

College Graduates with Visual Impairments: Seeking and Finding Employment

What Were We Trying to Learn?

Relatively little data exists on the job-search process and employment outcomes of college-educated youth with BVI. This project attempted to provide insight into the employment experiences of this population by looking at whether working with a career mentor could improve the job-search process and/or employment outcomes for youth with BVI.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

Young people with BVI in our study faced a tough job market. All the youth reported spending lots of time seeking jobs and submitting a large number of job applications, but they participated in relatively few job interviews.

Young people with BVI reported challenges that had to be overcome during their job search, such as a competitive job market with few available jobs, negative employer attitudes toward individuals with BVI as employees, lack of accommodations or assistive technology, and transportation barriers. When asked about the most challenging parts of their job search, participants mentioned securing interviews and overcoming stereotypes by proving themselves to be competent employees.

On a bright note, the young people who did secure employment reported being generally satisfied with their jobs. The students in our study worked in a variety of fields, often in professional or skilled positions that were full-time, paid competitive salaries, and came with benefits. The majority of employed students in our study did not work in a blindness-related field, which is a common career choice for youth with BVI.

Although having a career mentor was not found to significantly increase the odds of finding a job, the young people with mentors in our study seemed to have a more efficient job-search experience. Youth with BVI who were paired with mentors:

- Spent less time and effort on their job search and submitted fewer job applications while maintaining similar employment rates as young people in the comparison group.
- Were more likely to find jobs by searching on their own, rather than using employment agencies or recruiters.
- Demonstrated increased assertiveness in their job search.
- Were still in contact with their mentor one year after completing the program, indicating the long-term value these young people found in working with a career mentor. This finding was reported by more than half of the youth with mentors.

In comparison, the students without mentors reported spending substantially more time on career preparation and job-seeking activities.

Research Takeaway

The employment landscape for college graduates with blindness or visual impairments (BVI) is full of difficulties, as they face challenges unique to individuals with BVI. Matching young people with BVI with mentors who also have BVI and who can provide career coaching and advice may help improve employment outcomes for this youth population.

How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

- **Proactively plan for the challenges young people with BVI may encounter during their job search.** In order to successfully find a career, youth with BVI may require a more intensive job search than their sighted peers. Youth, parents, mentors, and service providers should work proactively to address common barriers to employment. Young people should be prepared to put in significant time and effort before obtaining a job and should not become discouraged if the job search lasts more than a year, especially during challenging economic times. As the results of our study indicate, for those who successfully find jobs, a satisfying, financially stable career is within reach.
- **Consider connecting young people with BVI with a mentor in their desired career field.** Experienced mentors can provide guidance that will potentially help young people conduct a more efficient job search. Mentors can instruct their mentees on how and where to seek employment and how to prepare for applying, perhaps streamlining the job search process for young people with BVI and encouraging them to be more independent in their quest for employment. Mentees in our study said they valued the contributions and support provided by their mentors and said they benefitted from working with an experienced person from their career field.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

College students with BVI who were close to graduation were randomly assigned to intervention and comparison groups. Youth in the intervention group (26 total) were assigned a mentor who was legally blind and working in the youth's career field of interest; youth in the comparison group (25 total) received standard career planning resources but no mentor. The participating young people either worked with their mentor or conducted their job search without a mentor for one year. All participants completed surveys at multiple times throughout the year, which included providing information about their job-search experience.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

Antonelli, K., Steverson, A., & O'Mally, J. (2018). College graduates with visual impairment: A report on seeking and finding employment. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.

For more information about this project, including resources to start your own mentoring program, visit the project overview page: [An Employment Mentoring Project for College Students who are Blind](#).

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