

# Traumatic experiences, mental health, and coping in blind and visually impaired individuals - A population study

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## Visual impairment in Europe

Europe (2010) : 40.3 million visual impaired  
(Pascolini & Mariotti, 2012)

- 8.5 million blind
- 32.0 million moderate to severe visual impairment (VI)

Increasing in all European countries (WHO, 2014)

- aging population
- greater frequency of systemic diseases
- more immigration from war-torn countries

## Traumatic events

May result in an increased vulnerability to risks and hazards for some types of traumatic events

- directly related
- indirectly related (social, economic, and political)
- related to the event that caused the vision loss

(Leegood et al., 2002; Haskell & Randall, 2009; Kitelsaa et al., 2015; Stevelink, Malcom, & Fear, 2015)

## Qualitative study (EUNAD I)

- May be other types and frequencies of traumatic events
- Fear of daily accidents is more dominating than fear of disasters
- Re-experiences of traumatic events through available sense modalities
- Avoidance and social withdrawal may foster social isolation
- Shame for labeling and non-coping
- Need for self-reliance and control
- Need for information and predictability

# AIMS

- Types of traumatic events
- Prevalence of PTSD and depression
- Traumatic events resulting in PTSD
- Coping with potential threats
- Coping with stress reactions
- Preparedness and self efficacy
- Withdrawal, loneliness, social support

# Procedure

- Collaboration with the Norwegian Association for Visually Impaired and Blind
  - Workshop in June 2016
  - Ensure user-participation
  - Specifics of visual impairment
  - Contribution and input to interview guide
  - Access to member lists
  
- Data collection company (IPSOS Norway)
  - Continuous dialogue

# Methods

## Participants

- Members of *the Norwegian Association for Visually Impaired and Blind*
- N= 800

## Measurements

- Visual impairment, history and current vision
- Function in work and daily life
- Devices: access, competence and use
- Life Event Checklist (LEC-5)
- Posttraumatic Stress Check List (PCL-5)
- Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)
- General Self Efficacy Scale (GSE)
- Psychosocial support inventory
- Loneliness scale



# Obstacles in the way

- Datacollection startup in January 2017
- Stopped mid-February
- Lessons learned
  - Collectivity – a we
  - Reactions from members; Whats in it for us? How can they?
  - New anchoring
- New start mid April
- How we got to the finish..

## Psychological follow-up

- Consultation with psychologist
- >50 participants
- Interpretation
  - Access to help seeking
  - Marginalization
  - Loneliness
  - Exclusion
  - Uncovered needs

## Sample distribution

Age group	n	%
18 -34	146	21.1
35 – 49	173	25.0
50 – 64	183	26.4
65 –	191	27.6
Total	693	100

## Descriptives

32 % part or full-time work

54 % retired or on disability pension (22 % retired)

43 % higher education (11 % masters degree or equivalent)

24 % totally blind

40 % severely vision impaired

20 % other severe disabilities

15 % less severe disabilities

## Traumatic exposure to self (n=632)

Exposures	Percent
Natural disaster	10 %
Fire, explosion	11 %
Transportation accidents	22 %
Serious accident	18 %
Violence, physical abuse	16 %
Sexual assault	10 %
Unwanted or unpleasant sexual experience	12 %
Life-threatening disease	24 %
Disease or injury that has caused vision loss	59 %
Other very distressing event	18 %

## Worst event

1. Disease or injury that has caused vision loss
2. Other very distressing event
3. Life-threatening disease
4. Sudden violent death
5. Sexual assault
6. Transportation accidents

## Bullying

Life time prevalence	41%
Last 6 months	8%

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Life time bullying	
Related to vision loss	54%
Partly related to vision loss	12%

## Loneliness

Lack of companionship	20 %
Feeling left out	11 %
Isolated from others	13 %



## Mental health

Sleeping difficulties

27 %

Feeling depressed or sad most  
days during the last two years

19 %

## A very preliminary summary...

Datacollection finished in these days

Reduced mental health prevalent in blind and visual impaired individuals

### Importance of

- Vision loss
- How it happened
- Exposure to traumatic events
- Social support, work participation and loneliness
- Bullying
- Access, competence and use of devices

**The only  
thing worse  
than being  
blind is  
having  
sight but  
no vision**

**Helen Keller**



Thank you!