

Chapter 15

Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons With Hearing Impairment: A Step Towards Inclusive Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the importance of vocational rehabilitation of persons with hearing impairment to attain the goal of inclusive development and rights of equal opportunities and participation. It deals with the definition of hearing impairment, in terms of ILO and prevailing legislations, the process of vocational rehabilitation, and importance of follow up. The chapter gives special emphasis to different approaches of evaluations of residual capacities, skill training models, and status of employment market along with the scope of entrepreneurial development. It also deals with various issues and challenges in the process of vocational rehabilitation of persons with hearing impairment.

INTRODUCTION

Ears are delicate and have complex mechanisms for many functions and not for just hearing per se. A well-functioning ear can make you hear very soft sounds over a wide range of frequency as well as withstand very loud sounds. It can also discriminate between sounds of varying pitch and intensity and locate the source of a sound. Various reasons of damage to ear like disease process, any physical trauma, exposure to excessive noise, drugs or simply the process of aging, may result in malfunction. This further may result in varying degrees of deafness which is also known as ‘Hearing Impairment’.

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Hearing impairment may be understood as a partial or complete inability to hear from one or both ears at a desired or even enhanced frequency. It may be congenital or acquired, and temporary or permanent. Hearing impairment is one of the most frequently experienced sensory deficits in the human population, and it affects more than 250 million people worldwide. Its consequences could be reduced capacity to understand speech sounds, communicate, and delay in language development, educational and economic backwardness, social isolation and stigmatization (Singh, 2015). The various types of hearing impairment are described in Table 1 (Nagaraja, 2002).

Table 1. Description of hearing impairment

Degree in *dB	Types of Loss	Onset	Course of Nature
Normal 0-25	Conductive Hearing Loss	Pre-lingual Congenital or before 4-4.5 years	Gradual
Mild 26-40	Mixed Hearing Loss	During development of language	Sudden
Moderate 41-55	Sensorineural Hearing Loss	Post-lingual and after development of language	Fluctuating
Moderately Severe 70-90	Retro Cochlear		Progressive
Severe 71-90	Central deafness		
Profound 91 +			

*dB-Decibel

All previous legislation that were enforced to protect the rights of the disabled have included certain disabilities under them. The International Labour Organization defined a disabled person as ‘an individual whose prospects of securing, retaining and advancing in suitable employment are substantially reduced as a result of a duly recognized physical, sensory, intellectual or mental impairment’ (ILO, 1983). The Persons With Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights, and Full Participation) Act, 1995 covered 7 such specific disabilities viz. Blindness, Low Vision, Hearing Impairment, Mental Retardation, Mental Illness, Leprosy-cured and Locomotor disability. Hearing impairment has been defined in the 1995 Acts ‘loss of 60dB or more in the better ear for conversational range of frequencies’ (The Persons With Disability Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights, and Full Participations Act, 1995). However, this Act has been revised and replaced by Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016. This new Act of 2016 includes 21 conditions under ‘Disability’ including the 7 conditions that were covered by earlier Persons with Disability Act 1995. Further, the new Act has also expanded the definition of hearing impairment by including both ‘deaf’ and ‘hard of hearing’ persons. As such, hearing impairment has been defined as follows:

- A - ‘Deaf’ means persons having 70 dB hearing loss in speech frequencies in both ears, and
 B - ‘Hard of hearing’ means persons having 60 dB to 70 dB hearing loss in speech frequencies. (Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016))

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