People with visual impairment 'watching' television? Leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment is one of the under-researched concepts in disability discourse. Employing focus group discussions, this study explored the leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment. Their leisure pursuits include chatting, sleeping, listening to radio, meditation and watching television. The watching of television is traditionally considered unconventional for people with visual impairment; however, this was pursued for multiple reasons including as a form of resistance to traditional stereotypes on visual impairment as well as its educational and informative values. Reasons underlying their leisure pursuits include availability and accessibility, desire to obtain information and relaxation.

Points of interest

- Leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment have rarely attracted research attention.
- There is the need, however, to understand the leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment to encourage participation.
- The leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment include chatting, sleeping, listening to radio, meditation and watching television.
- Watching television was purposely pursued as a form of resistance.
- The socio-cultural, economic and political contexts of people with visual impairment underpinned their leisure pursuits.

Introduction

Leisure provides space for identity formation as well as development of independent functional skills for people with disabilities (Coyle, Shank, and Vliet 2010). Most

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often, people with disabilities face numerous challenges and stereotypes as they seek meaningful leisure experiences (Pegg and Compton 2004). Among people with disabilities, those with visual impairment face unique challenges in their quest for meaningful leisure experiences. This has been attributed to their restricted mobility due to the constraining social structures in which they find themselves and they are thus constrained in both indoor and outdoor leisure contexts (Jessup, Bundy, and Cornell 2013). Leisure activities that require eyesight and movement are mostly conceived to be untenable for people with visual impairment. This scenario is more palpable and noticeable in African societies, which have negative conceptions of disability coupled with their inability to provide for the leisure needs of people with visual impairment.

Contrary to the tenets of the Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which declares leisure as a human right for people with disabilities, people with visual impairment in Ghana are mostly consigned to the idea that leisure is a 'luxury' and thus beyond their reach (Adam, Kumi-Kyereme, and Boakye 2016). In Ghana, leisure is conceived to be a preserve for the wealthy and elite. People with visual impairment as well as other citizens of exclusionary identities are not included in the echelon of the wealthy and elite. In this regard, people with visual impairment have limited leisure space within which they can pursue meaningful leisure. Additionally, the high dependence of people with visual impairment on their non-disabled acquaintances (Kassah, Kassah, and Agbota 2012) further limits their ability to construct and pursue meaningful leisure engagements. Consequently, leisure scholars have shown little research interest in the leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment. Thus, little is known on the leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment particularly in Ghanaian and African societies. In rare instances when the leisure of people with visual impairment is studied, such studies are situated in developed western countries (for example, Jessup, Cornell, and Bundy 2010; Jessup, Bundy, and Cornell 2013) which have different leisure settings to developing countries like Ghana. Accordingly, this article explores the leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment and discusses the reasons underpinning their leisure pursuits.

A study of this nature contributes to both practice and literature. In terms of practice, the study can influence action on the part of leisure service providers. Activities that are revealed to be popular among people with visual impairment in this study may induce policy-makers and service providers to put in place measures to ensure their provision. This is particularly important for developing countries like Ghana where leisure spaces and activities are not designed to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. To ensure participation of people with visual impairment in leisure, there is the need for policy-makers to understand their leisure pursuits. Knowing their leisure pursuits will not only ensure that the right activities are introduced in disabled-friendly leisure spaces, but will also enhance participation on the part of people with visual impairment. In relation to the literature, this study provides both pretext and context for further discussion and studies

on leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment from an African perspective. The literature lacks in both theoretical and empirical dimensions on the leisure of people with visual impairment. While leisure among people with disabilities has failed to garner the needed research attention, it is worse for people with visual impairment.

Disability language is a contested area but an important ideological and political issue since it borders on stigmatisation and strategies for social change (Darcy 2003). Nonetheless, given the social orientation of leisure and the need to foster the inclusion of people with disabilities, this article adopts the person-first language. The idea behind the person-first language is to emphasise the fact that individuals with impairments are first and foremost human beings and thus as normal and worthy of any human course as other people without impairments. To this end, they must first be recognised as human beings and not be tied to the shackles of the impairments they suffer as though the impairment is of precedence to their human values. Recognising people with disabilities as human beings shifts the focus of society from their impairments to the humanity that binds all human beings. Such an approach has the potential to limit stereotyping, especially in developing countries like Ghana where the basis for disabling people with disabilities is the impairment they suffer.

Leisure in Ghana

Leisure in Ghana has been shaped by historical, political, economic and socio-cultural thoughts (Nukunya 1992; Nabila 2001). A historical account of leisure in Ghana shows that leisure is traditionally associated with negative connotation. Even though the 'free time' value of leisure is understood (Yankholmes and Lin 2012), there is a denial of the existence of 'free time' due to the negative tags associated with having 'free time'. Being in possession of 'free time' without having anything obligatory to do is regarded as being wasteful and lazy (Akyeampong and Ambler 2002). Consequently, most people usually engage in home-based, passive activities to avoid being tagged as lazy and frivolous (Adam 2014).

Adu-Febiri (1988) identified three characteristics of leisure-related travel in pre-independence Ghana that helps to explain leisure lifestyles among Ghanaians. Firstly, leisure-related behaviour was viewed as an activity undertaken for serious social purposes such as attending funerals, naming ceremonies, weddings, festivals and visiting friends and relatives. Secondly, leisure-related travellers at the time patronised traditional and non-commercial tourism and hospitality facilities. This idea was reinforced by the fact that Ghanaians did not invest in hospitality facilities since the demand for such facilities was non-existent (Akyeampong 2007). Thirdly, tradition required that hosts be warm and courteous to visitors. In modern times, however, this orientation is being eroded by the commercialisation of hospitality services.

Relatedly, Akyeampong (2007) identified three motivations for non-work activities among Ghanaians to include customary imperatives, peer imperatives and escapism. The first two are described as 'imperatives' because they connote some sense of obligation based on either tradition or social ties. Unlike 'westerners' where the chief reason behind their leisure-related behaviour is for holiday purposes, most Ghanaians undertake such non-work activities under 'compulsion'. Customary imperative is when people undertake activities that are considered an integral part of most Ghanaian cultures such as attending festivals, funerals and marriage ceremonies. On the other hand, peer imperative pertains to leisure-related activities undertaken by social and youth groups such as student associations, religious and professional associations. Lastly, escapism is associated with the well-to-do in society who are in the position to take holidays and engage in structured leisure (Akyeampong 2007). This group of people are few and represent the upper class who have acquired or are acquiring foreign lifestyles and for that matter attach importance to leisure.

Disability and visual impairment

Many perceptions of disability antedate and have driven disability discourses. History has always portrayed people with visual impairment at the extremes of ability as either being helpless, needing protection, or hopeless and cannot achieve independent living. Bolt (2004, 53) suggests that the terms 'blindness' and 'the blind' have become a 'psychosocial burden that perpetuates prejudice' and that 'the blind' are perceived as a homogeneous group, sharing the same traits. Australian vernacular uses the term 'blind Freddy' to denote people who are unintelligent and unable to understand what is happening around them (Steer and Gale 2006). Many societies and cultures dehumanise people with visual impairment. Dictionary definitions of blindness pertain to ignorance and concealment, implying that if one cannot see then he or she cannot know (Jessup, Bundy, and Cornell 2013).

In Ghana, there are more people with visual impairment (40.1%) than any other type of impairment (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS] 2014). The rate of visual impairment is equally higher than all other categories of impairments (Ghana Eye Foundation 2013). The leading causes of visual impairment in Ghana include cataract, glaucoma, trachoma, refractive errors and low vision, and diabetic and sickle cell retinopathy. Deeply rooted socio-cultural beliefs have driven the perceptions of Ghanaians on disability (Avoke 2002; Kassah, Kassah, and Agbota 2012). While these socio-cultural beliefs are common to all types of disability, people with visual impairment tend to suffer unique challenges due to their sight limitation. There is a dual view pertaining to societal perceptions of disability rooted within the socio-cultural fabric. The first but predominant view portrays people with disabilities (especially those whose conditions are congenital) as people whose relatives have wronged a deity and thus the impairment is conceived as a punishment visited upon the family (Agbenyega 2003; Kassah 2008). In some cases, it is believed

that even when dead relatives offend a god/deity, this can cause a living relative to give birth to a child with impairment. In this regard, there is a griming fear that any association with a person with disability may result in a similar punishment (Avoke 2002; Slikker 2009) and hence most people with disabilities are shunned by non-disabled people (Avoke 2002; Kuyini, Alhassan, and Mahama 2011).

The other socio-cultural construction of disability perceives people with disabilities as deserving pity and charity. Those who subscribe to this thought project people with disabilities as presenting an opportunity for non-disabled people to do 'good' and serve God by being charitable to people with disabilities (Agbenyega 2003). This social–cultural construction of disability projects it as an aberration in God's creation and thus the path to achieving salvation lies in being sympathetic to people with disabilities (Kuyini, Alhassan, and Mahama 2011). Even though people who hold this view have some form of social contact with people with disabilities, such contacts are limited to the provision of necessities (food and shelter). Meanwhile, access to jobs is limited for people with disabilities (e.g. food and shelter) based on the notion that they are economically inactive (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2007) and thus considered a socio-economic burden. Equally, people with disabilities have limited access to education as the educational curriculum and infrastructure do not make provision for their educational needs. For instance, there are limited braille books to enable people with visual impairment to engage in the act of reading. Public libraries as well as libraries of educational institutions including universities lack braille books. Despite the enactment of the Disability Law (ACT 715) in 2006 to allow for the social, cultural, political and economic inclusion of people with disabilities, such objectives are yet to be achieved.

Theoretical framework

Social constructionism has been chosen to serve as the theoretical basis for this article. Social constructionism maintains that meanings attached to objects, people and social phenomenon are created through social interactions (Jessup, Bundy, and Cornell 2013). The social construction of disability suggests that if negative meanings are associated with it, then objects, language and behaviours towards disability will reflect this negativity (Jessup, Bundy, and Cornell 2013). Such negative meanings associated with people with disabilities and their capabilities are then accepted as 'truths' which in turn influence how they are perceived and related to in social settings. With time, people with visual impairment through their social interactions with the 'self' and wider social members (significant others) internalise these negative constructions of disability and ultimately accept such socially constructed views and consequently entertain doubts about their own capabilities. Relatedly, the socially constructed view of visual impairment in relation to leisure spaces is eventually accepted as the norm among the wider society and people

with visual impairment alike. Accordingly, people with visual impairment define their leisure spaces and pursuits to suit such a socially constructed view.

Study method

Study setting

The study setting is the Kumasi Metropolis in Ghana. The Kumasi Metropolis is the second largest city in Ghana after the national capital (Accra). The Metropolis has the highest proportion of people with visual impairment among all major cities in Ghana and hence was deemed ideal for this study. The Metropolis has 42,060 people with impairment, with 17,984 of them being people with visual impairment (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS] 2014). Other forms of impairments in the Metropolis include physical, emotional, speech, hearing, intellectual and multiple impairments. Regarding leisure facilities and opportunities, the Metropolis is endowed with numerous attractions and open spaces (e.g. Komfo Anokye Sword site, the Zoological Garden, the Ghana Armed Forces Museum, Manhyia Palace, Prempeh II museum, Ghana National Cultural Centre, Children's Park and Rotary Park, among others).

Data collection and analyses

The method of data collection employed in this study is focus group discussion (FGD). FGD offered a cost-effective means of gathering qualitative data and afforded the opportunity to get communal perspectives on the leisure pursuits of people with visual impairment in the Kumasi Metropolis. In all, four FGDs were conducted. Two FGDs were conducted with males while another two were conducted with females. This was deemed necessary because there are gender dimensions to the construction of leisure spaces (Adam 2014). The aim was to allow for free expression of views by the participants on their leisure pursuits without prejudice. The group membership of each discussion ranged from 10 to 11. Overall, 42 people with visual impairment were involved in the study. To ensure that a variety of views on leisure were captured, each of the FGDs was conducted in a different suburb of the Metropolis. Four suburbs were chosen for the data collection exercise since they have the highest proportion of people with visual impairment in the Metropolis. Coincidentally, these suburbs are not geographically proximate and thus further reinforced the original intent of gathering diverse views on leisure among people with visual impairment in the Metropolis.

To get the individual respondents, a list of people with visual impairment in the Metropolis was obtained from the Ghana Blind Union. This association is a recognised association that represents the interests of people with visual impairment in the country. Based on the list, invitations (through telephone calls) were sent to members to be part of the study. However, the invitations were based on

three main criteria: proximity to the venue where the FGDs were held; availability on a fixed date for the discussions; and ability to easily commute to the venue where the discussions were held. A FGD guide was used to gather data for the study. The FGD guide was designed in the English language and was structured into two main sections. The first section collected the bio-data of the discussants to provide context for the results of the study. The second section focused on the leisure pursuits of the participants as well as the reasons underlying the leisure pursuits. The questions were semi-structured and used as guides in moderating the discussions and therefore allowed for greater freedom of expression on the part of the participants.

The discussions were conducted in the local language of Asante Twi which is the indigenous language of the Metropolis. Most of the people with visual impairment in the Metropolis, as in the entire country, are not proficient in the English language (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS] 2014), hence making Asante Twi the best alternative. It was further anticipated that the use of the local language will encourage participants to freely express themselves. The FGD guide was given to a lecturer at the Department of Ghanaian Languages of the University of Cape Coast to translate the content from English language to Asante Twi and back from Asante Twi to English language to ensure the validity of the questions. This also helped to ensure that there was no loss in meaning because of the translation of the content from English language to Asante Twi during the discussions. The discussions were held on Saturdays since this was the day most of the discussants could spare time. The discussions were conducted over four Saturdays. All of the discussions were audio recorded and later transcribed. The FGDs were conducted (moderated) by only the researcher. This allowed for consistency in questioning and synthesis of the views of the respondents before the next discussion.

The transcription involved listening to the audio of the recorded discussions and typing out the responses verbatim. Additionally, the responses to all of the questions were transcribed since all the questions were considered pertinent to describing the realities of the people with visual impairment in relation to their leisure. After the transcription of the recorded audio, validation of the data was undertaken. This involved listening to the audio and comparing its content with the typed transcripts. This was done for each of the four discussions. This validation exercise helped correct minor errors and sentences that were wrongly typed out in the first instance. This helped improved the quality of the transcripts and validity of the narratives. Given the familiarity of the researcher with the research theme and terrain, the transcription of the audio recordings was done only by the researcher.

A content analysis of the transcripts was done using the analytic inductive technique (Patton 2002). This involved condensing the raw data into categories or themes based on the literature review and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Here, the directed content analysis was used. The initial coding was based on the literature review and the theoretical framework, and the second stage involved immersion into the data by allowing the themes to emerge from the data

(Hsieh and Shannon 2005). To check the consistency and validity of the themes/ codes, an inter-coding technique (testing for inter-coding agreement) was used to test the codes. The iterative coding process resulted in a coding scheme with five main categories/themes on leisure pursuits, and three on reasons underlying leisure pursuits. To check for credibility, the peer debriefing technique was used. This involved giving the codes to a group of five students with visual impairment in the university to compare the themes with the transcripts. Additionally, transcripts were read to two people with visual impairment who were part of the discussions to validate the content. The final codes/themes were presented as the results and interpreted in line with the content of the texts constituting each theme.

Findings of the study

To properly contextualise the findings of a qualitative enquiry, there is the need to understand the background characteristics of the respondents. The background characteristics of the discussants are presented in Table 1.

Leisure pursuits

Five main leisure activities of listening to the radio, watching television, meditation, sleeping and chatting were popular among the respondents. While some of the activities like listening to the radio, sleeping, meditation and chatting can be viewed as being within the capabilities of people with visual impairment, watching television is considered as being out of their reach. These activities are discussed in turn.

Listening to the radio

Listening to the radio is a common leisure activity among Ghanaians. Hence, the number of radio stations with diverse programmes has increased substantially over the past 10 years. The respondents were of the view that listening to the radio is one of the strategies they use to overcome boredom, get informed and be entertained. By listening to the radio, they engage themselves in a way that helps them to curb idleness. Listening to the radio helps them to momentarily forget about their social and psychological problems. One female discussant remarked:

> Most of us [people with visual impairment] listen to radio as part of our leisure. The radio is one powerful tool such that it can take away your boredom and therefore ensure that you are not idle. For us, it is important that you are always engaged so that you don't think a lot about the difficulties you face because of your impairment. So, listening to radio helps you forget about all these problems, at least for a while. Additionally, by listening to radio we get to know what is happening in Ghana and our communities. In addition to this, we get the chance to listen to music on the radio and other sports programmes which help to entertain us. (Female, 55 years old)

Table 1. Profile of discussants ($N = 42$).

Socio-demographic	Number	Percentage
Sex		
Male	22	52.4
Female	20	47.6
Age		
20–39	10	23.5
40–59	24	58.0
60+	8	18.5
Marital status		
Never married	23	54.8
Married	9	21.4
Ever married	10	23.8
Education attainment		
No formal education	28	66.7
Basic	5	11.9
Secondary	4	9.5
Tertiary	5	11.9
Religious affiliation		
Christianity	35	83.3
Islam	7	16.7
Average monthly earning (GH₵)		
10–200	33	78.6
≥201	9	21.4
Household size		
1–5	22	52.4
6–10	14	33.3
10–15	6	14.3
Employment status		
Employed	6	14.3
Unemployed	36	85.7
Level of visual impairment		
Partial impairment	7	16.7
Full impairment	35	83.3
Ethnic orientation		
Akan	35	83.3
Mole-Dagbani	3	7.1
Ewe	2	4.8
Other northern tribes	2	4.8

Radio programmes help to reduce psychological stress by providing the respondents with entertainment or information. For instance, through the entertainment value of radio, people with visual impairment can momentarily 'switch-off', which helps them to psychologically ease the burden of disability imposed on them by society. Nevertheless, by listening to the radio, an individual with visual impairment may be reminded of the feeling of neglect. Thus, depending on the content of the programme being aired on radio, one's hope of forgetting (albeit temporarily) about the burden of disability may be shattered. For example, discussion on the issue of exclusion and stigmatisation, or even a song that purports so, may serve as a reminder of one's past negative experience. The act of listening to the radio may therefore come with a mix of positive and negative experiences, and thus there is the need for the individual to be positive about the contents of a radio programme.

Watching television

Watching television emerged as a non-conventional activity undertaken by the people with visual impairment. The literal meaning of the word 'watch' as well as the action involved in watching implies that one must have eyesight to be able to undertake such an activity. It is a paradox that people who cannot 'see' undertake an activity that involves seeing. In view of this, the discussants indicated that the act of watching television primarily requires the function of the eye and ear. Since these two sensory organs are required, the absence of one (eyesight) does not mean that they cannot put the other (hearing) to use. One of the discussants had the following to say about watching television:

> Watching television is one of the important leisure activities for us since it is popular among most of us in this city. Sometimes when you tell other people that we [people with visual impairment] watch television they are amazed and usually asks questions such as; how can someone with visual impairment watch television? When we say, we watch television it does not mean that we see the programmes on television but rather we follow the television programme by listening to whatever is going. You see, the point is that you can't say 'I've listen to television' but rather 'I've watched television'. Even though there may be some differences between us and non-disabled people in watching television, we still enjoy watching it. (Female, 46 years old)

Another interesting finding that emerged from the discussions pertains to the use of the act of watching television as a form of resistance and thus a way of challenging the negative stereotypes on disability. The idea of using leisure as a form of resistance by people with visual impairment has been noted by Jessup, Bundy, and Cornell (2013), who indicated that because of the relative freedom of leisure it can be used as a space where the dominant cultural and social stereotypes are challenged. Resistance refers to verbal, cognitive or physical actions that oppose forms of power (Jessup, Bundy, and Cornell 2013). Even though the concept of resistance has been applied in the context of leisure, it is mostly associated with gender. Disability, and for that matter visual impairment, is one of the exclusionary identities, hence the idea of using leisure to express resistance to socio-culturally constructed stereotypes on visual impairment is conceivable. The discussants revealed that some of them engaged in the act to prove to society that even though their eyesight may be lost, they are human beings and thus capable of undertaking such an activity. One of the discussants remarked that:

> Watching television is an activity we enjoy. Also, when we watch television we feel we can prove to our non-disabled relatives and friends that we can undertake some activities that they enjoy. When someone with visual impairment is at home and family members are watching television and he or she gets close, you will hear some of them express pity for that person which makes one feel bad and incomplete as a human being. So, we are sometimes challenged to prove to them that being visually impaired does not mean we cannot watch television or enjoy it. (Male, 38 years old)

The idea of watching television among people with visual impairment is unique within the context of Ghana owing to the conception of disability and the associated marginalisation of people with disabilities. Socio-cultural connotations of

disability and that of visual impairment are cast either in the negative or in a manner that projects people with disabilities as recipients of charity and deserving of pity. Based on these widely held conceptions of visual impairment and disability in general, people with disabilities have been excluded from community and national life. Accordingly, people with visual impairment are barely considered in the design of programmes and services that can ensure their inclusion. In relation to watching television as a pastime activity, people with visual impairment are not expected to engage in watching television unlike their counterparts in the developed world for a number of reasons. First, people with visual impairment and people with disabilities in general are at the extreme end of poverty due to their conditions. They are unable to construct meaningful economic life and as such are heavily reliant on non-disabled people. The ownership of television sets as well as the act of watching television are considered a luxury and out of the reach of people with visual impairment. Second, owing to the level of neglect encountered by people with visual impairment, media houses and television stations do not make provisions for viewers who are visually impaired and thus make it difficult for them to watch television. Lastly, the act of watching is traditionally thought to require eyesight which people with visual impairment lack and hence watching television has originally not been a consideration among people with limited eyesight in Ghana.

The discussants indicated that watching television helps to inform and entertain them. Notwithstanding, the act of watching television may be experienced differently especially among people with visual impairment. First, the different levels of visual impairment as alluded to by the discussants are one indication that the act of watching television may result in varied experiences. Instructively, those with partial impairment may experience television differently from those with complete impairment. Even among those with complete visual impairment, it is conceivable that the sharpness of other senses (e.g. hearing) coupled with the socio-cognitive orientation of the individual may contribute to varying experiences regarding television viewing. Similarly, among the partially sighted, television offers an opportunity to experience their vision in unique ways. For instance, people who are short-sighted may have the advantage of getting closer to the television set and thus get a clearer view than they would have ordinarily experienced. Alternatively, those who are long-sighted may have the opportunity to sit far from the television set and for that matter get a better viewing experience.

Further, the type of television programme watched (dialogue based versus non-dialogue based) can influence the experience of people with visual impairment in watching television. Television programmes such as dramas and other messaging that involves dialogue are easy to connect with while those that are not dialogue oriented are not easy to connect with. Also, other family members may serve as social capital in connecting with television programmes, thus enhancing the experience. Meanwhile, television channels in the country do not consider the needs of people with visual impairment in developing their contents. Few of the

television stations in the country consider the needs of people with visual impairment in offering audio-descriptions of their contents and thus limit the viewing experience of people with visual impairment. Further, the Disability Law (ACT 715) is silent on media and information access in relation to people with disabilities. In this regard, television stations are swayed by the negative socio-cultural connotations of disability into neglecting the needs of people with visual impairment.

Meditation

Meditation emerged as one of the leisure activities undertaken by the respondents. Meditation pertains to solitary moments where one withdraws to himself/herself to reflect over one's life. The act of meditation during leisure has been supported in the literature (Patterson and Pegg 2009; Stumbo and Peterson 2009). For respondents, it is a moment to reflect on what might have been without visual impairment and what the future holds for them. One of the discussants had the following to say:

> … we also meditate a lot. During our leisure, we retire to our rooms and private places that are free of disturbances to be able to reflect on our lives. Sometimes you like to be alone just to be able to enjoy that inner peace. During such periods, we can think about what we're going through as visually impaired people and what we could have done without the impairment. On the overall, I believe that meditation as leisure helps us to accept our conditions and therefore mentally strengthens us. (Male, 52 years old)

The idea that meditation provides them with the opportunity to review their disabled situation in society implies that the act of meditation largely depends on their feeling of being disabled. Thus, meditation serves as a cognitive strategy through which people with visual impairment deal with mental health problems that may result from the stigma surrounding disability in Ghana. The negative socio-cultural conceptions of disability mostly result in the stigmatisation and exclusion of people with disabilities which could lead to loneliness and depression. Meditation may therefore serve as a strategy through which they cope with such depression or mental health problems. Thus, by engaging in meditation, they can review their situation and come to various conclusions that allow them to accept their impairment in relation to the exclusion and marginalisation they face in society.

Sleeping

Sleeping as a leisure activity has been reported in other studies (for example, Yankholmes and Lin 2012; Awine 2013; Adam 2014) and hence is indicative of its popularity among Ghanaians. Yankholmes and Lin (2012) opined that sleep offers a convenient excuse for Ghanaians to avoid being tagged as lazy and frivolous since leisure has such connotation in Ghana. In the context of this study, people with visual impairment indicated that sleep helps them to temporarily forget some of the problems they face in life and thus is a strategy for coping with stress as well as depression associated with the stigma of being visually impaired. This idea is typified in the voice of one of the discussants who indicated that:

> … we also sleep during our leisure. We tend to sleep not because one couldn't sleep the previous night but because it is a way to invigorate and forget about the worries of life. This helps us to stop thinking about unnecessary issues that we cannot change. Sometimes you are stressed by things going on around you and after sleeping you wake up feeling better. (Female, 44 years old)

Chatting

The respondents engaged in chatting with their relatives and friends. Chatting gave them a sense of belonging as they get the opportunity to discuss issues that are bothering them and hence makes them feel important and less lonely. One of the respondents observed that:

> Chatting is also common among us. Chatting is frequently undertaken during our leisure. We usually chat with our family members and friends. Chatting with friends and family members helps us feel important and loved since we get the assurance that they are ready to listen to us. (Female, 37 years old)

This finding is in tandem with other previous studies which have established that chatting is a popular leisure activity in Ghana (Yankholmes and Lin 2012; Awine 2013; Adam 2014). In most Ghanaian societies, chatting is one of the measures of social ties and people who value chatting even with strangers are considered sociable while those who do not are considered unfriendly. In relation to people with visual impairment, chatting may be done with some variation as compared with their non-disabled counterparts. Whereas chatting involves the ability to talk, it may be affected by other cues and gestures that may be missed by someone with visual impairment. Body language/expressions and eye contact help to enhance the act of chatting. These chatting-related cues help to enhance the chatting experience by helping the participant to physically and emotionally connect to the issue and co-participants. The inability of people with visual impairment to observe these cues may negatively impact on their chatting experience.

Reasons underlying leisure pursuits

Three main reasons were cited by the discussants as underlying their leisure engagements, including availability and access, informative and educative relevance, and the desire to relax or de-stress.

Availability and accessibility

The respondents revealed that their participation in leisure was partly based on availability and accessibility of leisure activities. They participated in leisure activities that were within their reach. The respondents opined that not all leisure activities are available or accessible to them, and hence they are compelled to undertake those activities that are available/accessible. This view was echoed by one discussant who indicated that:

> We are compelled to engage in activities that are available or accessible to us. You see, even though we're happy to undertake those activities we've mentioned; we would have wished we could undertake other activities like playing of ludo, 'oware', attending social events like wedding or naming ceremonies and funerals. Since we cannot see, engaging in some of these activities is impossible. Maybe if the government or some organisations can find a way to develop a means for us to also engage in these activities, we would have been much happy. (Female, 36 years old)

A salient issue revealed in the finding pertains to the concept of leisure freedom. The concept of leisure freedom is a contested issue among leisure scholars (Stebbins 2005). The finding suggests that leisure activities are not 'freely' chosen among people with visual impairment. Leisure freedom connotes the individual's ability to freely decide on the course of his or her leisure lifestyle including the choice of leisure space and activity as well as the timing of the occurrence. However, the existence of leisure freedom has been questioned in recent publications (Juniu and Henderson 2001; Stebbins 2005; Arneil 2009; Carr 2017). Juniu and Henderson (2001) and Poria, Reichel, and Brandt (2009) contend that the idea of freely chosen leisure cannot be empirically supported since people lack significant choice in the sense that leisure spaces are socially constructed and mostly shaped by social inequalities. Additionally, the imbalance that exists in leisure as a product of socialisation and culture defines access and rights to leisure (Stebbins 2005). Consequently, access and rights to leisure are based on social power dynamics such as gender and disability (Stebbins 2005). The idea of absolute leisure freedom is concealed from the ordinary person, including the one whose leisure freedom is curtailed, such that it is not obvious to him/her. Thus, the availability of predetermined alternatives in the form of leisure activities makes the individual oblivious of the fact that social power structures have indirectly decided on the activities he/she can undertake. Drawing from this, the idea of 'freely' chosen leisure activity as portrayed by the discussants refers to perceived freedom rather than absolute freedom in the choice of leisure. The discussants admitted that their leisure pursuits are mostly dictated by non-disabled members of their family/communities as they tend to heavily rely on them for assistance and as co-participants. Ultimately, the choice of an activity must coincide with the interest of the non-disabled person on whom the individual with impairment relies for leisure and other endeavours. Nonetheless, given the marginalised situations of the people with visual impairment coupled with their dependency on non-disabled people, they may not readily conceive the limitations imposed on their leisure freedom by their circumstances.

Information and education

Information enables an individual to make informed decisions and hence human beings are constantly in search of information. Similarly, education is a lifelong process and enlightens and improves an individual's life course. Information and

education desires accounted for one of the reasons the respondents engaged in leisure. One of the discussants indicated that:

> Most of us engage in leisure because of its information and educational values. During leisure, we listen to radio, watch television and even chat with friends and relatives. By engaging in these activities, we get informed on a lot of issues that we wouldn't have heard about. Again, we learn and for that matter educate ourselves through leisure. We get to learn about issues of the family, cultural values like proper conduct as well as political and economic matters. For instance, through leisure we get to hear and know what the government is doing to make the lives of Ghanaians better. By listening to radio or watching television, we are educated on how to keep our environment clean and the need to maintain good hygiene. (Male, 44 years old)

The information and education values of leisure have been established in the literature (Janke, Payne, and Van Puymbroeck 2008). However, the position of educational and informational attributes of leisure is a subject of academic debate. For some scholars (for example, Atherton 2009; John and Donald 2011; Caldwell et al. 2010), these attributes are associated with leisure motivation, while other scholars (for example, Mannell and Kleiber 1997; Mohsin and Ryan 2007) describe them as outcome variables and thus associated with leisure satisfaction. Despite the attempts to present these attributes as belonging to opposite dimensions of leisure engagements, a close examination reveals that they are both motivation and satisfaction elements. Once someone is motivated by the desire to get educated or informed through leisure, ultimately that person is likely to view these attributes as a measure of satisfaction after the engagement.

Relaxation (de-stress)

Relaxation has featured prominently in discussions on leisure motivations (Beard and Ragheb 1983). The desire to get away from everyday structured lifestyles has underpinned the desire to undertake leisure-related behaviour since the industrial revolution (Beard and Ragheb 1983). The discussants observed that leisure is valuable in relation to its relaxation attribute and hence helps them to de-stress. This sentiment was echoed by one discussant who said:

> … in some instances, we are motivated by the desire to relax. Leisure helps us to relax and forget about our worries. When you are so stressed, there is the need to undertake leisure to relax. So, leisure helps to take away the stress and make you cheerful despite all the problems that you may have. (Female, 33 years old)

Overall, the activities undertaken by the people with visual impairment involved in this study as well as the reasons cited for undertaking such activities suggest the role of social and cultural thoughts in shaping the leisure space of the discussants. Both concepts of disability and leisure have socio-cultural connotations and these internalised meanings emanate from social interactions on the concepts. The place of disability in every society is fluid, varies and evolves. While some western societies may have had the meaning of disability evolve through the medical to the

social perspective, African societies including Ghana still define disability within the socio-cultural fabric with emphasis on moral connotations. Accordingly, such negative socio-cultural connotations of disability dehumanise people with visual impairment. Once individuals with impairments are part of such societies, they are socialised based on the same negative ideals which leads them into internalising such negative feelings about their impairments and leisure spaces as suggested by the social constructionist theory.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn. Firstly, people with visual impairment involved in this study construct their leisure within the Ghanaian socio-cultural frame. An analysis of the nature of their constructed leisure pursuits suggests that the negative socio-cultural connotations of disability defined the leisure of people with visual impairment. Additionally, traditional Ghanaian connotation of leisure, including views on who qualifies to undertake leisure and what type of leisure the person can undertake, further shaped the leisure pursuits of the respondents.

Secondly, leisure was used as a tool for resistance to some of the negative socio-cultural tags on visual impairment. Resistance was demonstrated by the people with visual impairment through the act of watching television. The act of watching is generally conceived to be undertaken by people who have eyesight and hence people with visual impairment are not expected to watch television. To demonstrate to society that they deserve more than pity, the people with visual impairment engaged in watching television. Additionally, the study concludes that the people with visual impairment involved in this study enjoyed limited leisure freedom. The leisure activities undertaken by the people with visual impairment were largely dictated by non-disabled relatives and friends. Accordingly, the idea of 'freely' chosen leisure activities is therefore not absolute but rather perceived. Indeed, reasons such as inaccessibility and availability as cited by the people with visual impairment suggest the existence of limited leisure freedom. Further, leisure served as a form of coping strategy for the people with visual impairment involved in this study. Activities like meditation and sleeping were pursued to serve as a buffer for potential psychological/mental stress associated with being disabled citizens. The negative socio-cultural meaning of disability and the associated marginalisation suffered by the people with visual impairment imposes a great psychological burden on them. The feeling of loneliness and dejection associated with being disabled caused some respondents to resort to meditation and sleeping as a cognitive coping strategy.

Lastly, the findings of this article highlight an important dimension of the rights of persons with disabilities as conveyed in the CRPD. Research of this nature draws the attention of governments and related organisations to an important dimension of a neglected segment of society which borders on both their psycho-social

well-being and human rights. Article 30 of the CRPD proclaims the right of people with disabilities to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport on an equal basis with non-disabled people. Nonetheless, the issue of leisure participation among people with visual impairment (people with disabilities in general) has rarely been featured as a human rights problem. In most developing countries, societal concentration has been on non-disabled people, with few structural policies aimed at improving the lives of people with disabilities. This study therefore brings to the fore the nuances of leisure pursuits among a segment of the disabled citizenry and the need for intervention to make leisure a right for them.

Implications of the study

First, the act of watching television suggests that an improvement in assistive technologies and services such as audio-descriptions of television programmes (especially those that are not dialogue oriented) can enhance the viewing experience of people with visual impairment. Closely related to this, television content can also be produced in dialogue format to enhance the viewing experience of people with visual impairment. People with visual impairment can more easily connect with dialogue-oriented television programmes than those programmes that are not. Admittedly, it may be difficult to use dialogue in all television programmes. However, some contents can be altered and made in dialogue form so that people with visual impairment can easily connect with television programmes.

Further, the finding relating to the act of watching television as a form of resistance implies that socio-cultural stereotypes towards people with disabilities must be addressed. In this regard, the Ghana Education Service can revise its curriculum in a subject like social studies in basic and senior high schools to include topics on disability and social inclusion to educate the younger generation on issues of disability. Additionally, the National Commission for Civic Education together with the National Council for Persons with Disability as well as the Ministry of Gender and Social Protection should embark on public education on issues of disability and inclusion through the media and other public fora. Such communication behavioural change messages may ultimately enhance the perceptions of non-disabled people towards people with visual impairment and disability. Such initiatives may equally energise organisations and leisure service providers to take initiatives to make leisure spaces and services accessible to people with visual impairment.

Moreover, the findings relating to limited leisure freedom as reflected in the reasons underlying the leisure pursuits have implications for both the Disability Law (ACT 715) and society. The definition of access in the Disability Law (ACT 715) is vague (as it centres mainly on physical access) and must be broadened to include other dimensions of accessibility. McGrath et al. (2009) intimate that government policy on inclusion of people with access needs has overtly centred on physical access without acknowledging other dimensions of access as being key to inclusion. Broadening of the law to ensure that access is defined beyond just

physical access to embrace access to information will compel television channels and other media houses to include audio descriptions of some of the programmes or movies (especially those that do not involve dialogue).

Relatedly, the Disability Law (ACT 715) must be broadened to capture leisure as a human right for people with disabilities as contained in Article 30 of the CRPD. Such initiative will garner awareness and support of civil society and human rights organisations to advocate and insist on the right of people with disabilities to leisure. Further, broadening the definition of access in the law will encourage the printing of some written materials in braille to enable reading among people with visual impairment. Nonetheless, even if braille materials are currently made available, a significant proportion of people with visual impairment in Ghana lack the skills and ability to use them since most of them have not been trained in its use. Therefore, the requisite infrastructure, human resources and equipment (such as magnifiers) should be made available by the government and philanthropic organisations to ensure that people with visual impairment can read braille materials if they are made available. Also, the finding relating to accessibility as an underlying reason for engaging in the set of leisure activities revealed in this study implies that there is a need to incorporate the concept of accessibility in designing and programming of modern technological devices (such as computers, play stations and smartphones). Computers and other leisure-oriented electronic devices should be programmed to provide audio directives to allow people with visual impairment to use them in similar fashion as non-disabled people. Such audio directives can guide people with visual impairment to play computer games, read on the computer and even type on the computer as well as other entertainment electronic devices and hence enhance their leisure experiences.

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