment lack career-related information. In a study conducted by Wolffe, Roessler, and Schriner (1992), 176 participants with vision impairment indicated they were dissatisfied with the support received in terms of vocational preparation, use of assistive technology, developing job-seeking skills, and accessing career advice. Data from the USA's NLTS has pointed out that individuals with vision impairment "are overreliant on the blindness system to find them jobs" (Nagle, 2001, p. 734), and that, in addition to exploring traditional job-seeking methods (for example, rehabilitation agencies), young people with vision impairment need to learn about how to find a job independently and be "encouraged to explore innovative job-seeking strategies" (Nagle, 2001, p. 730). Therefore, Wolffe (2000) recommended that career education be taught by specialist teachers through "activities that enhance the students' understanding of the world of work and adult responsibilities outside the general education curriculum" (p. 681), and advised that teaching such content should begin during pre-school and continue throughout a student's schooling. Wolffe and colleagues (2002) found that educational teams working with adolescents with vision impairment needed to capitalise on the likelihood that these young people "become confident, independent, and employable young adults" (p. 295). Likewise, Sacks and colleagues (1998) have advocated that students with vision impairment "be given every opportunity to experience the myriad activities and events that prepare an individual for adult life" (p. 477).

The importance of students with vision impairment acquiring skills and content within career education has been supported by various studies. Gil (2007), for example, has suggested that students with disabilities need to demonstrate skills including self-advocacy and self-determination. Nagle (2001) recommended that students learn "how to discuss their disability-

related need" (p. 729) with various personnel in a collaborative manner. Wolffe's studies (1985, 1997) have recommended that young people with vision impairment need extra study in occupational-preparation requirements, information about specific careers, and career planning. Additionally, compensatory skills relevant to the work environment (Nagle, 2001), including how to efficiently access information (through the use of low vision aids for print users and braille reading and writing skills for tactile users), operate Word processing and computers, gain specific information about technology for individuals with vision impairment, and the possession of good orientation and mobility skills (Wolffe, 1996) must be systematically taught.

In addition to career education, Nagle (2001) has proposed that vocational assessments should be implemented through both schools and rehabilitation agencies, in order to ensure students with vision impairment are "aware of the many opportunities that are available to them" (p. 731). Nagle (2001) has reported that realistic vocational assessments have the capacity to address needs including "access to the community, the development of social networks, and living arrangements...along with aspirations for future employment" (p. 731). Such vocational assessments have the potential to enhance positive attributes, provide strategies to maximise skills, and take an individual's strengths and weaknesses into account (Nagle, 2001). It has been suggested that students with disabilities who have a range of skills are better prepared to "[overcome] transition challenges as they enter the postsecondary setting" (Gil, 2007, p. 14). Young people with vision impairment "need to be exposed to strategies that will enable them to allay the fears of potential employers" (Nagle, 2001, p. 732).

The world of work

Even though the importance of career education has been emphasised as part of the secondary school curriculum, the research base clearly shows that adolescents with vision impairment encounter great difficulty gaining and maintaining adequate employment. Available research has suggested that, despite young people with vision impairment successfully completing secondary school and a significant proportion of these furthering their education in tertiary institutions, the majority are either unemployed or underemployed (Sacks & Pruett, 1992). A British study conducted by Roy, Dimigen, and Taylor (1996) pointed out that some tertiary education graduates with vision impairment were still unemployed seven years after they had graduated.

The extremely poor employment data may be attributable to many factors. Many students with vision impairment have reported being the only

student, or one of a small number of students with vision impairment at their school (Corn & Koenig, 1996; Rosenblum, 2000). Hence, they may have no contact with peers or adults with vision impairment (Rosenblum, 2000). Without positive examples, these young people have limited opportunities to be guided by peers or role models (Hutto & Hare, 1997) who face similar day-to-day challenges, such as using a cane for travel or accessing print materials through the braille medium (Rosenblum, 2000). The inability to access peers or role models with vision impairment means these adolescents form incomplete understandings of available post-school opportunities, including limited knowledge of available jobs/careers that can be successfully carried out by individuals with vision impairment.

A lack of awareness about future job opportunities is exacerbated by the fact that adolescents with vision impairment have limited work experience opportunities while at school (Rabby & Croft, 1989). Many studies have recommended that students with vision impairment participate in as many community-based work experience placements as possible (e.g., Moore & Wolffe, 1996; Oddo & Sitlington, 2002; Wolffe, 1999). In fact, the importance of students participating in work experience has been emphasised in several recent studies. For example, Kirchner and Smith (2005) proposed that years of post-secondary education for individuals with vision impairment does not necessarily facilitate employment for this group, especially if such individuals did not participate in work experience while at school. Sacks and Wolffe (1998) observed three adolescents with vision impairment over a 4-month period and discovered that each of them "had limited vocational experiences" (p. 16). Additionally, Valdes, Williamson, and Wagner (1990) reported that despite the provision of career information and vocational assessments in many schools, few provided hands-on experiences through placement services or job development. Furthermore, Nagle (2001) suggested that participation in real-life work experience placements is essential for adolescents with vision impairment, particularly if they are to "develop a true understanding of the full range of employment opportunities that are available" (p. 732). To ensure young people with vision impairment develop similar job-seeking strategies to young people without vision impairment, Nagle (2001) also indicated that adolescents with vision impairment should volunteer within the neighbourhood carrying out odd jobs (e.g., delivering newspapers).

Young people with vision impairment not only have low levels of participation in school-based work experience, but few partake in casual/part-time paid work while at school (Rabby & Croft, 1989). Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, and Blackorby (1992) explained that students with vision impairment were less likely to have worked while in secondary school than the majority of their peers with other disabilities, because they

focused on carrying out academic course work. Likewise, Kirchner and Smith (2005) reported that students with vision impairment in the USA "exceeded those in most other IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act] categories in academic outcomes...but fell behind most groups in respect to employment, including jobs held while in postsecondary education" (p. 500). Overall, it appears that secondary school-based students with vision impairment have focused on achieving academic competence and, as a result, have had inconsistent or limited opportunities for ongoing transition experiences, including experiencing a variety of careers (e.g., Graves & Lyon, 1985; Graves, Lyon, Marmion, & Boyet, 1986; Miller, 1993; O'Day, 1999; Wolffe, 1985).

Abel (1961) suggested that it is extremely difficult for an adolescent with vision impairment to "experience at least an optimistic outlook concerning his [or her] future vocation" (p. 327). This early prediction was insightful, considering young people with vision impairment undertake further study at postsecondary institutions at a similar rate to young people without disabilities, but they experience a far greater rate of unemployment (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Edgar, 1987). Riddle (1998) suggested that gaining employment is a true indicator of adulthood because it facilitates adult relationships, identity, and access to an independent base outside home. Consequently, studies in the field of vision impairment have implied that many adolescents never transition into adulthood because statistics showed that the vast majority do not gain and maintain quality employment.

Although Wong (2004) noted that the post-school choices of adolescents with vision impairment were determined with "a practical goal of employment in mind" (p. 39), international data on the employment rates of people with vision impairment appear bleak. Within Australia, for example, the unemployment rates of people with vision impairment have been significantly higher than that of the general population. Two sources indicated that only 37% (Australian Government, 2008) and 35% (Blind Citizens Australia, 2007) respectively of the 500,000 Australians with vision impairment are employed. In the USA, approximately 19% of the 993,766 adults aged 18 and older who are legally blind and non-institutionalized were employed (Zuckerman, 2004). In South Korea, the employment rate for persons with vision impairment is 38.6% (Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, 2006). Even though young people with vision impairment have participated in post-secondary study at similar rates to young people without disabilities, their rate of unemployment has been much higher (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Edgar, 1987; McBroom, 1997; Nagle, 2001). A recent study that interviewed 874 South-Korean individuals with vision impairment (aged 18-65) found that more than one third of people with vision impairment did not work because a "severe disability made it

"difficult to work"" (Lee & Park, 2008, p. 149). Of the 38.6% of persons with vision impairment who were employed, 42.7% of them have jobs in areas that have high job instability (Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, 2006).

Nagle (2001) confirmed that the nature of vision impairment makes it challenging for young people with vision impairment to gain paid employment. Studies have suggested that youths with vision impairments do not have sufficient knowledge about alternatives to print media or sufficient mastery of compensatory skills (Fireison & Moore, 1998; Harrell & Curry, 1987; Hatlen, 1987). In a study of barriers to employment, Crudden, McBroom, Skinner, and Moore (1998) found that more than half of participants considered needing to access print materials as a significant barrier to gaining and maintaining paid work. More recent studies have confirmed the difficulties associated with gaining employment. For example, Wong (2004) examined the factors that contribute to the post-school choices of students with vision impairment in Britain and reported that adolescents acknowledged obtaining employment would not be easy.

According to Nagle (2001), since employment environments have changed, the type of "training and services offered to people with [vision] impairments have not changed" (p. 731). Nagle (2001) also reported that this disparity presents ongoing concern for students with vision impairment, parents, educators, and other professionals working with this population, pointing out that "evidence suggests that rehabilitation agencies are unable to meet the needs of youths with [vision] impairments in the 21st century" (p. 735). The high unemployment rate has been regarded as significant because too much has been invested the education of people with vision impairment to allow them to remain an unused resource (Hutto & Thompson, 1995). Unfortunately, Nagle (2001) has determined that the aim of individuals with vision impairment "matching the employment rates of other youths with disabilities, let alone youths in general, seems no closer than it was almost two decades ago" (p. 735).

Difficulty gaining employment has serious implications for young people with vision impairment. For example, without any paid work experience, these adolescents have not been able to provide examples of work activity to future employers (Rabby & Croft, 1989). In an attempt to overcome this Farnsworth (1999) suggested that professionals working with young people with vision impairment help them gain paid employment that is related to possible future careers over the summer period. To maximise these summer work opportunities, Farnsworth (1999) indicated that rehabilitation professionals build associations with a wide range of employment agencies and businesses, through knowledge of the workforce,

placement techniques which are original, and by ensuring young people possess job-seeking strategies (Wolffe & Johnson, 1999).

A portion of the high unemployment rates may be attributed to potential employers' concerns. Employers may not be aware of the types of jobs individuals with vision impairment can perform. Rabby and Croft (1989) clarified that employers may not know that individuals with vision impairment can carry out certain jobs if employers had not experienced satisfactory contact with people with vision impairment. Additionally, studies have indicated that employers may not understand how people with vision impairment will transport themselves to and from the workplace. Wolffe (1999) explained that potential employers "routinely express concern about transportation as a barrier to employment for people" (p. 252) with vision impairment. Lee, Suh, and Park (2001) confirmed this apprehension, stating that difficulties in transportation and mobility may make individuals with vision impairment less competitive for employment. More specifically, employers have often been concerned about how employees with vision impairment using public transport will arrive at work on time (Wolffe, 1999), particularly if employees are travelling outside urban areas. Many employers have been concerned that employees without the ability to drive would "not be as flexible as...those who have vehicles at their disposal" (p. 252), in terms of participating in work-related social activities and working on alternative days.

The social world

It has been acknowledged that adolescents with vision impairment experience some specific difficulties, challenges, and complexities as a result of their impairment (e.g., Abel, 1961a; Abel, 1961b; American Foundation for the Blind, 2008a; Cook-Clampert, 1981; Konarska, 2007; Lowenfeld, 1959; Rosenblum, 2000). In addition to difficulties gaining and maintaining adequate employment within the world of work, young people with vision impairment also experience challenges in the social world. In particular, studies have highlighted that adolescents with vision impairment experience great difficulty relating to peers, have few friends compared to their peers without vision impairment, have somewhat limited social support networks, and are brought up in families who are described as 'overprotective' (e.g., Kef & Bos, 2006; Kef et al., 2000; Thahane, Myburgh, & Poppenpoel, 2005). Despite adolescents with vision impairment being exposed to peers on an ongoing basis through core curriculum classes and receiving specialised instruction and support in social skills, the limitations young people with vision impairment experience have indicated this population are not at all well prepared to navigate the broader social world once they leave that of the

school. For young people with vision impairment, the social implications of vision impairment "can have just as much influence over one's quality of life as the vocational or psychological implications" (Nemshick, Vernon, & Ludman, 1986, p. 862).

Feldman (1998) asserted that a majority of adolescents in the USA experience the dilemma of maintaining their individuality while aspiring to gain peer acceptance. From 1975 to the present, several studies on the psychological and social skill development of adolescents with vision impairment have determined that many of these adolescents have difficulty relating to the outside world and their peers, that is, adolescents without vision impairment (e.g., Kef & Bos, 1975; Huurre & Aro, 1998; Kef, 1997; Kef & Bos, 2006). Nemshick and colleagues (1986) involved up to 15 000 persons with retinal disorders in a large study in the USA. The vast majority (72%) reported that their vision impairment hindered their social activities.

In theory, it was predicted that the inclusion of students with vision impairment in primary and secondary schools would result in social acceptance and increased social interactions with peers without vision impairment, along with meaningful friendships. However, such benefits have not been found in practice, especially within secondary schools. Even though students have been involved in regular school life, they may not have seen how other students congregate, how to decipher visual signals, and how to anticipate "what is being intended and about to happen" (Tobin, 2008, p. 123). Studies have highlighted the social rejection many young people with vision impairment experience, which may result in feelings of inferiority and inadequacy (e.g., Beaty, 1992; Lopez-Justicia, Pichardo, Amezcua, & Fernandez, 2001). A preliminary study involving questionnaires and observations by Sacks, Wolffe, and Tierney (1998) on 48 adolescents with vision impairment in the USA (aged 15-21 years) found "opportunities for social integration and acceptance by sighted age-mates...limited at best" (p. 477). The following year, Huurre and colleagues (1999) studied 115 Finnish adolescents with vision impairment (aged 13-16 years) attending regular schools using self-report questionnaires and found little evidence of enhanced interactions with peers, nor enhanced self-esteem levels. Most recently, Rosenblum (2000) interviewed 10 adolescents with vision impairment (aged 13-17 years) and found that most participants took a long time to develop friendships and reported seeing themselves as "outsiders in the social hierarchy of their schools" (p. 440).

During adolescence, many young people with vision impairment become increasingly aware of their vision impairment because many cannot participate in typical adolescent activities reliant on vision, such as driving a car (Rosenblum, 2000) and playing football (Peavey & Leff, 2002). Social rejection may affect young people, emotionally, mentally, and

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psychologically (Thahane et al., 2005). Adolescents with vision impairment may live stressful lives and may experience "shame, neglect, [and] abuse" (Thahane et al., 2005, p. 393). Additionally, as a result of seeing themselves as inferior, young people with vision impairment have reported experiencing feelings of "helplessness, confusion, disbelief, powerlessness, fear, shamefulness and anxiety" (Thahane et al., 2005, p. 393). Uttermohlen (1997) proposed such feelings may occur because adolescents with vision impairment "face the reactions of others who may not understand their struggles and hence may present obstacles to overcoming them" (p. 309). Hence, one major challenge adolescents with vision impairment experience is successfully engaging with peers in social activities. Two significant studies both determined that, when compared to peers without vision impairment, adolescents with vision impairment spend a significant amount of time alone (Kef & Bos, 2006; Wolffe & Sacks, 1997). Similarly, Konarska's (2007) study on 80 adolescents with vision impairment showed these young people "have a tendency for passive retreat" (p. 916) when presented with difficult situations. As a result, adolescents with vision impairment participate predominately in passive activities (Wolffe & Sacks, 1997), including talking on the telephone (Kef, 2002; Sacks & Wolffe, 1998), watching television, and completing homework (Kroksmark & Nordell, 2001). Participation in passive rather than active activities can impede an individual's capacity to develop essential communication skills and, in turn, affect his or her ability to initiate and maintain friendships with others.

For all adolescents, being accepted by peers and having friends has been considered extremely important (Furman & Burhmester, 1985). As with the development of social skills among adolescents with vision impairment, recent international studies have also investigated their social support networks and friendships (e.g., Huurre et al., 1999; Kalabula, 1991; Lifshitz, Hen, & Weisse, 2007; Palmer, 2006a,b,c; Rosenblum, 1997, 1998, 2000). The vast majority of studies highlighted the difficulties encountered by adolescents with vision impairment in social contexts, such as developing and maintaining friendships and relationships. Earlier studies indicated that individuals with vision impairment may exhibit characteristics including asking excessive questions, limited play-related skills, and inappropriate affectionate acts (MacCuspie, 1992; Rettig, 1994). As a result of such characteristics, many young people with vision impairment may experience social isolation, may be considered unpopular by their peers (Kalabula, 1991), and have few friends (Eaglestein, 1975; Huurre & Aro, 1998; Kef, 1997; Kef, 2002; Peavey & Leff, 2002; VanHasselt, Hersey, Kazdin, Simon, & Mastanuono, 1983) compared to typical adolescent social networks (Huurre & Aro, 1998; Huurre et al., 1999; Kef, 2002). In a study by Kef and

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colleagues (2000) on a group of 316 adolescents with vision impairment, the average number of friends was only four.

Huurre and colleagues (1999) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the social support and self-esteem of 115 Dutch adolescents. In this study, fitting in with others, making friends, and having a number of friends were associated with high self-esteem among male adolescents with low vision and female adolescents who were blind or had low vision (Huure et al., 1999). For the male adolescents who were blind, higher self-esteem was related to "the quality of the relationship with parents" (Huurre et al., 1999, p. 32). The study's findings also emphasised that inadequate social support and social isolation may lead to reduced levels of self-esteem. Many studies about adolescents with vision impairment have indicated that they experience unpopularity and have few friends, but Rosenblum's (1997, 1998, 2000) research on the friendships of young people with vision impairment provided alternative insights. She acknowledged that, when an adolescent with vision impairment develops a best friendship, the vision impairment "can provide unique challenges for both members of the friendship dyad" (p. 435). Rosenblum (2000) also asserted that despite these adolescents regularly being social outsiders in the school culture, they can still have "meaningful social relationships" because adolescents had "experienced firsthand the benefits of having friends" (p. 444).

Some contemporary studies on young people with vision impairment have also examined their experiences with dating, relationships, and sexual knowledge. For example, Kef and Bos (2006) investigated a group of thirty-six young Dutch people with vision impairment (aged 14-24 years) and discovered that "the percentage of adolescents with a [vision] impairment that never had dated was significantly lower than that of sighted adolescents" (p. 91). Moreover, adolescents with vision impairment experienced "more difficulties and risks in their relationships with peers" (Kef & Bos, 2006, p. 91). Duh (2000) surveyed the sexual knowledge of 104 Taiwanese secondary school students with vision impairment, and compared results with 180 adolescents without vision impairment. The adolescents with vision impairment "varied considerably in their sexual knowledge" (Duh, 2000, p. 389) and "the earlier the onset of [vision] impairments, the lower the students' sexual knowledge" (Duh, 2000, p. 390). Overall, the peers without vision impairment had significantly greater knowledge than adolescents with vision impairment on knowledge about the four survey areas: anatomy, pregnancy, puberty, and sexually transmitted diseases. In particular, adolescents with vision impairment were uninformed about sexually transmitted diseases and conception (Duh, 2000). Adolescents without vision impairment were most likely to gain sexual information from their peers, while adolescents with vision impairment were "most likely to turn to

teachers for sexual information, followed by parents" (Duh, 2000, p. 390). These adolescents appear to be greatly dependent on their parents.

The social networks of adolescents with vision impairment have received substantial attention in recent literature (e.g., Huurre & Aro, 1998; Huurre et al., 1999; Kef, 1997; Kef et al., 2000; Roy, Dimigen, & Taylor, 1998). For any adolescent, the social environment, family, school, and peer group are three "subsystems which form the social network" (Kef et al., 2000, p. 74). However, many studies on adolescents with vision impairment have pointed out that their social networks are smaller than adolescents without vision impairment. In Finland, for example, Huurre and Aro (1998) found that the social networks of adolescents with vision impairment were slightly smaller than the social networks of adolescents without vision impairment. In a study to measure numbers of people within adolescents' social support networks in the Netherlands, Kef and colleagues (2000) found that the average number of people in the personal networks of 316 adolescents with vision impairment was 15, compared to 15 to 20 for adolescents without vision impairment. Adolescents with vision impairment identified social networks that included fewer friends, family members, and neighbours than the social networks of peers without vision impairment (Kef, 1997). The implications of having few friends and smaller social support networks are numerous for adolescents with vision impairment; they have few people to discuss personal concerns or queries with, have limited opportunities to participate in social activities outside the school environment, are susceptible to social isolation, and face the possibility of a lonely future.

For many young people with disabilities, families are an essential component of one's support network. Ideally, families are involved in an adolescent's transition process (McBroom & Tedder, 1993). In fact, it has been reported that parents are keen to be involved in their child's career development process (Battle, Dickens Wright, & Murphy, 1998; Morningstar, 1997; Salembier & Furney, 1997). However, studies regarding the post-school directions of adolescents with vision impairment by both McConnell (1999) and Nagle (2001) revealed that parents do not have a well-defined role in their children's career process. Many studies have considered the dynamics between families and adolescents with vision impairment. Rosenblum (2000), however, found that several adolescents with vision impairment "felt excluded from their families" (p. 444), but Kef and Bos (2006) provided detail about the large amount of time young people with vision impairment spend with their families. Generally, multiple studies have described the close relationships these adolescents have with their parents and the fact that most social support is received from family members (Huurre et al., 1999; Kef, 1997; Nemshick et al., 1986; Wolffe &

Sacks, 1997). Kef and Bos (2006) explained that positive relationships with family are important for adolescents with vision impairment as adolescents who are blind "turn less to friends and more to their parents" (p. 97).

It appears that many adolescents with vision impairment may have overprotective families (Ferrell, 1985; Nagle, 2001; Nemshick et al., 1986; Sacks et al., 1998; Thahane et al., 2005; Tuttle, 1984), families and/or parents who are in denial about their child's disability, have negative attitudes, and/or provide too much assistance (Ferrell, 1985; Tuttle, 1984). For example, parents may be reluctant to allow children with vision impairment to make mistakes, and, as a result, these children may not learn how to perform simple tasks (McBroom & Tedder, 1993; McConnell, 1999). Ward (1988) contended that if individuals with disabilities do not experience failure then they may not learn how to problem-solve, make decisions, and gain insights into their limitations and abilities. Furthermore, McBroom and Tedder (1993) advocated that parents be mindful to encourage independence rather than dependency in their children, even in difficult situations. McBroom, Tedder, and Ji (1990) and Mitchell (1988) advocated that young people with vision impairment learn to make their own decisions within their schools and families to limit the likelihood they will struggle in post-school life when school services cease or when their parents pass away. Additionally, Warren (1984) indicated that parents may have lower expectations for their child or children with vision impairment. Such expectations may have a negative impact on a child's development and accomplishments. Sacks and Wolffe (1998) provided quantitative evidence on 32 adolescents with vision impairment suggesting adolescents without vision impairment were "more independent of their families" (p. 16) than adolescents with vision impairment.

Conclusion

The transition from high school to adult life is recognised as one of life's most significant transitions (McBroom & Tedder, 1993; Wolffe, 2000; Wong, 2004) that is filled with new challenges (Gil, 2007). According to McGregor and Farrenkopf (2000), the ultimate goal for all individuals with vision impairment is "healthy growth toward adulthood" (p. 654). For a majority of young people with vision impairment, research has indicated that this goal is not being realised in practice. Studies on the availability of post-school options and practices that facilitate transition for young people with vision impairment have indicated a significant lack of success in equipping students for the wider social community beyond school and for meaningful employment. This lack of success is cause for great concern, especially since employment is recognised as an important indicator of life chance (Wright,

2006). Although efforts are in place to maximise and enrich the transition to post-school life, individuals with vision impairment continue to experience great difficulty engaging in social activities and gaining suitable employment.

In spite of the strong focus on improvements and innovations in the education of children and young adults with vision impairment, very few studies have examined the transition pathways from secondary school to post-school life for adolescents with vision impairment. Despite the fact that many young people with vision impairment have the cognitive capacity to contribute to and participate in society, research indicates that many of these young people experience limitations in the social world and the world of work that diminish their contributions and life satisfaction. Further research on transition to post-school life for young people with vision impairment is vital if these adolescents are to achieve "more positive outcomes following school" (Sacks et al., 1998, p. 477).

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