

Employment Outcomes and Job Quality of Vocational Rehabilitation Consumers With Deaf-Blindness

What Were We Trying to Learn?

To date, no research exists on the employment outcomes of vocational rehabilitation (VR) consumers who are deaf-blind. Our study is the first to look at both the factors that make it more likely that deaf-blind VR consumers will find jobs and the factors that are linked to higher quality jobs for these individuals. To determine job quality, we considered whether the job provided medical insurance and a living wage as well as how the pay compared to median hourly wages in the individual's state.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

Our study focused on both employment outcomes and job quality among individuals who are deaf-blind. We looked at individual factors (such as age or gender) and VR-related factors (such as the VR services a person received and the type of VR agency in which they were served).

Among the people in our study's sample, more than half had a job at the time their VR case was closed. About a quarter of these individuals (26.0%) received medical insurance through their jobs. On average, those with jobs earned 96% of the living wage in their state.

Research Takeaway

For many people who are deaf-blind, finding a high-quality job is a challenge. We found a number of factors that are linked to better employment outcomes for these individuals.

Employment outcomes:

We found a number of factors that were positively linked to finding employment:

- Higher levels of education
- Self as the primary source of support at the time the individual applied to VR
- Being competitively employed at the time the individual applied to VR (if the person did not have a cognitive disability)
- Getting an educational degree or certificate while receiving VR services
- Receiving job-placement assistance from VR
- Receiving job-search assistance from VR
- Receiving on-the-job supports – short term from VR
- Receiving on-the-job supports – supported employment from VR
- Receiving counseling and guidance from VR

Three factors were associated with lower odds of finding a job:

- Female gender
- Physical disability in addition to being deaf-blind
- Receiving VR services from a combined agency that serves people of all disability types (as compared to a separate agency that serves only those with blindness or visual impairment or a general agency that serves people with all disabilities other than blindness or visual impairment)

Job Quality:

Similarly, several factors in our study were linked to higher job quality:

- Higher levels of education
- Older age
- Self as the primary source of support at the time the individual applied to VR

Five factors were found to be related to lower job quality:

- Female gender
- Receiving Supplemental Security Income benefits
- Receiving Social Security Disability Insurance benefits
- Receiving on-the-job supports – short term from VR
- Receiving on-the-job supports – supported employment from VR

How Can I Incorporate These Findings into Practice?

- **Encourage consumers to pursue further education.** Receiving a degree or certificate while a VR consumer significantly improved the odds of employment. Higher levels of education were linked with higher quality jobs. Encourage all the consumers you work with to advance their educations. Deaf-blind consumers may need targeted assistance to connect with the disability support services at their educational institution and get the assistive technology they need. Although deaf-blind consumers may take a significant amount of time to complete a degree or certificate, this investment is worthwhile.
- **Know the risk factors for poor employment outcomes.** Women who are deaf-blind and deaf-blind people with physical disabilities are more likely to struggle to find high-quality jobs. These individuals may need extra help to reach their employment goals. Encourage these consumers to not give up on work as an option and to set ambitious career goals. Connecting these consumers with deaf-blind individuals who are currently employed and who can serve as role models provides added encouragement and support.
- **Provide more of the services that are linked to positive employment outcomes.** Job-related services, such as job-placement assistance and job-search assistance, were associated in our study with higher odds of finding employment. The more you provide these services to your consumers, they more likely you are to facilitate positive employment outcomes for them.
- **Make sure deaf-blind consumers receive counseling and guidance.** VR counseling and guidance was linked in our study to higher odds of finding employment. This may reflect the importance of communicating with deaf-blind consumers using their preferred mode of communication. Deaf-blind consumers who are receiving disability benefits can also benefit from counseling and guidance. Be sure to talk to these individuals about work incentives and encourage them to earn at their full potential.
- **Separate VR agencies that specifically serve blind consumers are particularly effective.** Consumers in our study were nearly twice as likely to find employment if they received services from a blind agency or a general agency. Policymakers should consider these outcomes when making decisions about VR agency structure.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

We used data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration Case Service Report (RSA-911) database. Our sample included 1,382 deaf-blind VR consumers whose cases were closed during fiscal years 2013, 2014, or 2015. All members of the sample were between ages 18 and 67.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

McDonnall, M. C., & Cmar, J. (2018). Employment outcomes and job quality of vocational rehabilitation consumers with deaf-blindness. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/0034355218769461

For more information about this project, visit the project overview page: Exploration of Secondary Data to Increase our Knowledge About Subpopulations of Individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired and WIOA Impacts. For additional deaf-blindness resources, visit our products page.

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