

Predictors of Employer Attitudes Toward Blind Employees, Revisited

What Were We Trying to Learn?

Employer attitudes are considered one of the major barriers to employment for individuals with BVI, but little is known about the specific factors that influence employers' attitudes towards people who are BVI. This study sought to shed light on the relationships between employer attitudes, employer knowledge of how individuals with BVI function on the job, employer relationships with VR agencies, and employment decisions.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

Employer attitudes towards individuals with BVI as employees were found to be significantly impacted by five main factors:

- **Past hiring decisions:** Having hired an individual with BVI in the past was the strongest predictor of current employer attitudes.
- **Employer knowledge:** Another important predictor of employer attitudes was employer knowledge about how individuals with BVI accomplish workplace tasks.
- **Belief in knowledge:** Employer attitudes were also associated with the employer's general confidence that there is a way for an individual with BVI to perform a given workplace task (even without specific knowledge of exactly how a task could be accomplished).
- **Relationship with a VR agency:** Nearly 90% of employers who reported an ongoing relationship with VR that included talking specifically about BVI indicated that they had hired an individual with BVI in the past.
- **Being female:** Women in hiring positions had significantly more positive attitudes toward individuals with BVI as employees.

Research Takeaway

Employer attitudes can be one of the most significant barriers to employment for individuals with blindness and visual impairment (BVI). This study took a fresh look at the factors that influence employer attitudes by surveying hiring managers from across the country. Results demonstrated the importance of building and maintaining relationships between Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies and employers and ensuring employers know that accommodations exist that allow individuals with BVI to be effective on the job.

Interestingly, in contrast to findings from another study, communication with VR agencies was not found to have a direct connection to employer attitudes. Instead, communication had an indirect relationship with employer attitudes: Communication with VR agencies made employers more likely to hire an individual with BVI, and having hired someone with BVI made the hiring manager more likely to have a positive attitude toward individuals with BVI as employees.

How Can I Incorporate These Findings into Practice?

- **Specific knowledge among employers about on-the-job accommodations for individuals with BVI is important, but basic knowledge that effective accommodations exist is also important.** Employers knew very little about on-the-job accommodations, with over 80% unable to name a single way that individuals with BVI complete workplace tasks. Both employer knowledge about specific accommodations and general knowledge that accommodations are available were

about specific accommodations and general knowledge that accommodations are available were associated with more positive employer attitudes towards individuals with BVI as employees. In their communications with employers, VR professionals should realize that detailed descriptions of workplace accommodations may not be as important as building a relationship with an employer and reassuring them that accommodations are available and VR will be there to provide ongoing support.

- **Communication between VR agencies and employers remains essential.** Although communication with a VR agency was not found to be directly associated with employer attitudes, employers who had not communicated with a VR agency rarely reported having hired an individual with BVI. Communication is strongly associated with hiring decisions, and hiring decisions in turn predict employer attitudes. Therefore, VR professionals should interact with employers as much as possible and seek to develop trusting, ongoing relationships. When VR agencies experience employee turnover, they should take particular care to safeguard and sustain employer relationships by providing as much consistency as possible.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

Online surveys from 379 hiring managers from across the nation were analyzed to identify predictors of employer attitudes towards individuals with BVI as employees.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

McDonnall, M. C., & Crudden, A. (2018). Predictors of employer attitudes toward blind employees, revisited. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*.

For more information about this project, including links to a practice guide, online short courses, and other publications, visit the project overview page: [Effectiveness of VR Agency-Employer Interaction Practices](#).

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