QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY VISUALLY IMPAIRED WOMEN IN WORKING LIFE

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Abstract

Today, disadvantaged groups that enter employment experience various problems. In this sense, the difficulties encountered by disabled persons and women separately have been examined in detail in the literature. However, no study investigates the problems experienced by visually impaired women as a specific group in employment. Intersectionality theory suggests that being a woman and being disabled intersect, so more complex problems emerge for them in employment. Detailing these problems is crucial for policy suggestions. Therefore, this article investigates the difficulties encountered by visually impaired women who have been actively working for at least five years. An interpretive phenomenology approach was used in this research. In sample selection, a criterion sampling method was used to reach both visually impaired and female individuals. This study was conducted with 20 visually impaired women, and data were obtained using a semi-structured interview form consisting of open-ended questions. According to the results of the study, the difficulties encountered in working life by visually impaired women working in a full-time job were found to be "flawed work system", "lack of knowledge and awareness among co-workers and managers", "the glass ceiling problem", "self-confidence problem as a result of segregation", "barriers in the community leading to segregation", "access issues".

Key Words: *Disability, work life, visually impaired women, intersectionality*

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GÖRME ENGELLİ KADINLARIN ÇALIŞMA HAYATINDA KARŞILAŞTIKLARI GÜÇLÜKLER ÜZERİNE NİTEL BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Öz

Günümüzde istihdam dezavantajlı bireyler için önemli bir olanak olması yönüyle dikkat çekmektedir. Fakat istihdama giren dezavantajlı grupların çeşitli sorunlar yaşadıkları tespit edilmiştir. Bu anlamda engelli bireylerin ve kadınların ayrı ayrı yaşadıkları sorunlar literatürde ayrıntılı bir şekilde incelenmiştir. Bununla birlikte spesifik bir grup olarak görme engelli kadınların istihdamda yaşadıkları sorunları inceleyen herhangi bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Bu dezavantajlı grubun ihmal edildiği bildirilmektedir. Kesişimsellik teorisi çerçevesinde hem engelli hem de kadın olmanın sonucunda istihdamda daha büyük sorunlarla karşılaştıkları literatür tarafından tespit edilmiş olup bu sorunların ayrıntılandırılmasına ihtiyaç vardır. Dolayısıyla bu makale kapsamında en az beş yıldır aktif olarak çalışan görme engelli kadınların çalışma hayatında karşılaştıkları güçlüklerin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu araştırma kapsamında yorumlayıcı fenomenoloji yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır. Örneklem seçimi konusunda hem görme engelli hem de kadın bireylere ulaşılması amacıyla ölçüt örneklem yönetimi kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışma 20 görme engelli kadın ile gerçekleştirilmiş olup açık uçlu sorulardan oluşan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu ile veriler elde edilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonucuna göre tam zamanlı bir işte çalışan görme engelli kadınların çalışma yaşamında karşılaştıkları güçlükler "kusurlu çalışma sistemi", "iş arkadaşları ve yöneticiler arasında bilgi ve farkındalık eksikliği", "cam tavan sorunu", "ayrımcılığın sonucu olarak ortaya çıkan özgüven sorunu", "ayrımcılığa yol açan toplumdaki engeller", "erişim sorunları" olarak bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Engellilik, çalışma hayatı, görme engelli kadınlar, kesişimsellik*

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of disabled persons in the labor market is essential for inclusive economic growth and is one of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (Kim et al., 2025). Disabled persons need to be integrated into the workforce to lead healthy lives with a high quality of life in humane conditions without relying on dependency or being segregated from society (Çevik and Özkul, 2022). When employed, disabled persons enhance their social relationships, earn income, and gain social status (Özçatal and Aşkın, 2022). Because individuals' self-esteem grows through employment, their quality of life significantly improves (Önol and Dönmez, 2021). Moreover, as disabled individuals achieve greater independence through employment, their families' worries about their future tend to lessen (Efeoğlu and Kılınçarslan, 2021). Given the numerous benefits of employment for disabled persons, it is crucial for them to enter the workforce.

Many disabled persons, despite wanting to work, face obstacles in finding employment. Even when they do secure a job, they often encounter challenges in maintaining it (Shaw et al., 2022). In this regard, in addition to social policies for the difficulties they experience, there is also a need to break down prejudices in society (Polat et al., 2020). Employers' attitudes are among the most common problems faced by disabled persons (Bezyak et al., 2024; Derbyshire et al., 2024). In specific sectors, such as the hotel industry, there is greater resistance to employing disabled persons (Hui et al., 2021). Considering the general employment, they have much less chance than those without disabilities (Van Der Zwan and De Beer, 2021). Thus, disabled persons face more significant difficulties in entering and maintaining employment than those without disabilities.

Today, the employment of disadvantaged groups is a significant problem in many countries around the world (Acar and Findikli, 2020; Çetin ve Çiçek, 2024). Disabled persons are among these disadvantaged groups, and the problems they experience in employment are well-established (Babikian and Hamdani, 2023; Bhanushali, 2016). Disabled persons' problems in employment are low wage (Ambuj and Anna, 2017), significant discrimination (Hutchinson et al., 2021), intolerance workplaces (Vornholt et al., 2018), limited physical access to

the workplaces (Darcy, Taylor and Green, 2016), adverse working conditions (Lindeboom, Llena-Nozal and Klaauw, 2016), non-standard contracts (Jetha et al., 2020), bad jokes (Orhan and Uysal, 2019), stigmatization (Doğu, 2020), low skilled jobs (Ababneh, 2016), reluctant family members (Bualar, 2015), and communication problems (Kalkan and Karabulut, 2021). Taken all together, disabled employees are more likely to hold lower status in the workplace as compared to non-disabled employees (Salam et al., 2021; Lindsday et al., 2019). That is why they need protective policies and empowerment programs to be more employed in favorable conditions (Adams, 2021; Baciu and Lazar, 2017; Xiang, 2020). Similarly, another disadvantaged group with numerous employment problems is women (Abdelhadi and England, 2019; Chatterjee and Vanneman, 2022).

Today's societal changes and the growing number of educated women have resulted in more women joining the workforce. Nonetheless, Aycil (2024) claims numerous factors hinder women's promotions in the workplace. In this sense, Akgemici et al. (2019) put forward that there are invisible obstacles that make it difficult for women to reach management levels in organizations governed by men's rules. Therefore, women are part of disadvantaged groups and face employment challenges.

The differences between disabled and non-disabled individuals are quite similar to those between men and women, as highlighted in the literature (Buz and Karabulut, 2015; Cohen-Mitchell, 2020; Chikate, 2020; Haykır, 2020). In this sense, women face very different and major problems in employment compared to men (Brini, Scherer and Vitali, 2024; Piasna and Plagnol, 2018; Theodossiou and Zarotiadis, 2010). These problems are underestimation of skills (Kapantai, 2019), restrictions (Rao, 2016), hostile environments (Murashima, 2021), non-regular work (Inoue, Nishikitani and Tsurugano, 2016), the gender wage gap (Rajeev and Sinha, 2024), low paid (Sunikka-Blank, 2020), job stress (Amponsaa-Asenso, 2018), less likely to be promoted (Sleiter, 2019). Similar to disabled persons, women also need various policies and empowerment programs to be supported in employment (Çağlar et al., 2023; Hampden, 2015; Özçalik, 2019). In this regard, many efforts and initiatives have taken place to improve the working conditions of

women and disabled persons (Beletskaya and Zotova, 2020; Čavkoska, 2018; Budhwar et al., 2013; Sakız, 2022). Thus, employment conditions for women and disabled persons have improved relatively from the past to present (Cruz, 2024; Opini, 2010; Pujari and Kamble, 2022). Nonetheless, disabled women experience greater and more complex problems in employment than women and disabled persons (Naami, Hayashi and Liese, 2012; Varshney, 2022; Wang and Li, 2018). In this regard, intersectionality theory suggests that being a woman and being disabled intersect, so more complex problems emerge for disabled women (Chan and Hutchings, 2023; Moodley and Graham, 2015). In other words, when the burdens of being disabled and the burdens of being a woman combine, the problems increase exponentially. In this regard, Brown and Moloney (2019) argue that intersection of gender and disability leads to less favorable working conditions for disabled women. Thus, the problems experienced by disabled women in employment emerge as a much larger issue that needs to be addressed.

Numerous studies in foreign literature have examined the difficulties experienced by disabled women in working life (Hirano, Bromley and Lindstrom, 2024; Holnes, 2016; Moloney et al., 2019). Similarly, various studies on the working life of disabled women have been conducted in Turkish literature (Çakır, 2021; Doğu, 2020; Gedikli, 2022). Nonetheless, these studies neglect visually impaired women as a specific disabled group (Daudi, 2018). Similarly, it is thought that there are very few studies on the lives of visually impaired women before the modern age (Capp, 2024). The limited number of information and research makes it critical to examine the lives of visually impaired women. (Backenroth, 1996).

While it is reported that visually impaired women had employment problems approximately 30 years ago (Backenroth, 1996), current studies indicate that these problems continue today (Koral, 2023). Even educated visually impaired women face various problems in the workplace (Raj and Priyadharshini, 2024). For the research on the work life of visually impaired persons, empirical studies have included both genders without any separation (Lund and Cmar, 2019; McDonnall and Tatch, 2021; McKnight, Crudden and McDonnall, 2021; Zapata, 2022). That is why there is a dearth of research on

specifically visually impaired women's work lives. Thus, this study is novel and significant since it addresses a gap in the literature on visually impaired women's work life, particularly in the Turkish context, where there is no empirical study on the work life of specifically visually impaired women.

Thus, the recent article examines the challenges visually impaired women face in the workplace. The research problems of this study are as follows:

1. What are the views of visually impaired women regarding challenges during their work life?

2. What are the views of visually impaired women regarding the impact of visual impairment on their work life?

3. What are the views of visually impaired women regarding the impact of working for at least five years on their lives?

METHOD

In the existing literature, the problems experienced by women and persons with disabilities in work life are well-established separately (Hosseini et al., 2023; Korkmaz, 2023; Rao and Shailashri, 2021; Teborg, Hünefeld and Gerdes, 2024). Nonetheless, visually impaired women have been neglected, especially in the Turkish context. That is why this research has utilized a qualitative method to examine the experiences of these individuals thoroughly. Within the scope of this study, we conducted in-depth interviews with visually impaired women to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. The participants of this research were selected using criterion sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling. A criterion sampling technique is recommended for participant selection when conducting phenomenological studies (Inanc and Kozak, 2021). If there is a high number of individuals experiencing the identified phenomenon, the criterion sampling technique allows for collecting rich information about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005).

The qualitative data was evaluated using an interpretative phenomenological approach, which aims to understand how individuals perceive themselves and the world. The interpretative phenomenological approach aims to comprehend and uncover the new meanings of a personal experience that has previously been overlooked (Khazaeipour et al., 2018; Seymour and Clark, 1998). This

approach strives to thoroughly describe and interpret a phenomenon from the perspective of those who are interviewed (Talewar, Cassidy and McIntyre, 2020). In this sense, the interpretative phenomenological approach elucidates participants' subjective experiences within a particular phenomenon, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of their perspectives (Read, 2013). In other words, it explores how participants experience and derive meaning from the topic under investigation (Pacheco-Zenteno et al., 2021). According to this approach, the researcher carefully examines the transcript from an interpretative perspective (Prosek and Gibson, 2021). Thus, this research uses an interpretative phenomenological approach to delves into the specific experiences of visually impaired women in a typical work life and explores the meaning of these experiences for them.

Sample

This study involved 20 visually impaired women who were employed in full-time positions. In order to reach the participants, the Ankara branch of Altı Nokta Körler Association was visited and volunteer visually impaired women participants were identified. Participants were chosen from visually impaired women who had worked for at least five years. To truly understand the participants' experiences, it is crucial to consider the time they invest in the phenomenon under investigation because the formation of their experience depends on their time investment in work life. Thus, this research study's criteria were gender, visual impairment, and experiencing at least five years of work life. Participants are between the ages of 31 and 59. Among the participants, 2 are middle school graduates, 8 are high school graduates, 1 has an associate degree, and 9 hold university degrees. Out of the participants, 2 are workers, 2 are teachers, and 16 are civil servants.

Prior to the study, the purpose of the research was thoroughly explained to those who were interviewed. Volunteer visually impaired women were informed that their voices would be recorded during the interview. They were assured that the data collected would only be used for research purposes. It was emphasized that the participants' identities would not be linked to the transcripts. Moreover, participants were informed that their involvement in the research was voluntary and that they could terminate their involvement

whenever they wanted. Participants were made to read and sign the consent form in the presence of a sighted individual and an association official. Interviews were held for about 15 minutes. Although more in-depth interviews are needed in phenomenological studies, the fact that the interviews in this study lasted an average of 15 minutes is a limitation of this study. Despite being volunteers and having significant experience with the phenomenon being studied, most participants stated that prolonging the discussion by revisiting the employment issues that have remained unresolved for years was unnecessary. They also expressed concern that, despite being interviewed for many years, they generally do not receive feedback, and the results of the studies are rarely shared. Upon this situation, the purpose of this study was explained to the participants in greater detail. They were informed that the results would be shared with the Ankara Branch of the Altınokta Blind Association upon completion. After the results of the study were obtained, contact was made, and the results were presented. The interviews took place between April and August 2024. To maintain confidentiality, the data collected from voice recordings were assigned numbers instead of using personal information.

Researchers

Researchers have postgraduate education in social policy and have studies on disabled individuals. One of the researchers has expertise in disabled individuals and has specifically studies on the employment of disabled individuals. Before the interviews, the researchers had dialogues with visually impaired women in the Ankara branch of Altı Nokta Körler Association. The researchers went to the Ankara branch of the Altı Nokta Körler Association every Saturday for a total of 9 weeks and witnessed the experiences of visually impaired women by participating in various events. In understanding the phenomenon under investigation, it is crucial for researchers to have face-to-face dialogues with visually impaired women for long periods of time and to have direct studies on this subject.

For phenomenological research, establishing a meaningful relationship between the individuals whose experiences are being examined and the researchers interpreting these experiences is crucial. Researchers in this relationship must set aside their biases and prior beliefs about the emotions

and thoughts they observe to prevent influencing the research (Creswell, 2005). In this regard, bracketing is a technique used by researchers to minimize the influence of their own preconceptions on qualitative research, thereby enhancing the rigor of the research (Habibullah, Mohammed and Hamza, 2023). Bracketing assists phenomenological researchers in abandoning their realities to understand the experience in its purest form (Matua and Van Der Wal, 2015). The researchers held several discussions to examine their preconceptions and beliefs about visually impaired women that stemmed from their previous experiences. Considering these discussions, the researchers proceeded with the study and consciously acknowledged and set aside their biases. They were careful to carry on with the study while being as cautious as possible of their biases.

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form was developed for data collection in the research. This form was adapted mainly from the questions used in the study conducted by Doğu (2020) on the difficulties of disabled individuals in working life. The form went through a detailed literature review during the preparation phase, and a question pool was created through group work with the researchers' participation. Subsequently, an interview form was created by selecting questions suitable for the research's purpose. After experts examined the questions, necessary adjustments were made. A pilot application was carried out before the study to ensure the comprehensibility of the questions in the created form. In the pilot study, it became clear that the length of the questions made them difficult for the participants to understand. Based on feedback from the pilot study, the question statements were shortened. Following the pilot application with participants, the interview form reached its final version. The form was then applied to other participants without any changes.

The interview guide covered various topics to explore the challenges visually impaired women face in work life. The study aimed to conduct in-depth interviews, during which each participant's voice was recorded. Transcripts of the audio recordings were then extracted and analyzed for thematic content. An application to the Middle East Technical University Applied Ethics Research

Center was made for ethical permission for the research, and approval was obtained (Ethics Committee Protocol Number: 0362-ODTUİAEK-2023).

Questions included in the interview guide:

- You have been working a full-time job for more than five years. What are the difficulties you have experienced in your job?

- In your opinion, how does your disability affect your work life?

- What does your family expect from your work? How do these expectations affect your work life?

- In what way and how was your life affected when you started your job?

- Do you have fears and concerns about continuing your job? If so, what are they?

Credibility / Transferability / Consistency / Confirmability Studies

In order to ensure the credibility of the research, the researchers conducted pre-interviews with participants to explain informed consent in detail. Then, the participants were asked questions. As with all qualitative studies, it is essential to consider transferability in phenomenological research. Therefore, the research field, the participants, and the methods used to collect and analyze data should be explained in detail for transferability (Foley, Myrick, and Yonge, 2012). This study provided comprehensive explanations of the research process to ensure that its findings can be transferred to other settings. Thus, we provided a detailed explanation of the development of the data collection tool, data collection and analysis, as well as the role of the researchers.

Analysis process

The researchers conducted the data analysis themselves without using any qualitative analysis program. During the analysis phase, the statements of visually impaired women were categorized into main and subcategories using the open coding method until no new categories emerged. In the next step, axial coding was used to establish relationships between the codes identified in the first step. The main themes were identified after two cycles of coding. Quotations from the statements of visually impaired women were included to

illustrate their opinions. The selection of quotations is based on the reflection of similarities.

The expert review technique is one of the most helpful and widely used methods for establishing credibility in qualitative research (Özkan and Gezer, 2024). In this technique, a field expert is consulted to assess whether the researchers have interpreted the data reasonably and if the results align with the collected data (Merriam, 1995). In this study, one expert reviewed the data to validate its credibility. Also, each researcher's coding was compared with the other researcher's to ensure data reliability. In qualitative research, detailed reporting is essential for credibility, and it is recommended to include adequate participant information and direct quotations (Creswell, 2013). That is why detailed information about the participants is provided in this study, including direct quotations. Furthermore, researchers have refrained from using biases and experiences when interpreting research data by bracketing themselves. Additionally, as another method, prolonged engagement involves investing a significant amount of time in the research setting (Hlyva and Schuh, 2003). Thus, researchers utilized prolonged engagement by spending ample time with participants to gain a deeper understanding.

FINDINGS

The identified themes from in-depth interviews with visually impaired women were discussed, with supporting quotes from the interview transcripts. After analyzing qualitative data, we identified six themes related to the challenges visually impaired women encounter during their work lives. These themes are as follows: 1) flawed work system, 2) lack of knowledge and awareness among co-workers and managers, 3) the glass ceiling problem, 4) self-confidence problem as a result of segregation, 5)barriers in the community leading to segregation, 6) access issues.

Theme 1: Flawed work system:

Participants report that the tasks assigned to them at work sometimes conflict with their disabilities. Visually impaired women at work may feel uncomfortable when faced with tasks that ignore their disabilities, and if they cannot get help, these tasks become a significant problem for them.

"Because of my profession, for example, sometimes I am assigned and sent somewhere. I am asked to go to an address I do not know, a place I do not know. While going, thank God, our friends support us. They help us with their own vehicles, and if they do not help, whether we would get into a taxi or fall on the road is never questioned. We go by struggling on our own." (Participant 4)

"Although our special situation exists in the system, it is ignored every time, and different tasks are requested from us. There are things I can do, there are issues that are beyond my capacity due to my special situation. Unfortunately, this is not taken into consideration." (Participant 5)

Participants indicate that unsuitable workplaces are a significant problem. They state that they are not only given inappropriate tasks but also do not have the equipment to perform normal tasks. For visually impaired women, even when performing their normal tasks, if the opportunities provided by the workplace are limited if they are given inappropriate tasks, the problem situation can grow exponentially. Lack of opportunities and inconsistent expectations in the workplace are another significant problem for visually impaired women.

"We have been working for many years. But, I mean, everywhere we are is a problem, everywhere is a difficulty. Which one should I tell you and which one should be left? First of all, the workplace is not suitable for the visually impaired women, the equipment is inadequate, and the employer's mentality is another problem. We have been saying this for years, but there is no progress."

It is emphasized by most participants that visually impaired women can fulfill the requirements of the job in a healthy way if they have the equipment. However, the lack of workplace equipment is another crucial problem. While they are expected to do a certain task when hired, the lack of voice computer support in the workplace makes it difficult for them to demonstrate their competence. Working without equipment means inefficient work for visually impaired women. This situation can be interpreted as they are not making any effort to work, but the equipment they demand is persistently not provided by the workplace. Workplaces pose a problem not only in terms of assigning tasks that exceed their capacities but also in terms of expecting them to work without

providing equipment, thus providing an inappropriate and unproductive work environment for visually impaired women.

"The computers given to us must have at least a voice program. We are trying to do something with our own efforts. We want the institution that employs us to support us in the field of informatics. For example, I have been describing the necessary program to my computer for many years, but I cannot get the workplace to do it." (Participant 18)

"At my workplace, they tell me, "Since you came here, go write on the computer." Okay, write. There is no problem with writing on the computer, but the computer is not loud. The environment is not suitable for me. You cannot explain because the environment is not ideal for you." (Participant 19)

Theme 2: Lack of knowledge and awareness among co-workers and managers:

Participants feel that they are not understood by the people they work with. Visually impaired women who make an effort to be understood do not do this once and encounter the need to explain their situation again at regular intervals throughout their working lives. As a result of the failure to understand the special conditions of visually impaired women, their position in the workplace can be problematized. The fact that their special situations and equal rights are not understood is one of the critical problems of visually impaired women at work.

"The difficulties I experience in my job are, first of all, prejudice, like every disabled person. In other words, I may have to explain myself to my target audience almost every 4 years. In some jobs, due to priorities, positive discrimination is applied, etc. There may be cases where these are perceived incorrectly by my colleagues. In other words, I actually have the same rights as everyone else, but sometimes this can be reflected differently. I am disturbed by these." (Participant 3)

Visually impaired women's work lives are made more difficult by the prejudice of the people they work with rather than their disability. Visually impaired women can do jobs similar to other employees, but avoiding giving them work can reduce their productivity. They can be instilled with the

belief that they will not be successful or leave their work unfinished. They are not even given tasks where their disability is not a problem. Therefore, the perception that they cannot do things is created, and their position in the workplace is also negatively affected.

"So, actually, the problem is not because we are disabled but because people have prejudice. For this reason, we suffer a lot from it. We experience this distress because we are always seen as incapable of doing something, as not being successful, or as the work given to us being left unfinished." (Participant 12)

"For example, while I am available, my boss can give a task to another employee. However, I know that job. They are reducing my ability to do it. For example, since they do not give me the job due to my disability, my ability to do it decreases. Hah, I can actually say it like this. When you are at work, you do not do it even though you can do it. However, you know, you can do it but you are disabled. Since they do not bother to ask, they do not understand that you can do it normally." (Participant 20)

Visually impaired women may experience a self-fulfilling prophecy because their abilities decrease when they are not given the tasks they can do at work. Participants state that when their participation in workplace tasks decreases, they are dragged into a dysfunctional position, resulting in unstable relationships with their managers. For visually impaired women who are restricted to fewer tasks, there are higher expectations for these tasks. For visually impaired women, who are placed in a different position than other working individuals, the negative attitudes of managers cause workplaces to become a more inappropriate and inefficient working environment for them. It is even reported that managers sometimes do not accept the working status of visually impaired women and follow various strategies to force them to leave their jobs.

"If there are problems with your managers, their expectations may be high. In other words, a computer may not be provided to us, or a working environment may not be arranged for us." (Participant 5)

"What are my concerns? The simplest example, we will come back to the manager. The problem is this. Of course, they cannot insist that we do some

tasks. But naturally, they apply a policy of boredom. They try to make the staff lose their jobs. That is clearly what happens. A policy of intimidation..." (Participant 15)

Theme 3: The glass ceiling problem:

Participants report that they put in a lot of effort to get promoted at work. Similar to other working individuals, visually impaired women work to get a higher status job and set goals such as getting promoted in their current position. However, they are concerned that their chances of getting a better-status job are lower. They state that they are at a disadvantage in terms of getting a better-status job.

"I have no fear about continuing my job, but I can say that I make great efforts to move up and get promoted in my field of work." (Participant 10)

"Of course, I think I am negatively affected in terms of working in better positions." (Participant 7)

Visually impaired women report that they suffer from working with prejudiced employees and managers in every workplace or different unit they work in. Even if they break down people's prejudices in their first workplace after a long time, if they get a chance to move up, they encounter new prejudiced people in their new units. Prejudices that other employees do not encounter during their promotion phase can significantly reduce the promotion chances of visually impaired women, creating the glass ceiling problem. More importantly, while visually impaired women try to break the prejudices of individuals in their workplaces, they cannot devote themselves to jobs and promotions because their time and effort are focused on breaking existing prejudices.

"I have fears. For example, when I change institutions. When I move to another institution, I think that I will not be able to get a position and rise while; I will encounter those prejudiced people again and lose time to break their prejudices." (Participant 12)

Theme 4: Self-confidence problem as a result of segregation:

Participants report that starting and staying in a job significantly increases their self-confidence. The income, socialization, being useful, and

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completing certain tasks that come with working life impact self-confidence. Visually impaired women describe work life as a self-confidence-increasing opportunity in the absence of discrimination since it is a place where they can get away from their normal daily routines and gain very different experiences.

"Having financial freedom after starting a job and meeting people who are not disabled, of course, takes you even further. It increases your self-confidence. Frankly, sometimes I forget that I am visually impaired." (Participant 5)

"I have more self-confidence. It is better to earn my own money and spend it. Of course, there was no problem with getting support from my family, but spending my own money is better." (Participant 8)

"I can say that getting a job had a very positive effect. First of all, let me say this, self-confidence has been completely gained. Since we have gained our economic freedom, self-confidence has been completely gained. In other words, you have proven yourself in a way." (Participant 10)

"My life was affected in many ways. At least I gained self-confidence. I was happy to have a job. I tried to stand on my own two feet. Frankly, I had money in my hands." (Participant 11)

"So, my economic freedom has improved. And based on this, self-confidence is also strengthened." (Participant 16)

"Well, before I started working, of course I was unhappy. Because I was living alone. When I started working, I became happier. I became more self-confident, my self-confidence improved a little more, I became stronger." (Participant 18)

Visually impaired women notice the negative thoughts and expectations of failure of other employees in the workplace and can be affected by this. Participants who think that they are positioned in a different place than other individuals are directed by the perspective of others. It will be very difficult for co-workers and managers to balance their views and expectations regarding visually impaired women due to the lack of knowledge and awareness. For visually impaired women who think that there are negative views and expectations about themselves, the fear of making mistakes may increase, and every mistake they make may carry the risk of reducing their self-confidence.

Maintaining self-confidence can be quite difficult for visually impaired women who face different attitudes and segregation, unlike other employees.

"Of course, sometimes I am afraid of making mistakes, of proving them right, as people who approach with prejudice think. But we say that people should not be afraid of making mistakes, but it is really hard to put this into practice. Because I have a job where I have to renew myself constantly, and in this sense, sometimes I wonder if people could be right. There are times when I think about whether I might fall short at certain points." (Participant 3)

"Of course, I have fears and concerns about continuing my job. I try to do my job as much as I can, but I wonder if I am enough? These thoughts come to mind from time to time." (Participant 18)

Theme 5: Barriers in the community leading to segregation:

Visually impaired women state that they are in a more disadvantaged working life compared to other individuals in the society. They indicate that society ignores them, and therefore, they become invisible in work life. The negative thoughts and discourse of the society spread and affect work life. Due to the segregation that occurs as a result of barriers spread throughout the society, visually impaired women face the problems of being invisible, being in the background and becoming unproductive in working life.

"People have a negative view because we are disabled. There is a situation of ignoring. You are disabled. They don't see you. For example, it is clear that I can do many things. I can do many things, but they don't ask me. Since they don't ask, they don't know what I do. We can't even do our job properly; let me put it this way: that first look, the negative look, affects us negatively. You can't even do your job properly, that's what happens in the beginning. There is an effort to prove yourself. I mean, there are always difficulties. The disabled have a minus one because of the external view. I mean, the perspective of the society, you know? This is the most fundamental problem in the difficulties we experience." (Participant 20)

"So even if there is a meeting about disabled women, a non-disabled woman goes. That's why this is the worst. Here, I mean being invisible as a disabled woman. You don't see them, and they don't see you." (Participant 13)

Visually impaired women struggle with the barriers built for them in society, apart from their disability. Even in cases where their disability is not a problem, the interference in their working lives by society and the negative thoughts and expectations directed at them create problems in their working lives. The prevailing idea in society that visually impaired women are not suitable for work life, and the constant reflection of this idea causes segregation.

"I mean, the place I lived in was a conservative city. It wasn't used for disabled people at all. They thought I shouldn't work at all." (Participant 2)

"Sometimes, I am treated like why are you working if you don't see it? Because it is something that society gives externally." (Participant 19).

Visually impaired women emphasize that their families always support them in work life, even if they are a little worried when visually impaired women start working. They state that it is complicated for visually impaired women to obtain and maintain a job in society, although their families and close circle support them. It is seen that they are perceived as disadvantaged when it comes to getting a job, and they experience different problems when they get a job. Communication with individuals stands out as one of these problems. No effort is made to communicate with visually impaired women by paying attention to their special conditions. Problems such as miscommunication and unhealthy communication arise. In addition to the fact that the society does not see visually impaired women as suitable for work life, the attitudes, behavior, and communication patterns towards them are also misstructured.

"My family was, of course, supportive. At first, they were afraid of me living alone here. Because I don't see. After I started working, of course, they said it was very good for me. Of course, everyone was happy. Because I was hopeless. It is tough to get a job because of the conditions in our country. Especially if you are disabled, it is even more challenging to get a job." (Participant 18)

"We have roads and sidewalks. In fact, those who put obstacles to disabled people are people without disabilities. Yes, we are visually impaired, and we achieve many things, but we definitely need people who can see somewhere. Here, society needs to be conscious. Society should definitely be educated. I am suffering a lot here. The people where I work do not know how to treat me or how to talk to me. It is a very painful situation. Even the educator doing this

sometimes hurts and tires us a lot. That is why I would definitely like you to pay attention here." (Participant 5)

Theme 6: Access issues:

Visually impaired women report that they have difficulty getting to the workplace. They also have different challenges regarding accessibility in the workplace. Lack of healthy transportation and accessibility problems in the workplace negatively affect the work life of visually impaired women. As access issues increase, it can become difficult for visually impaired women to focus on their working lives and continue their work in a healthy way. In this sense, access issues are an important problem as they take up their energy and time, and sometimes even hinder their ability to complete their tasks on time.

"In my job, just like every disabled person, we have accessibility problems." (Participant 3)

"I have difficulty commuting. The roads are not suitable for us, and there is no audio recording on the buses. Sometimes, we can pass our destination or get off early." (Participant 11)

"Our biggest problem is that, as disabled people, we have transportation difficulties. Access, transportation. Information technology, access and transportation put a lot of pressure on us." (Participant 18)

Visually impaired women state that they experience difficulties because their workplaces are not designed to be suitable for them. They need to have accessible workplaces in order to be aware of the physical environment and overcome difficulties by acquiring this habit in the workplace, but it is reported that even the most basic places, such as stairs, may be inappropriate. While they need their workplace to be accessible so that they can focus on working life and be productive, they encounter inadequate support, design, and equipment, thus increasing their problems. While the impact of disabilities on working life would be minimal in an ideal environment, inaccessible workplaces and public facilities that arise as a result of ignoring disabilities pose an obstacle to visually impaired women. Visually impaired women's disability does not affect their working life on its own, but access issues make the disability problematic. Therefore, while the real problem is the accessibility of workplace and public

facilities, society problematizes disability and misinterprets the work life of visually impaired women.

"For example, there are things that are physically deficient and inadequate in the places we are and work in, sometimes. It's the stairs. We have trouble sometimes. Not when going up or down the stairs, I mean, how should I put it? If we are not used to that workplace, that place, we have problems." (Participant 19)

"In fact, it is not the disability that affects us, but the lack of adequate equipment and the technology not being fully provided to us. In fact, it has nothing to do with my disability, for example, if everything were made accessible, then my disability would not be a problem. In other words, the problem is not my disability, the problem is the institution's inability to provide accessibility." (Participant 13)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to elucidate the challenges encountered by visually impaired women in their work lives. After conducting interviews, six main themes were identified: 1) flawed work system, 2) lack of knowledge and awareness among co-workers and managers, 3) the glass ceiling problem, 4) self-confidence problem as a result of segregation, 5)barriers in the community leading to segregation, 6) access issues.

While visually impaired women report that the difficulties they face in their working lives are not due to their disabilities, they emphasize the meaning that society attributes to their disabilities as a problem. As a result of managers' and coworkers' misconceptions regarding their disability, visually impaired women are not assigned to tasks they can do, they cannot gain experience, they cannot test their capacities, and they find themselves in a disadvantaged position in the workplace. The fact that the lower positions and unfavorable working conditions in the workplace reported for disabled persons (Salam et al., 2021) and women (Brini et al., 2024) are very clearly experienced by visually impaired women confirms the exponential effect of the intersection of gender and disability. Thus, the problems of visually impaired women in their working lives are much more profound and extensive.

The difficulties that visually impaired women face in their work lives are the negative attitudes and behaviors of other individuals towards them. The barriers in society lead to the lack of knowledge and awareness of other employees in the workplace. Since work life cannot be considered separately from society, it is open to the influence and shaping of society. For visually impaired women, the barriers in society manifest themselves more concretely in the workplace. Similar to being ignored in society, when they are ignored at work, their chances of promotion decrease, and their work becomes worthless. They cannot perform when their capacities are underestimated, and they are not given the tasks they can perform. Thus, getting a promotion is more challenging for visually impaired women compared to others, as suggested in the literature by Sleiter (2019).

Visually impaired women, like other disabled persons, need special arrangements in transportation and workplace design. However, they report that these arrangements are currently inadequate for them to have a healthy working life. Darcy et al. (2016) indicate that insufficient transportation opportunities are a significant problem for these individuals. In this sense, increasing technological equipment and sound systems may be useful so that public transportation vehicles can provide sensitive services to visually impaired women. As stated by Lindeboom et al. (2016), visually impaired women's working conditions are not appropriate to ensure accessibility. Additionally, audio equipment and technological devices in the workplace are essential for visually impaired women to work with. If this equipment is not provided at the workplace, work efficiency decreases and they experience self-confidence problems. Having equipment ready for visually impaired women when they first start working, checking it regularly, and providing it completely is a crucial step to reduce difficulties in work life. Thus, if accessibility and necessary equipment are provided, visually impaired women can fully participate in work life by performing at full capacity.

For visually impaired women, the attitudes and behaviors of other individuals in society are as important in their working lives as accessibility and equipment issues. Visually impaired women who have adequate equipment and accessibility are more likely to be demotivated to work in the face of

negative attitudes and behaviors. When negative thoughts and attitudes are eliminated, visually impaired women who want to perform may fall far short of their performance capacity due to a lack of equipment and accessibility. As a result, lack of self-confidence may occur. Thus, the positive progress of visually impaired women's working lives depends on both the provision of equipment and access and the positive attitudes and behaviors of the individuals around them.

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