

**THE 1994 SURVEY OF DIRECT
LABOR WORKERS WHO ARE
BLIND AND EMPLOYED BY
NIB AFFILIATED INDUSTRIES FOR THE BLIND**

**Prepared by the
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
on Blindness and Low Vision
at Mississippi State University
in Cooperation with the
American Foundation for the Blind**

By

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the 24 National Industries for the Blind (NIB) affiliates which participated in this study on a voluntary basis. We are particularly grateful to the direct labor workers who voluntarily agreed to respond to our questions and to offer suggestions for improving work opportunities within the NIB system of affiliated agencies. Finally, we would like to express our sincere thanks to Corinne Kirchner, Ph.D., Director of Social Research, at the American Foundation for the Blind and to Mr. Robert K. Hanye, Director of Rehabilitation Services for NIB, for their comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this document.

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October, 1994

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Development of this document was supported by National Industries for the Blind, 524 Hamburg Turnpike, Wayne, New Jersey 07472. Opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the granting agency.

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BACKGROUND

At the request of National Industries for the Blind (NIB), the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (RRTC) at Mississippi State University conducted a survey of direct labor workers who are blind and employed in NIB affiliates. The survey is a follow-up to surveys conducted by NIB staff with Polaris Research Associates, Inc. in 1983 and 1987. The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) provided professional consultation and assistance to the RRTC in revising the survey protocol, conducting data analysis, and developing the final report.

Report results can be used by NIB and other agencies, both private and government, to determine some of the employment needs and concerns of persons who are blind and employed in NIB affiliates. This information may be useful in developing or modifying service delivery policies and systems which address the problems and issues currently identified by direct labor workers who are blind. It is the hope and expectation of all persons concerned with this project that the results will lead to increased job satisfaction, productivity, upward mobility, and opportunities for direct labor workers who are blind/visually impaired, or multi-disabled.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of the survey was to enhance the understanding of employment issues expressed by direct labor workers employed by NIB affiliates and to evaluate the satisfaction levels, both with work and the work environment, of these workers. In addition to evaluating the satisfaction levels and perceptions of the employment

setting, the researchers were interested in understanding more about the demographics of the sample, providing a voice for employees to express their opinions regarding public policy issues, and making recommendations for improving employment opportunities for all direct labor workers. The survey results enable comparisons to 1983 and 1987 data.

METHODOLOGY

Interview Protocol Development

Researchers at the RRTC, along with representatives from AFB and NIB, revised, added, and deleted items as appropriate from the 1987 NIB questionnaire. The initial 1983 questionnaire was developed by NIB staff with data analysis completed by Polaris Research Associates, Inc. In 1987, Polaris staff assisted NIB staff in design and development of the questionnaire and the data analysis. The 1994 revisions were made to promote clarity, incorporate questions regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), to include questions related to pre-affiliate employment earnings, current earnings, etc., and to make data more readily interpretable. The questionnaire was field-tested by RRTC staff to ensure reliability and consistency in administration. Prior to data collection, the interview protocol and revised questionnaire were submitted to, and subsequently approved by, the Mississippi State University (MSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Interview Site Selection

Twenty-four NIB affiliates nationwide were chosen for participation in this project from a master list of affiliates obtained from NIB. To insure appropriate representation in the survey, each affiliate was categorized by structure (i.e., private non-profit or state government administration), wage system (i.e., minimum wage or above only v. minimum wage exempt), geographic location

(six agencies from each of the four General Council of Workshops for the Blind regions), and size (i.e., small, medium, large). Affiliates were then chosen based on a representative sampling of workers by the size of the affiliate (those with over 100 direct labor workers were categorized as large; 50 to 99 direct labor workers were medium; and less than 50 direct labor workers were small) and by region. Within each region, at least one government owned/operated affiliate and one affiliate which paid below minimum wage were included.

Within the above constraints, site selection was sometimes made on an "opportunity" basis necessitated by budget constraints. For example, small affiliates near major airports were non-randomly chosen so multiple sites could be visited, thereby minimizing air travel expenses. Also, a medium-sized facility may have been selected because of its location near a major airport. Affiliates in remote areas of the country may be under-represented due to this selection process. Each affiliate was notified by mail that the work site had been selected for survey inclusion and that data collection dates would be scheduled at a later date.

A total of 500 interviews were planned. At large affiliates, 40 workers were surveyed; at medium-sized affiliates, 25 workers were surveyed; and at small affiliates, 10 workers were surveyed. The survey process included 6 large affiliates, 5 medium affiliates, and 13 small affiliates. Of the affiliates selected, one small, one medium, and two large sites were unable or unwilling, for various reasons, to participate in the project. Alternate sites, matched as closely as possible for all selection criteria, were contacted and voluntarily agreed to participate.

Employee Selection

In order to select workers for this survey, lists of current employees at each site were obtained from NIB, or from affiliate management. These lists of workers were typically alphabetical, but on occasion, were by seniority of the worker. The sampling plan determined the number of workers to be surveyed at each facility. The total number of workers listed on the employee roster was divided by the number to be

surveyed. The resulting figure determined the interval for inclusion in the survey. All workers who participated in the survey were legally blind and engaged in direct labor, according to the employee rosters.

When workers selected were not available for the survey, (due to illness, refusal to participate, lay offs, etc.) researchers continued through the list using the same selection process. In cases where the researcher collected data at a facility for more than one day, persons absent were interviewed, if available, the following day. In some smaller affiliates, every direct labor worker was included in the sample; in other affiliates, many persons were found to be laid off, resulting in the inclusion of all direct labor workers available. A small number of workers selected were not able to participate in the survey because they were employed in vital positions and interruption of their duties would negatively affect production deadlines.

Employees were not interviewed in any particular order, although efforts were made to cause as little disruption as possible in the routine activities of each workplace. It should be noted that this is a survey of workers currently employed and as such, reflects only the opinions and concerns of those workers. Persons currently laid off may or may not have concerns and opinions that vary significantly from this population.

Interview Process

One of three RRTC professional staff conducted individual interviews of each direct labor worker participating in this project, which resulted in 502 usable surveys. Researchers did not provide advance notification to the affiliate staff regarding which employees would be included in the survey process. Each participant was interviewed in a private setting to insure confidentiality. The attached Interview protocol, which stipulated the voluntary nature and confidentiality of the information collected, was read and explained to each participant.

When interpreters were needed, either because English was not the primary language or due to the need for manual communication, affiliate management provided an interpreter. In all cases, interpreters were affiliate staff.

Workers who were developmentally disabled and/or multi-disabled were included in the survey. In some cases, these workers were unable to respond to all of the

questions or were uncertain of some answers to interview questions. For example, some workers expressed difficulty remembering salary information precisely. Additionally, some workers either declined, or were unable to provide some requested information. No systematic comparisons of records were used to confirm the data reported, and names of participants were not recorded.

Interviews typically lasted 30 to 35 minutes; however, some lasted as long as one hour, while others were much shorter. Generally, researchers allowed workers to comment at length as long as the worker remained focused on the issues addressed in the survey. Also, when using interpreters, the length of time needed to conduct the interview increased.

Sample Characteristics v. Population Characteristics

At the end of FY 1993, NIB affiliates employed a total of 5,213 direct labor workers who were legally blind. This survey includes a sample of 502 workers, which represents almost 10% of the total NIB direct labor population. Of those surveyed, 44% were employed in large affiliates, 26% in medium affiliates, and 30% in small affiliates. This compares to the total NIB direct labor population (based on NIB FY 1993 data) where 48% of the workers were employed in large affiliates, 26% at medium affiliates, and 26% at small affiliates.

Of the persons included in the survey, 23% (n=113) were from Region 1 (Northeast), 31% (n=158) were from Region 2 (Southeast), 24% (n=119) were from Region 3 (Midwest), and 22% (n=112) were from Region 4 (West). The majority (81%) of affiliates included in the survey were administered by private sector entities and paid direct labor workers at or above minimum wage (64%).

LIMITATIONS

1. The information contained in this report is based on comments of employees at work on data collection dates. Workers laid off or absent may or may not have different concerns and responses from workers who were present. When the data collection period spanned more than one day, workers selected for the survey absent on the first day were included the subsequent day, if available.

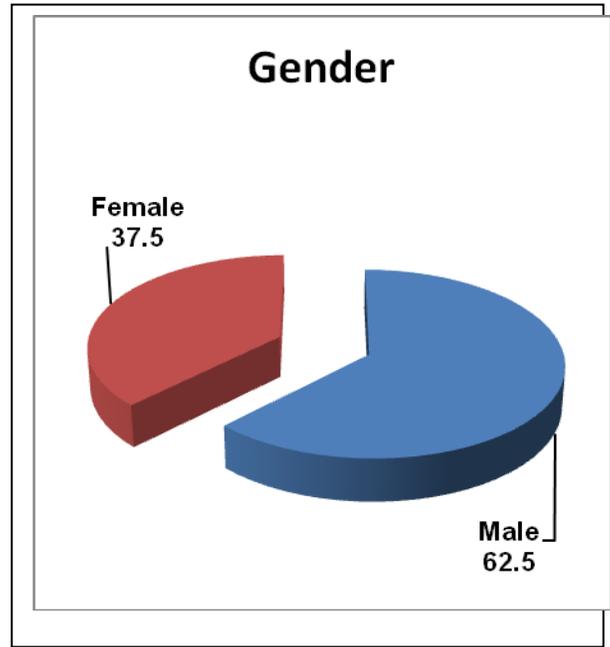
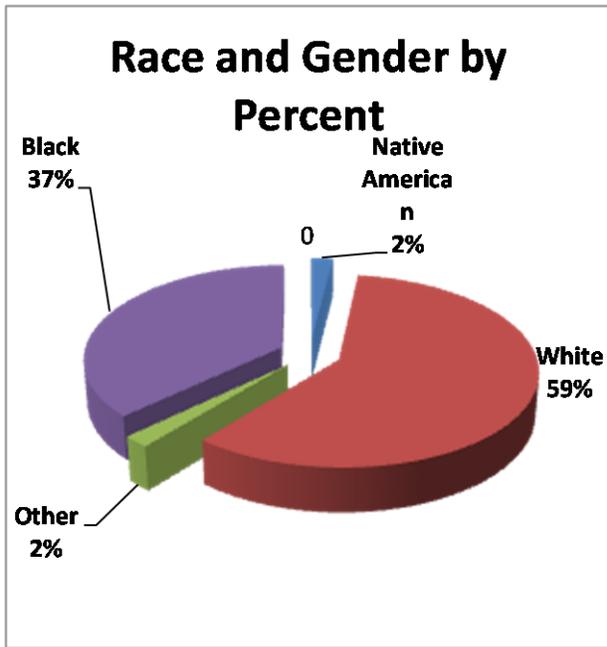
2. The sample of direct labor workers surveyed represents a stratified systematic sample of the population of direct labor workers, within affiliates selected by the a priori inclusion criteria and constrained by time and budget limitations. Application of truly random sampling of workers nationwide was not possible due to the pragmatic constraints under which the study was conducted. It is believed, however, that the sampling procedures employed were successful in achieving a representative sample of workers, nationwide. It is possible that travel constraints may have resulted in an under-representation of affiliates located in remote areas. Consequently, the reader should be mindful of the above constraints and exercise caution when generalizing the results beyond the present sample of workers.

3. Some information included in this report is based on the workers' ability to recall information (i.e., age at onset of vision loss, hourly wage) and is subject to errors associated with self-reports.

DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Characteristics

As a group, the majority of workers were white (59%), male (63%), unmarried (68%), and financially responsible for supporting themselves only (57%). (Figure 1, p.8) The mean age of the group was 44 years, with a range of 18 to 89 years. (Figure 2, p.8) Most workers belonging to non-white groups were black (37%). Only 5% (n=23) of the workers were of Hispanic origin. The 68% of



23 or 5% indicated
Hispanic Origin

Figure 1

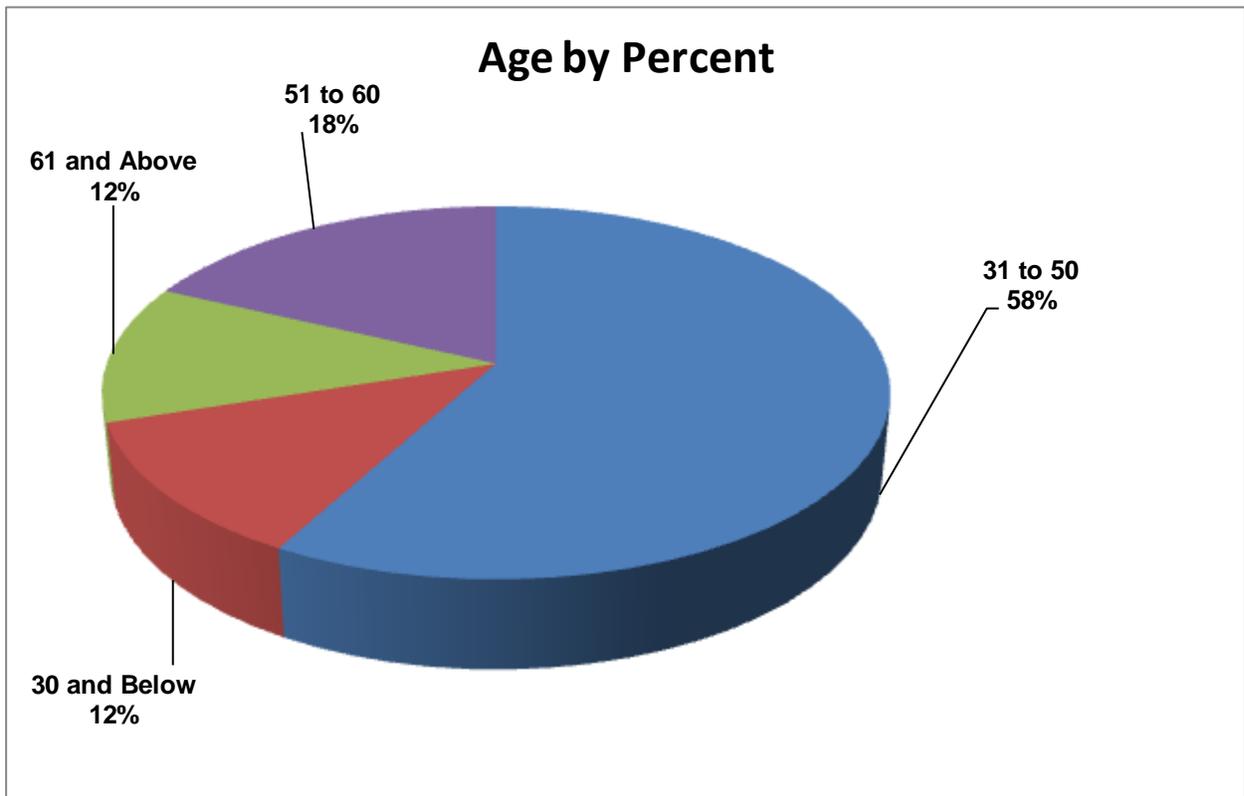


Figure 2

unmarried persons included 43% who had never been married, 4% who were separated, 16% who were divorced, and 5% who were widowed. (Figure 3, p.10)

Approximately one-third of the workers were currently living with a spouse. One in three (32%) of those surveyed had children in the home, and 30% had some other person in the home, typically a parent or parents. Approximately 69% of the workers lived alone. There was no significant difference between males or females, or between minority and non-minority groups regarding the likelihood of living alone. (Figure 4, p.10)

Education

The mean level of completed education of the workers was about the tenth grade; however, this included those who received no education at all (1%, n=5), and those with college degrees (3%, n=16). Just over 63% of the direct labor workers were high school graduates. (Figure 5, p.11) The majority (85%) of these graduates had a high school diploma or equivalency degree, with only 15% stating that they had certificates, which may reflect participation in special education classes. Educational experiences were predominantly at public schools (56%) with about one in five (21%) of those surveyed attending Schools for the Blind exclusively. Only 3% of the workers had attended a private school only, and 15% attended a combination of a school for the blind and a public school.

Age at Onset and Level of Vision

About half (52%) of the workers have been blind since birth, with the other half being adventitiously blind. Of those surveyed, 3 of 4 workers (75%) were blind before reaching 21 years of age,

Marital Status by Gender

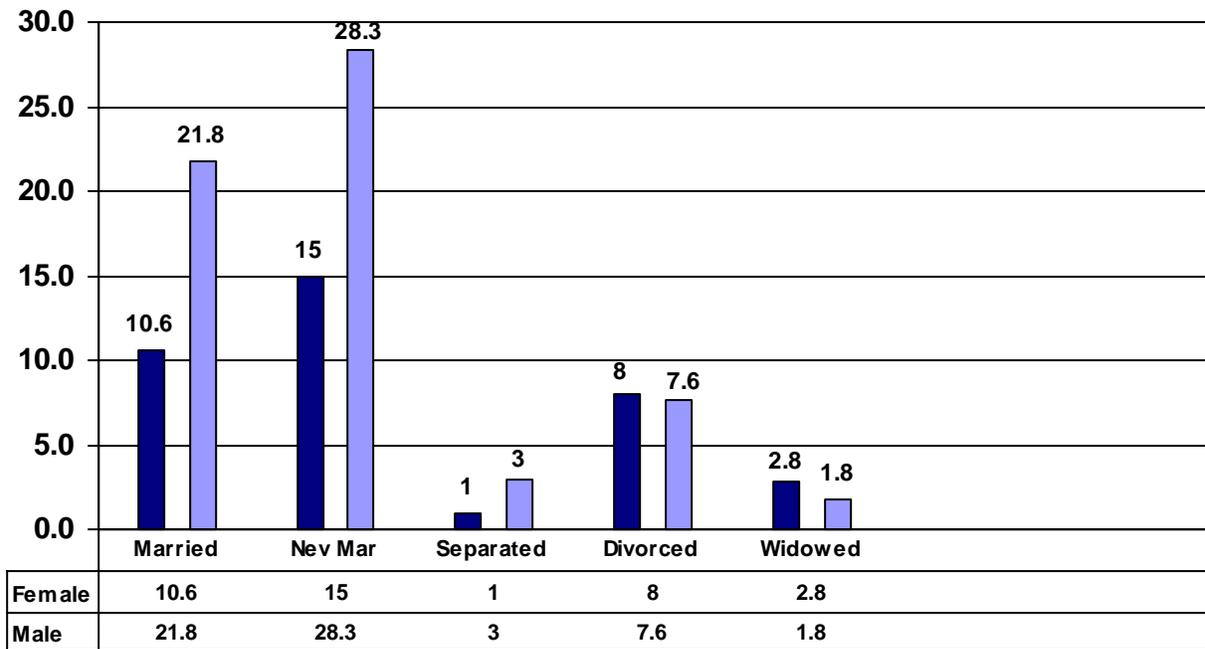


Figure 3

Living Arrangement by Gender

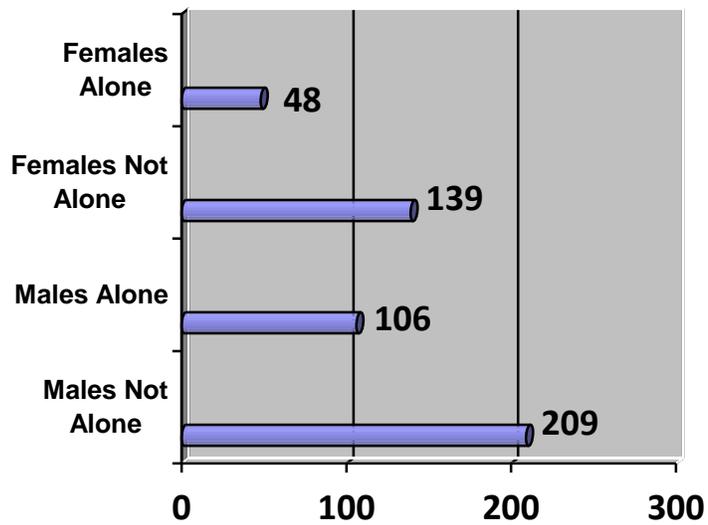


Figure 4

Male-Female ratio unaffected
By living arrangement

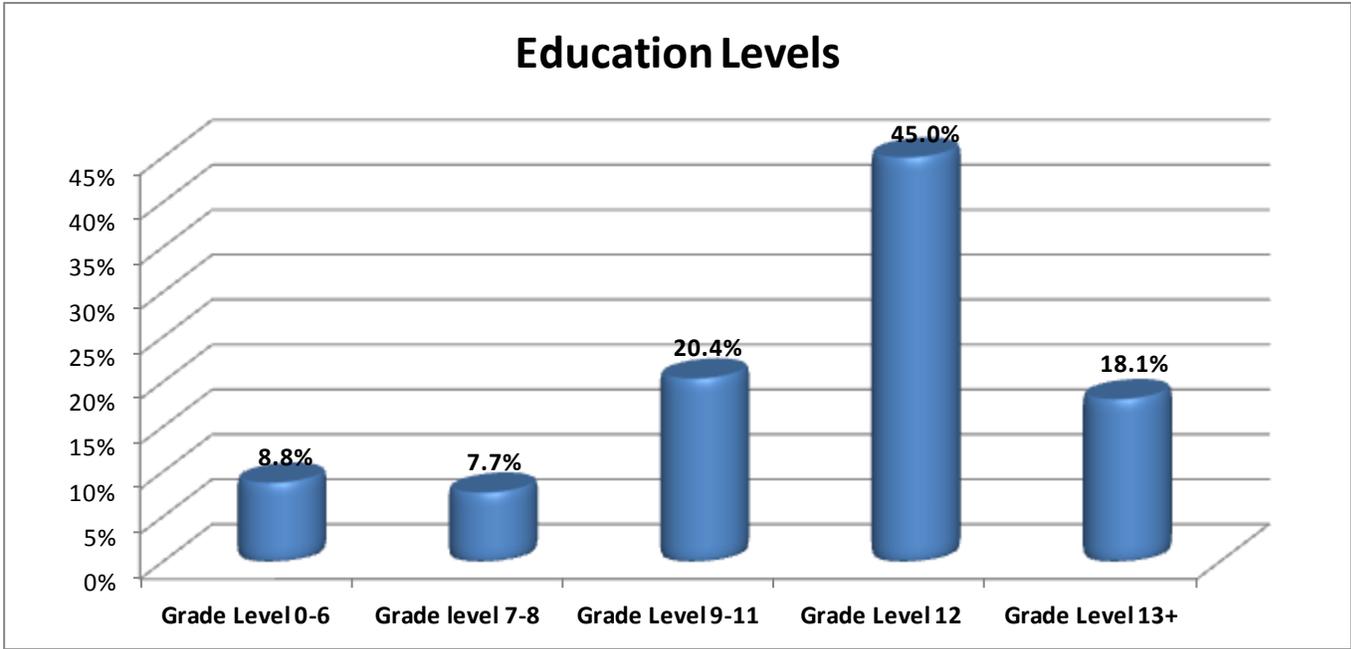


Figure 5

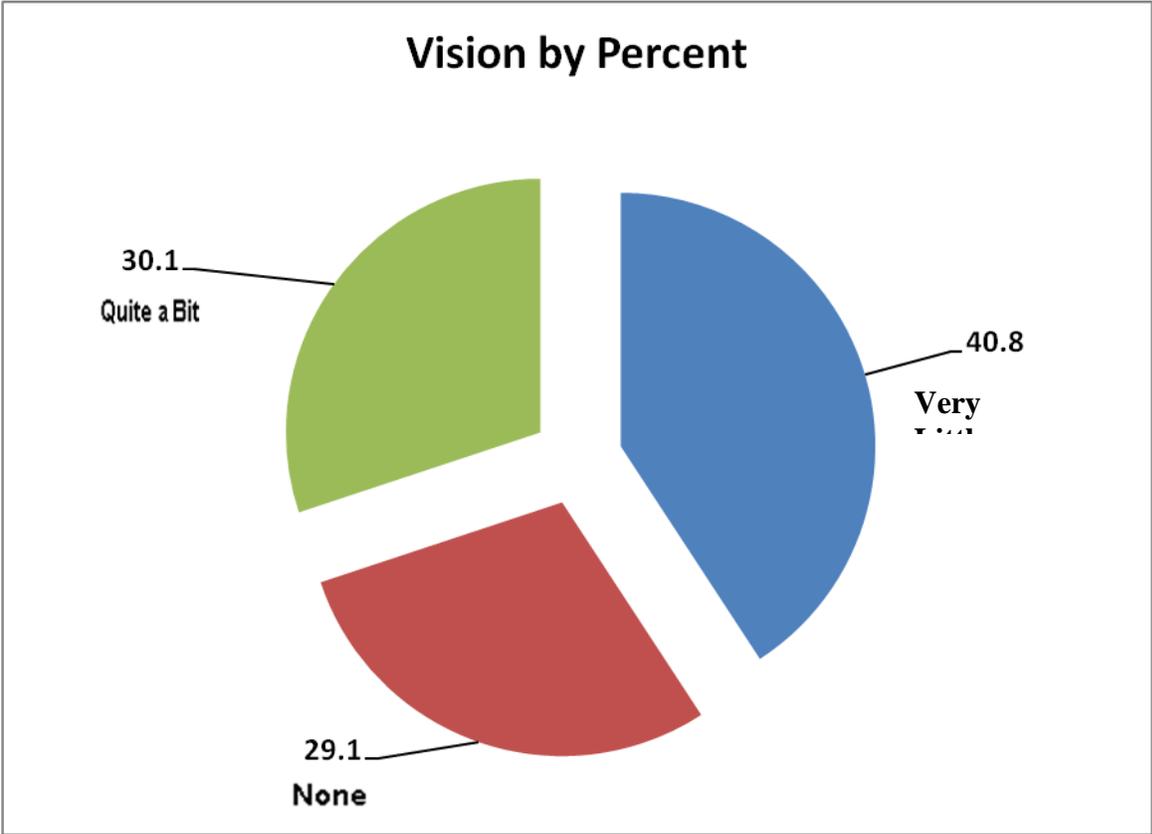


Figure 6

while over half (56%) were blind before 6 years of age. Fifteen percent of the workers became legally blind at, or above, age 30. When describing their own usable vision, 30% of workers said they had "quite a bit," 41% said they had "very little," and 29% said they had "no usable vision." (Figure 6, p.11)

Reading Medium

Although 28% of the workers stated that they could read Grade II Braille, only 16% stated that Braille was their preferred method of reading. The most commonly preferred reading methods were tape cassette/talking books (33%) and large print (32%). The 16% of persons who preferred Braille are probably able to use cassette tapes as well. There was a strong relationship between the ability to use Braille and the age of onset of blindness; those persons who lost their vision at an early age were more likely to read Grade II Braille.

Transportation

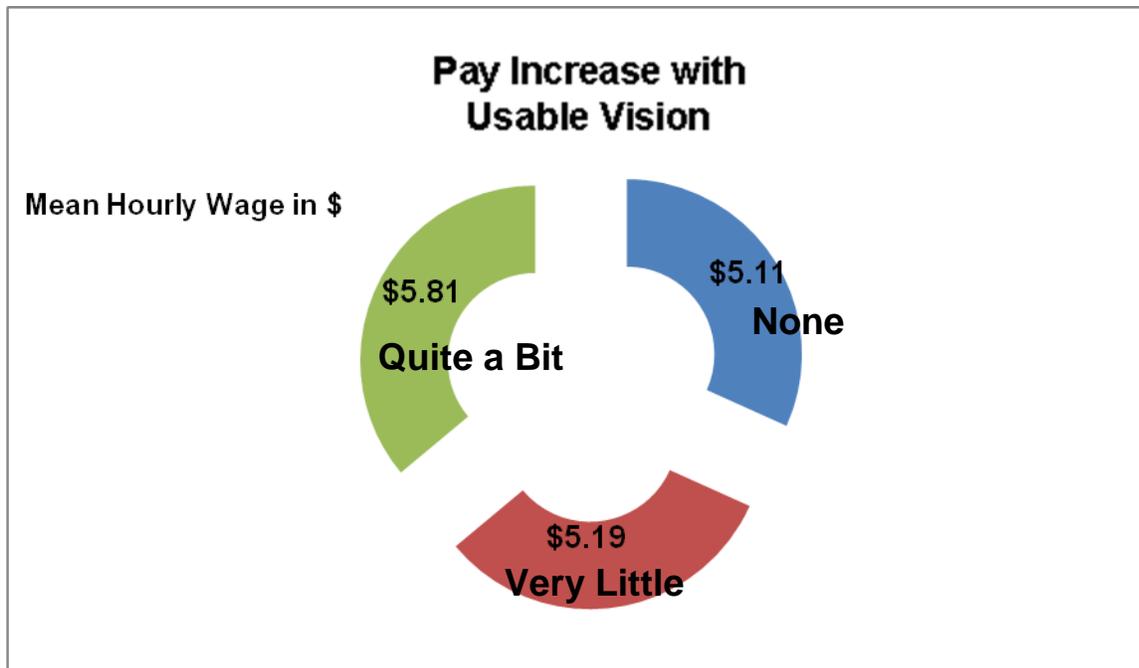
Workers spent an average of 30 minutes per day getting to work (one-way), with 16% of workers spending one hour or more. Workers were most likely to use a public bus (30%); however, 27% relied on para-transit systems, which represents a large increase in the use of para-transit systems from previous years. This increased use of para-transit systems may be due to passage, enforcement and increased knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Employment

Earnings The mean weekly wage for the group was \$191, or \$5.36 per hour. Persons who described themselves as having "quite a bit" of usable vision earned significantly higher salaries than those persons with "no usable vision" or "very little" usable vision. (Figure 7, p.14) This discrepancy was frequently mentioned by direct labor staff. There was, however, no difference in the rate of pay for males compared to females, nor for minority compared to non-minority groups. (Figure 8, p.14)

Hours Worked The overwhelming majority (98%) of workers were engaged in work over 20 hours per week, with a mean of approximately 37 hours of work per week. More than half (63%) of those surveyed worked 40 hours per week. Workers employed less than 20 hours per week usually attributed their part-time status to medical reasons.

Work Experience When workers who participated in employment prior to their loss of vision (31%) were asked why they left their previous job, 61% stated that they had been laid off or fired due to their loss of vision. A majority (64%) of direct labor workers have participated in other employment since their vision loss. The most common reasons for leaving the job acquired after loss of vision were: plant closed/work force reduction (18%), fired/laid off due to blindness and family/personal reasons (17% each), and part time/seasonal work (15%). Only 24% of workers had been employed in another facility-based work program. Of those, just over half (57%) had been employed in a facility-based work



Pay slightly higher for those
With "quite a bit" usable vision

Figure 7

Wager per Hour Unaffected by Gender and Minority Status

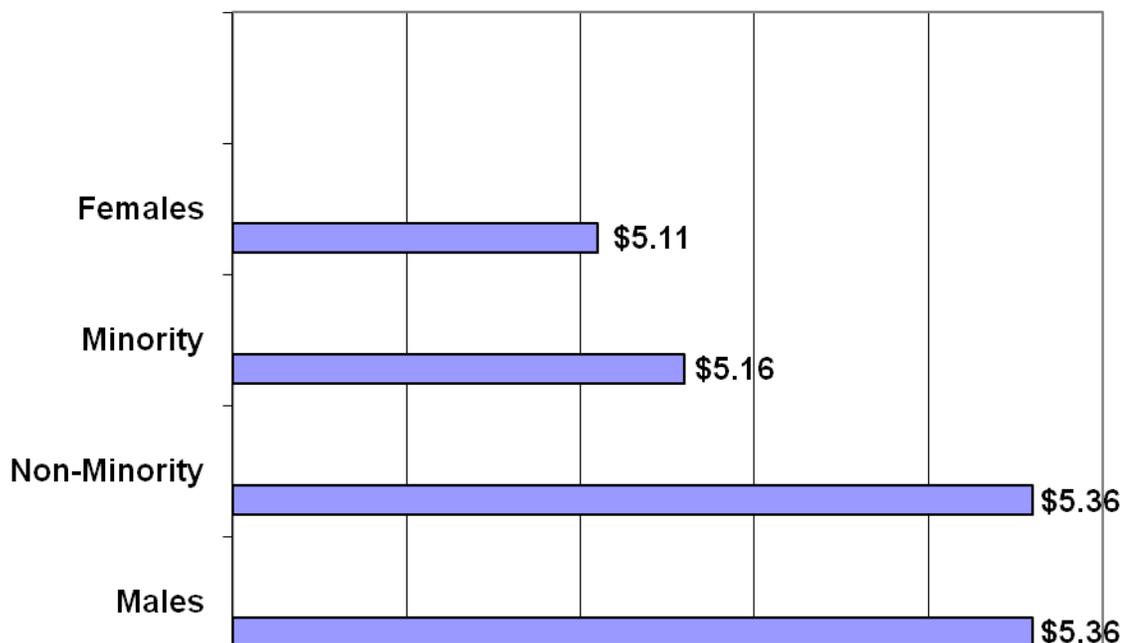


Figure 8

program for the blind, while the remainder were employed in another system, such as Goodwill agencies.

Fringe Benefits Most (70%) workers were familiar with their employee fringe benefits. Verbal explanation from agency staff was the primary method (59%) in which workers learned about the fringe benefits package available to them. Other workers cited an employee manual (21%). Only 6 of every 100 workers stated that their benefits were not explained to them.

Training

Almost two-thirds (63%) of the workers received some type of training services, usually from another agency (70%), prior to employment in the NIB affiliate. Almost 9 of 10 workers (88%) had been served by a state rehabilitation agency. Over half (52%) attributed their placement at the NIB affiliate to a referral by their Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor. Almost one fourth (24%) of the workers, however, stated they obtained their job on their own, or independently of any other agency.

Job satisfaction

In response to the question, "How satisfied are you working here?", 61% indicated they were "satisfied" (40%) or "very satisfied" (21%). The number of workers indicating they were "dissatisfied" (10%) or "very dissatisfied" (4%), remains low; however, it is up slightly from the previous two surveys where these combined figures were 6% in 1983 and 10% in 1987. There was a similar decrease in the number of workers who were "satisfied" and "very satisfied", with 61% of the workers in those categories in 1994, 66% in 1987, and 73% in 1983. (Figure 9, p.16)

Satisfaction Trends

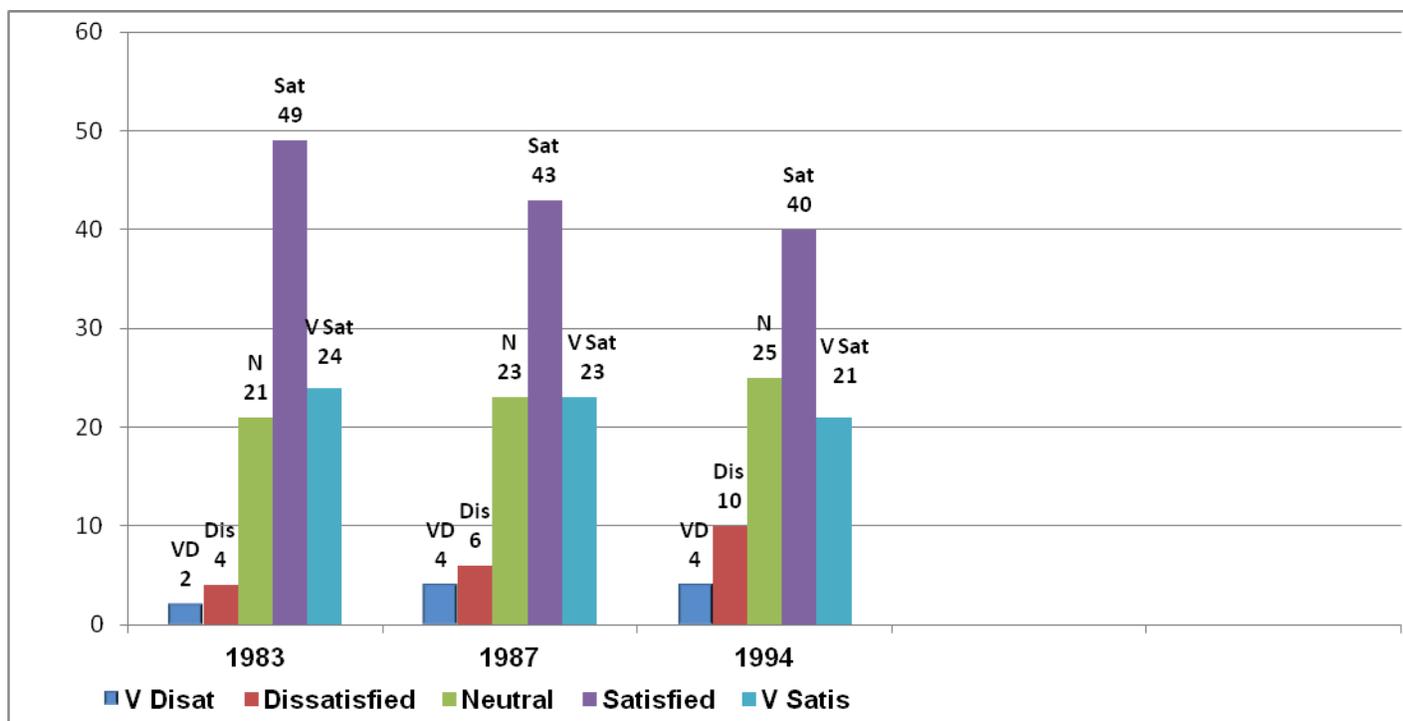


Figure 9

Satisfaction Unaffected by Amount of Usable Vision

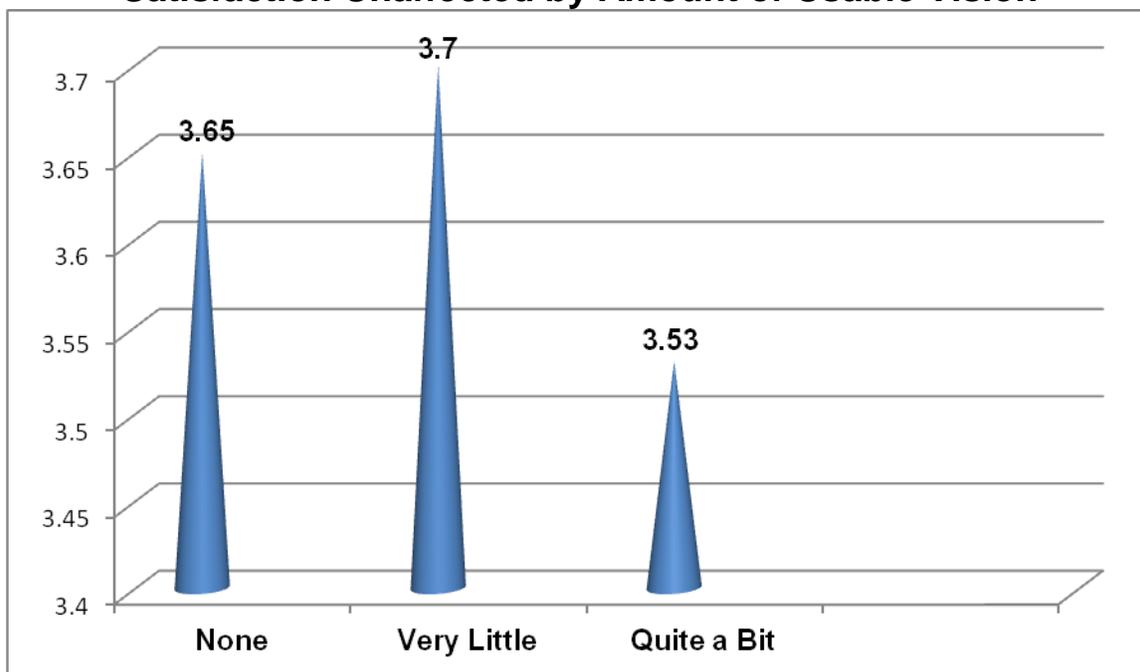


Figure 10

There was no significant relationship between the level of job satisfaction and the degree of visual loss; (Figure 10, p.16) nor was there any relationship between the level of job satisfaction and gender or job satisfaction and minority status. (Figure 11, p.18) The same is not true, however, for educational level. As the educational level of the worker rises, the dissatisfaction level also rises. (Figure 12, p.18) Workers with 5 or less years of experience with the affiliate were more satisfied than workers with more experience. (Figure 13, p.19) Workers over 50 years of age, however, were more satisfied than younger workers. (Figure 14, p.19) The number of neutral responses rose slightly from 21% in 1983, to 23% in 1987, and to 25% in 1994. Persons who gave a neutral response did not always state neutral feelings about their employment. Rather, these workers indicated they had strong conflicting negative and positive feelings, leading them to a neutral response.

Good Points about Work Environment

When asked to list "the good points of working here," workers had the opportunity to generate multiple responses. Only 1% of those surveyed could not list a good point about their work environment. Interaction with co-workers was cited as a good point by 43% of workers. Indeed, many workers stated that social interaction with others was the main reason they continue to engage in direct labor work. Almost one-third (30%) of workers indicated that the staff/management were good points of working at the NIB affiliate. While more difficult to document through statistical analysis, a large number of persons commented at length about the help and support they received from affiliate staff,

Satisfaction Unaffected by Gender and Minority Status

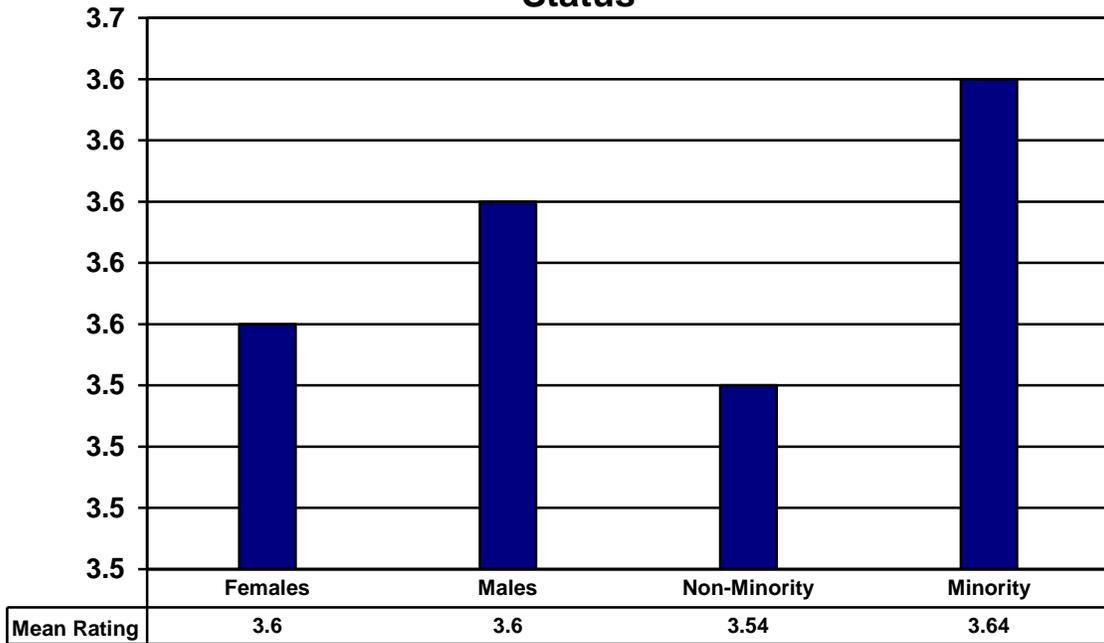


Figure 11

Satisfaction and Education

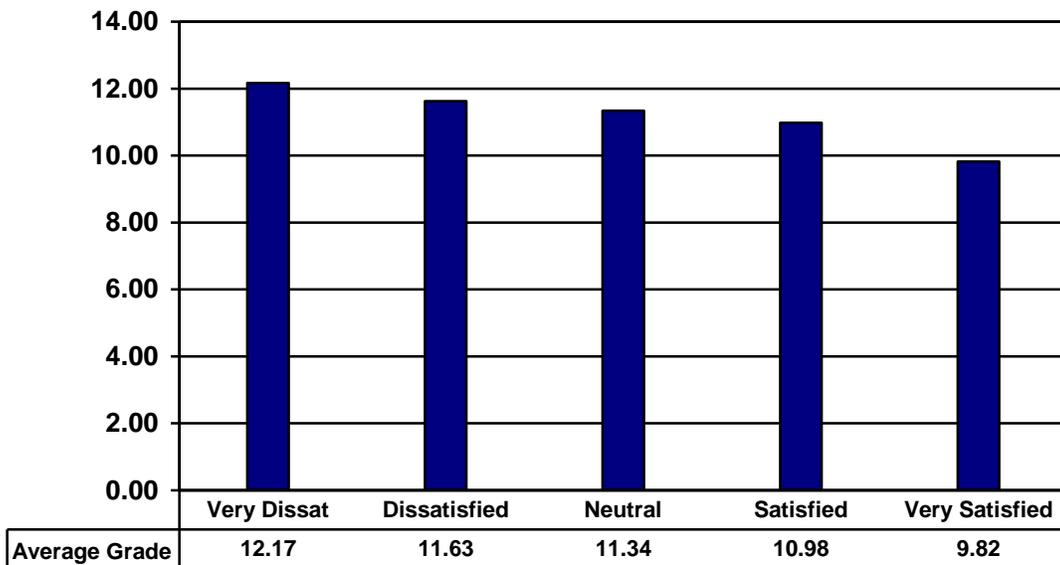


Figure 12

Satisfaction Highest Among Employees with Least Work Experience

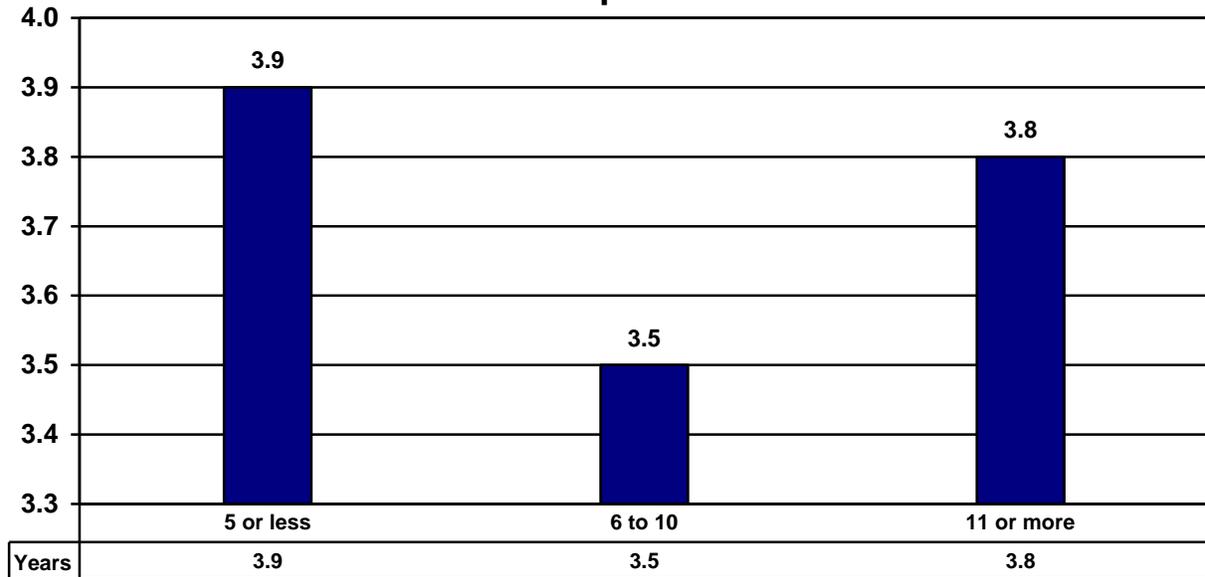
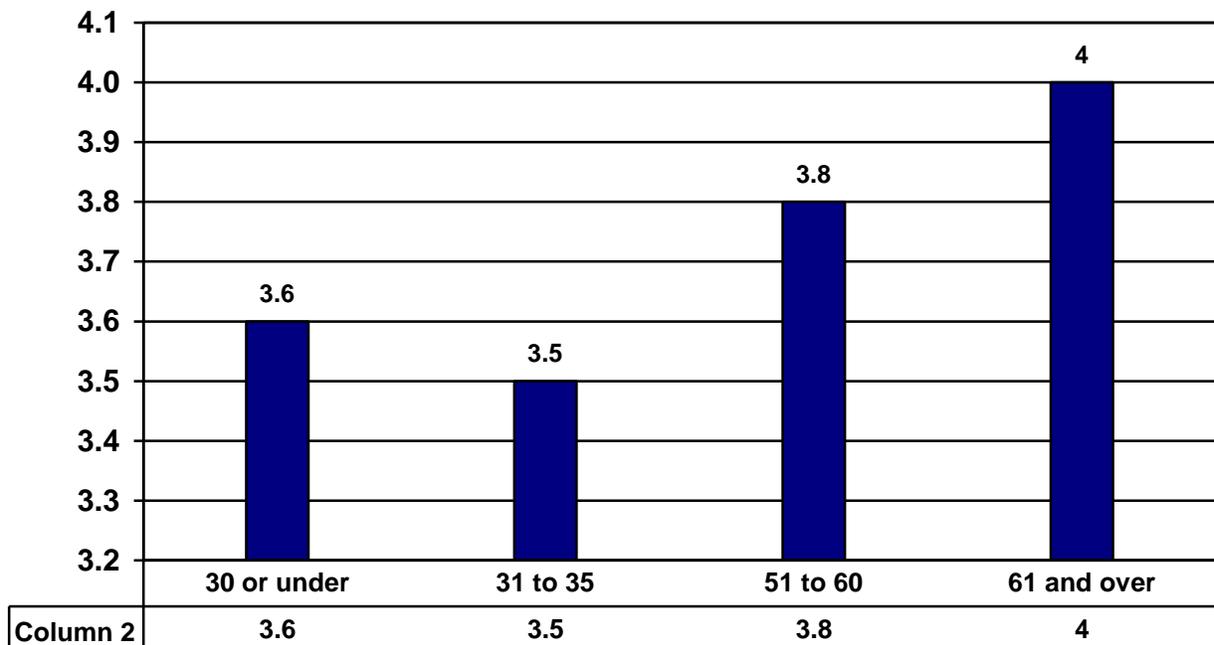


Figure 13

Satisfaction Increases with Age



Age Groups
Figure 14

stating such things as "they will do anything for you." Many workers were quite "emotional" and very positive about the staff.

Another positive point mentioned about staff and management was flexibility. Some managers allowed workers to choose their number of work hours per week. This system was very popular with workers earning a high hourly rate, as it allowed them to reduce their work hours, as needed, to retain unearned income. Others not receiving unearned income were appreciative of the opportunity to work additional hours and earn overtime pay.

When asked to point out the "good points of working here," 21% of workers interviewed cited their fringe benefits package. Included in this category were items such as flexibility in work schedules, insurance plans, and paid time off. Some workers listed fringe benefits as both a good point and a bad point, indicating that they were pleased with the benefits package currently available, but desired additional benefits, i.e., a retirement plan in addition to insurance, or more paid time off, etc.

The same percentage of workers (21%) stated that the type of work was a "good point of working here" indicating some workers were quite pleased with the work duties assigned to them. Additionally, workers commented positively about the type of work available when they were given the opportunity to rotate among various jobs.

More than one in four (27%) of the workers cited simply having stable employment as a "good point." Almost one in three workers (31%) listed other good points, such as "just being able to get out of the house." Only a comparatively few persons listed independence/self-sufficiency (12%), reduced/minimal job pressure (13%), physical working conditions (9%) or working with other blind/disabled people (15%) as good points. Some (17%) reported that wages was a "good point." Workers commented frequently that although some aspects of their jobs were not ideal, they were grateful to have the opportunity to work. Many of these workers expressed a desire to see their affiliate expand, thereby making more employment opportunities available to others. (Figure 15, p.22)

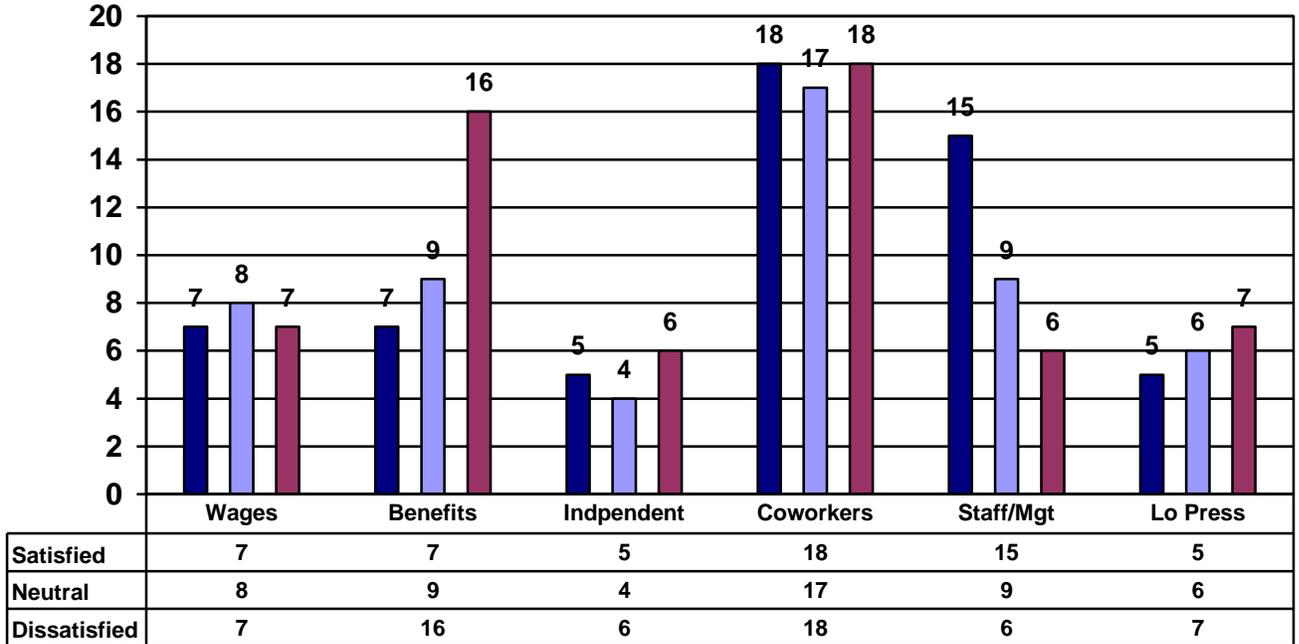
Workers were also asked to name "the main good point of working here" in an effort to identify the most pertinent issue of the multiple good points. The most frequent response was stable employment (26%), with 9% of the workers stating wages. One in

10 workers (10%) were not able to name a main good point of working in their facility. Approximately 15% of the workers had varying responses, the most common of which was "having a job" or "having something to do". Only 8% of those interviewed identified their co-workers as the "main good point". (Figure 16, p.23)

Bad Points about Work Environment

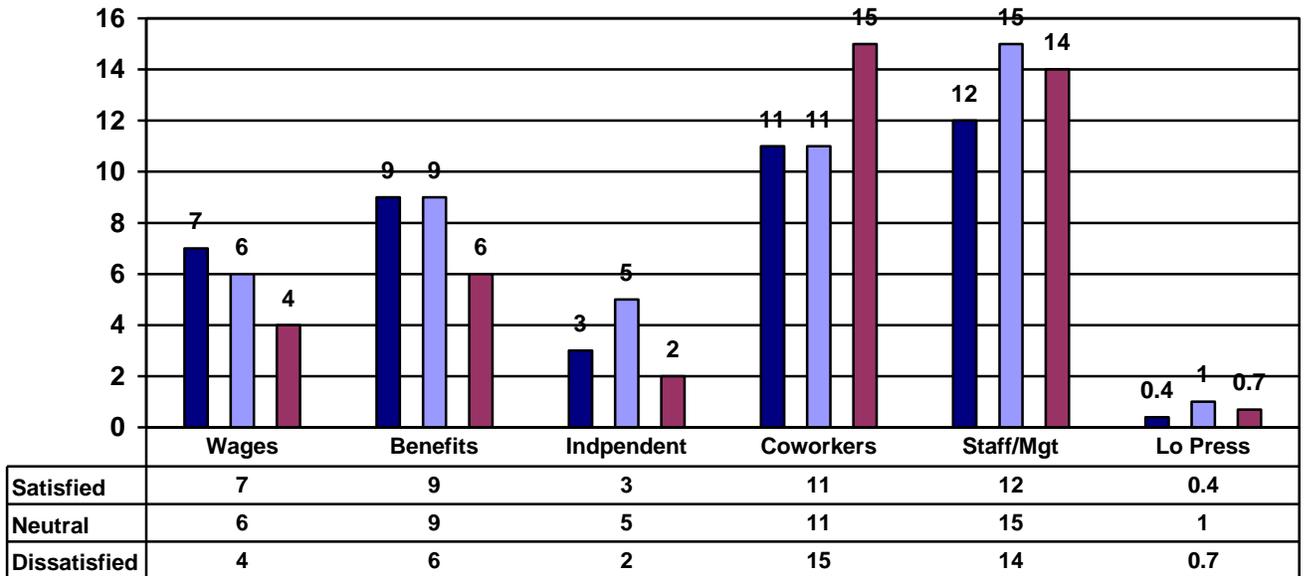
When asked to list any "bad points of working here," which generated multiple responses, 30% of the workers stated there were no bad points. One in five workers stated that wages were too low. Some workers cited the method in which piece rates were determined. Based upon comments made during these interviews, there appeared to be wide-spread lack of information among workers about how piece rates were determined. Many workers reported having information that piece rates were determined in an unfair manner, either because the rate was set on the productivity standards of sighted workers, or due to some other reason.

Satisfied Workers Identify Co-Workers, Staff/Management, Stable Employment as Most Often Mentioned Good Points



Part A

Area



Part B

Area

Figure 15

Main Goods Points by Percent

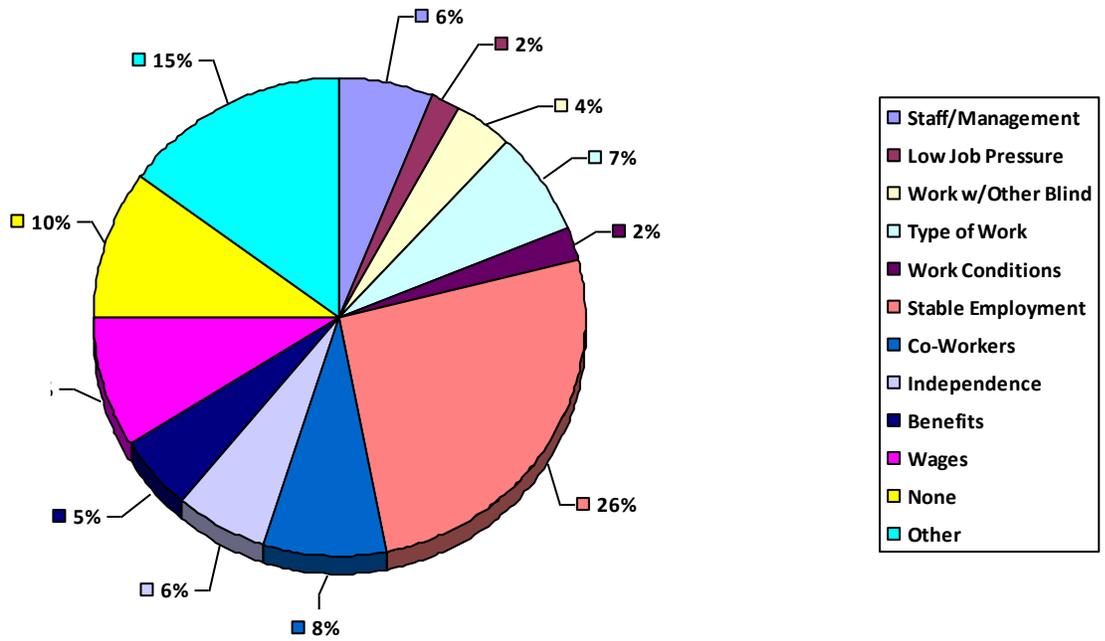


Figure 16

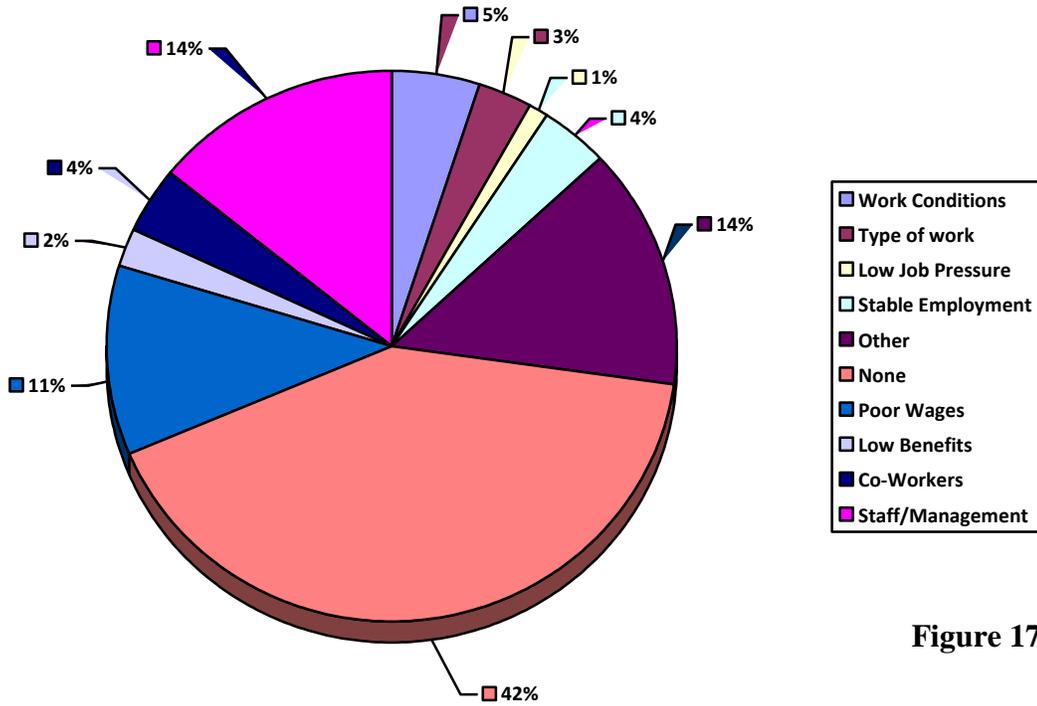


Figure 17

Main Bad Points by Percent

A concern among workers who listed staff as a bad point (25%) was how workers were treated by staff. Several workers at different affiliates stated that staff "talk to me like I am a dog." Some stated they were treated like children. Many workers clarified their responses by stating that while the Director of the affiliate treated them well, the direct supervisor or plant manager did not, or vice versa.

Some workers said affiliate management laid them off when work orders were low while "front office" staff continued to work and get paid. The unpredictability of the work appeared to cause a great deal of anxiety among many employees. Other negative comments directed toward staff and management included a perceived tendency of management to lay off the most severely visually impaired workers first and most frequently, and giving jobs of higher status and salary to "the chosen few." The concept that there was a group of workers within each affiliate who received preferential treatment was widespread. When asked what these workers had to do to get into this exclusive group, most workers stated that all one had to do was "play the game," "be a yes man" or assume a similar role.

A few workers mentioned concerns about gender-related issues. A small number of workers commented that male staff sexually harassed female workers and visitors in the presence of direct labor staff. Some female workers stated that male workers were given job tasks that commanded more prestige and higher salaries, although statistical analysis of the data demonstrated that males and females were paid at comparable rates.

The lack of sufficient fringe benefits was cited by a few workers (8%). Workers commented upon the discrepancies between the benefits package available to direct labor workers and the benefits package available to staff. Most of the workers who commented on this reported that affiliate staff received substantially better benefits than the workers, thus creating both a hierarchy within the affiliate and significant resentment among the workers toward the staff. Workers appeared to perceive themselves as doing the hard work that allowed staff to have these superior benefits.

There were relatively few negative comments about either the type of work (6%) or the physical conditions (12%) of the work environment. Those workers who did mention problems with physical conditions reported problems with noise or dust. Other

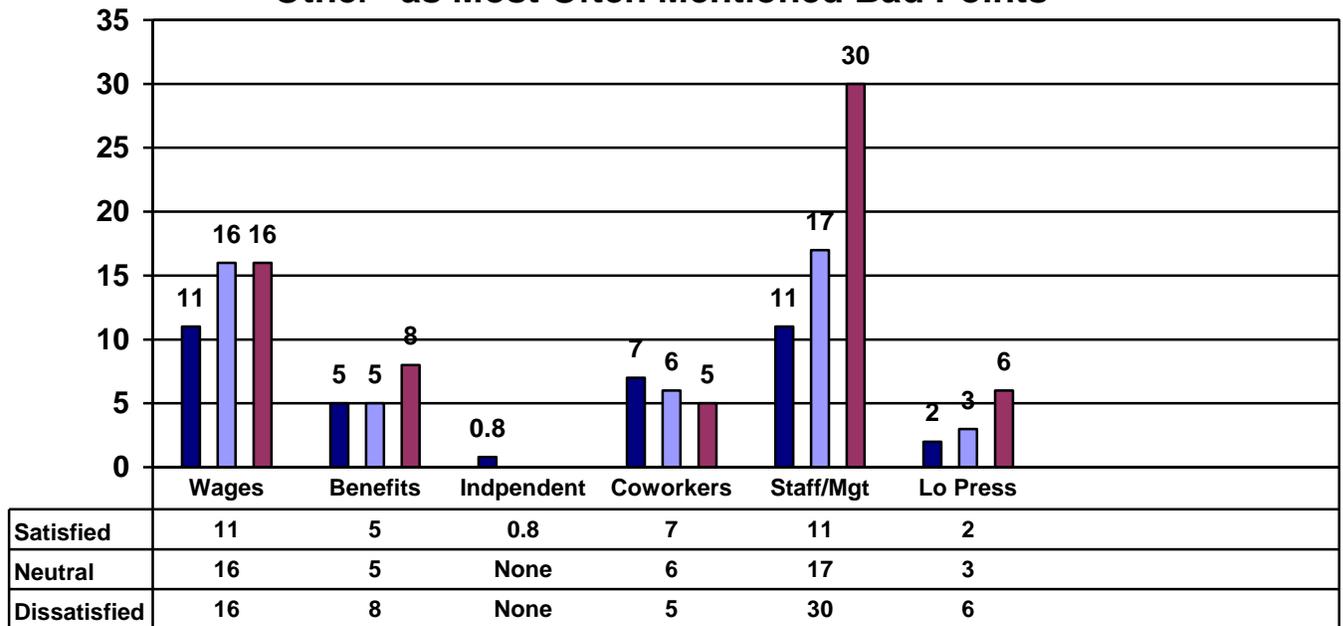
workers reported that safety issues were a concern, both in the physical work area and with equipment. These workers stated that machinery maintenance was inadequate, thereby causing a danger to them and reducing productivity. (Figure 17, p.23)

There did not appear to be any clear consensus among workers about the "main bad point of working here." Forty-one percent of the workers said there was no main bad point. The most frequently cited main bad point, identified by 14% of the workers, was the staff. Wages were cited as a "main bad point" by 11% of workers. Of the 14% of responses that fell into the category of "other," many referred again to the issue of those with greater levels of vision having greater work opportunities within the affiliate. (Figure 18, p.26)

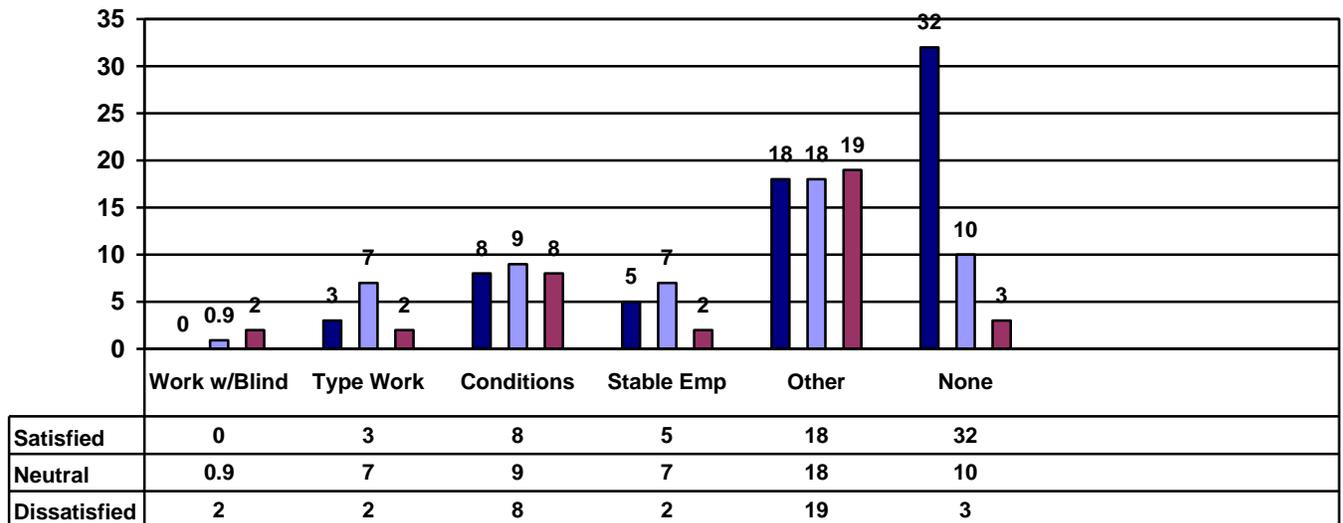
Job Discrimination

A total of 37% of the workers stated that they had experienced discrimination due to blindness in getting hired or in keeping a job. Several workers commented that employers turned down their requests for employment due to fear of escalating

Dissatisfied Workers Identify Staff/Management, Wages, "Other" as Most Often Mentioned Bad Points



Percent Satisfaction Responses
Part A



Percent Satisfaction Responses
Part B

Figure 18

Workers Identify Wages, Co-Workers, Staff/Management, Stable Employment as Salient Employment Factors

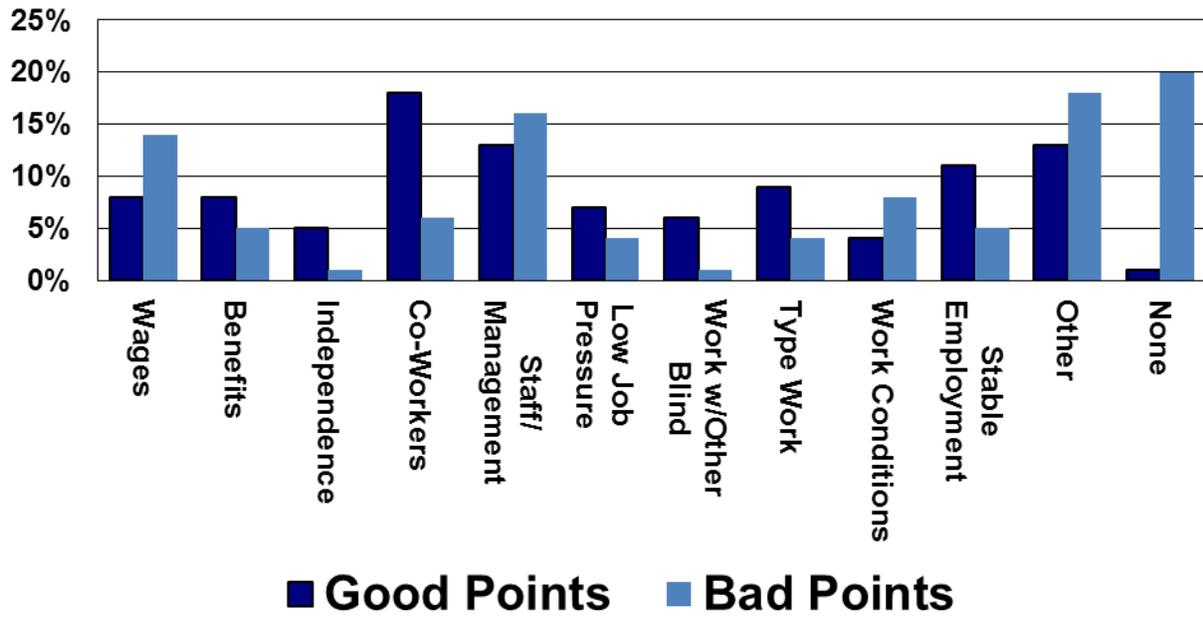


Figure 19

workers compensation insurance premiums. Several workers with residual vision stated that employers had offered them jobs, then rescinded the job offer upon learning of their visual impairment.

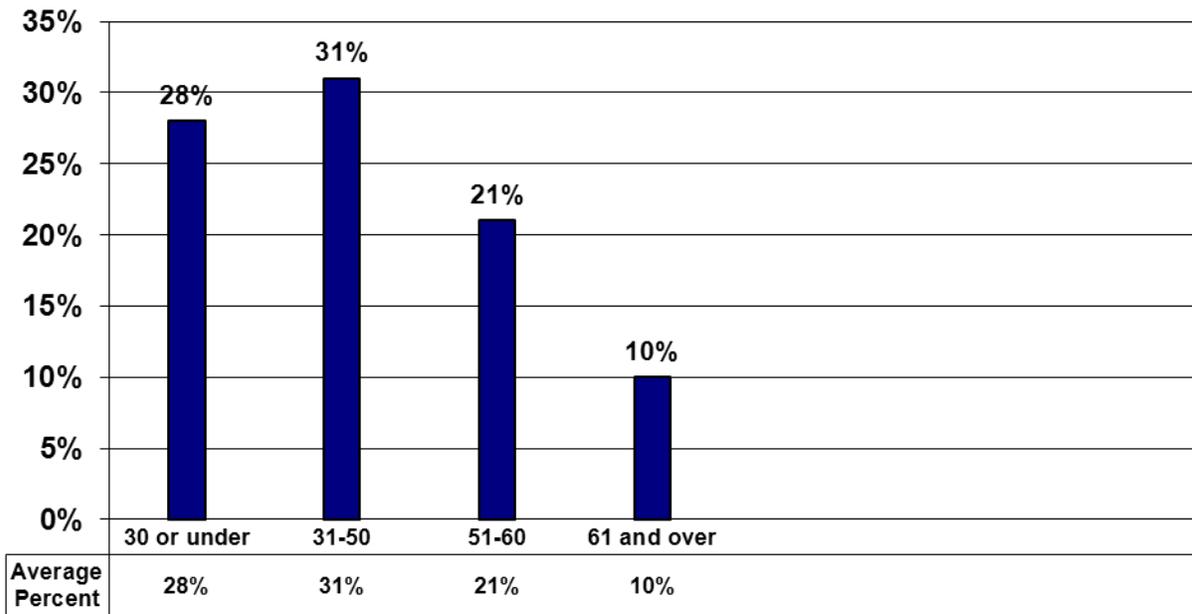
General Industry Employment

The majority (74%) of workers stated that they had not attempted to locate or secure jobs in the general employment sector since beginning employment at the NIB affiliate. Of those who had not tried to find employment in general industry, more than one in four (27%) stated that they had not tried because they preferred their current placement. Males and females sought jobs in the general sector at the same rate. Neither minority nor non-minority respondents sought general sector employment at a significantly different rate. Workers who were the most satisfied were least likely to pursue employment in general industry. Typically, workers who were older were less likely to seek employment in general industry. (Figure 20, p.29)

About one in ten (11%) of the workers who had not tried to find employment in the general sector stated that they had not tried because employers would not hire them. Only a few stated age (6%), other disabilities (1%), lack of education or experience (4%), or lack of transportation (4%) as a reason. Of the 74% of workers who stated that they had not sought employment in the general sector, almost 36% stated they had not considered looking for a job elsewhere and appeared bewildered regarding a reason.

Of those persons who found employment in the general sector, or 27% of those who tried, most were fired, laid off or quit due to lack of work or the attitudes of co-workers and management. Of those who unsuccessfully pursued employment

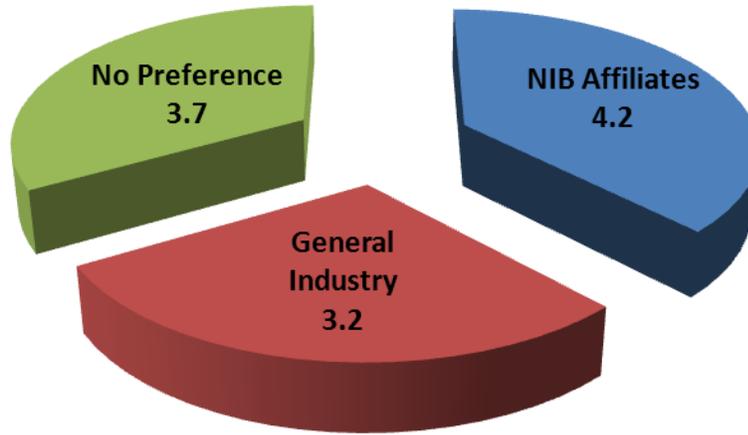
Seeking Employment in General Industry Decreases over Age 50



Age Groups

Figure 20

Satisfaction Highest Among Workers Who Prefer Working at NIB Affiliates



Preferred Worksites

Figure 21

in the general sector (73%), almost half (46%) stated they were unable to find general employment because the employer was unwilling to hire a person who is blind.

When asked, "What is the single most important thing that is keeping blind people from working in the competitive labor market?", the majority of workers stated ignorance or discrimination on the part of employers and the general public. Some workers stated that it was their blindness itself that prevented them from working in the general labor market.

A small number of persons cited transportation as a barrier to general employment. Discussions with other persons who are blind after this survey was completed indicated that transportation continues to be such a pervasive issue in the life of every person with a visual disability that many would not even think to mention such an obvious issue unless it was specifically raised. Future researchers should note this when developing research questions in this area.

Preference for Facility-Based v. General Industry Employment

In regard to choice of a work place, workers were divided in their responses: 28% preferred their current placement, 36% preferred general industry, and 34% indicated no preference; a majority of workers who indicated no preference said that as long as they could do the work, were treated fairly, and earned a decent salary, they had no preference regarding their work environment. Workers indicating a preference for general industry stated that increased employment options, both for upward mobility and the variety of work available, were their main reasons.

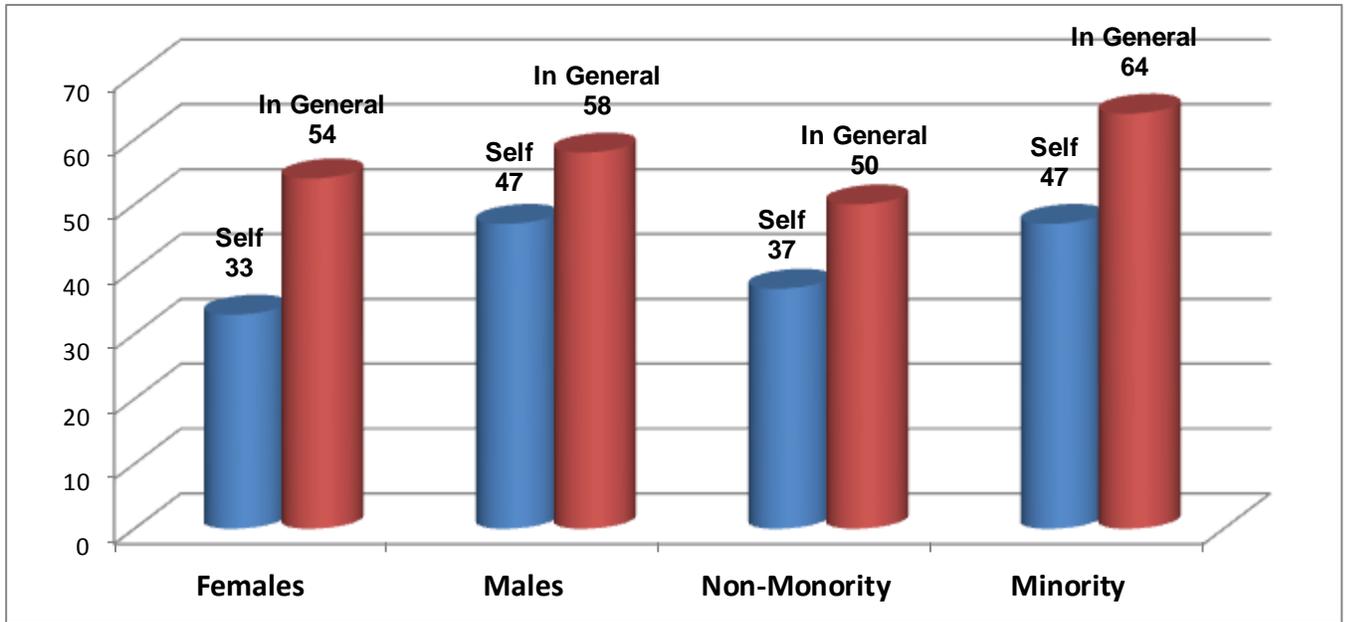
Workers who chose to remain in their current placement indicated that they were comfortable at their job and had no desire to change. Some preferred the low stress/pressure of the affiliate, while others stated they anticipated difficulty with mobility or transportation in a new environment. Workers who stated a preference for the NIB affiliate had higher levels of satisfaction than workers preferring general industry, or those with no preference. (Figure 21, p.29) Most workers had thought "a lot" (40%) or "a little" (27%), about the issue of choice regarding their workplace before the survey; 33% of the workers stated that they had not thought about where they would choose to work before the day of the survey.

Promotion

Workers were divided (51% yes, 36% no, 13% unsure) regarding whether there is a chance for "blind people in general" to be promoted. Those who thought there was a chance stated that co-workers within the affiliate had been promoted. Others stated that only a select group of persons were eligible for promotion; typically these select groups consisted of workers who were male and had a great deal of residual vision, or those who were reported to have a special relationship with management. There was no statistical difference, however, in the rate at which males and females, minorities and non-minorities, or those with varying levels of vision rated the likelihood of "blind people in general" being promoted. (Figures 22 and 23, p.32) Women who live alone, however, were more likely than men, or women who live with others, to believe that "blind people in general" could be promoted. (Figure 24, p.33)

Workers were also divided (34% yes, 49% no, 17% unsure) regarding whether one could individually be promoted. Some workers stated the possibility was there if they did a good job.

Promotion Expectation Higher for Minority and for Male Workers



No Male-Female Difference in Expectation "In General"

Figure 22

Promotion Expectations Not Influenced by Level of Vision Higher for Minority and for Male Workers

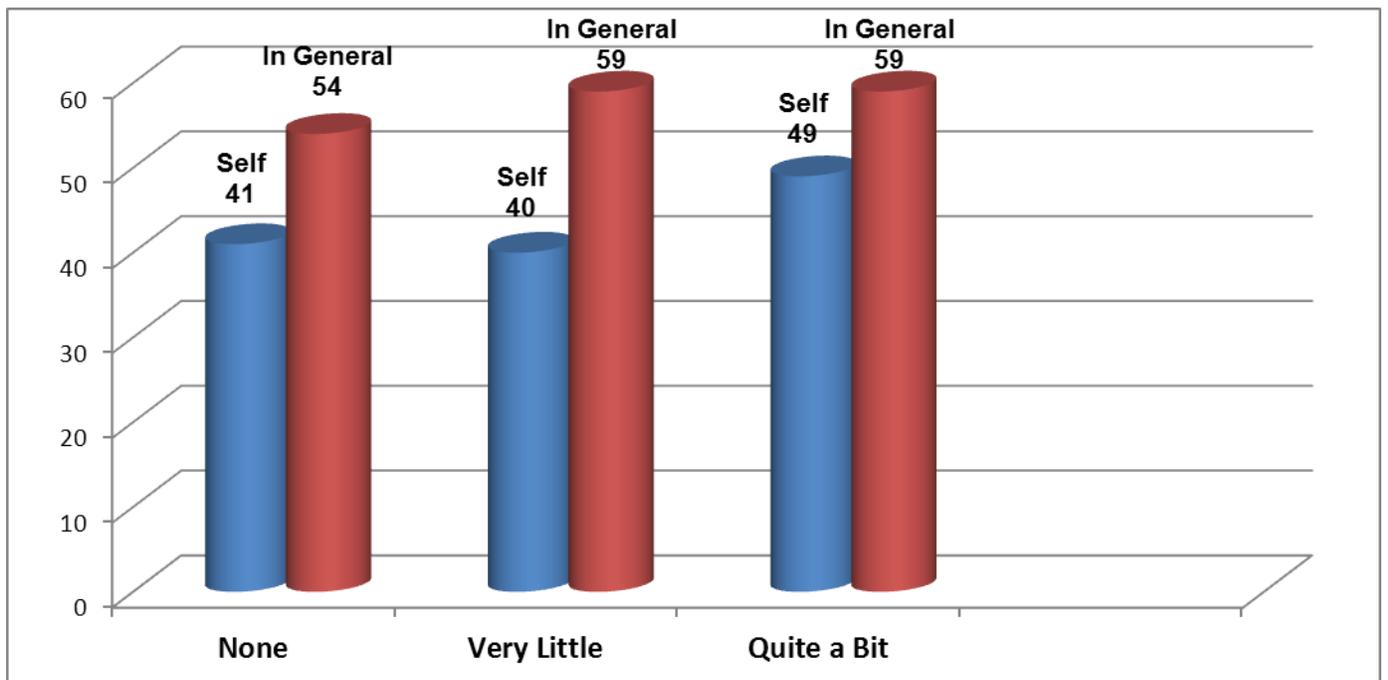
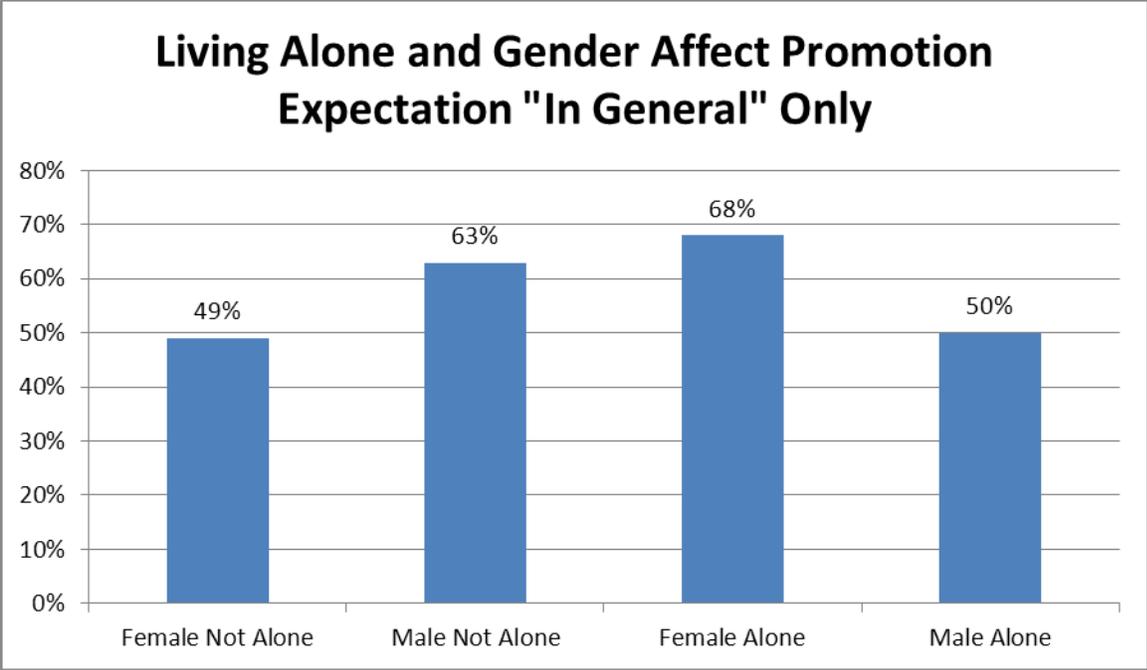


Figure 23

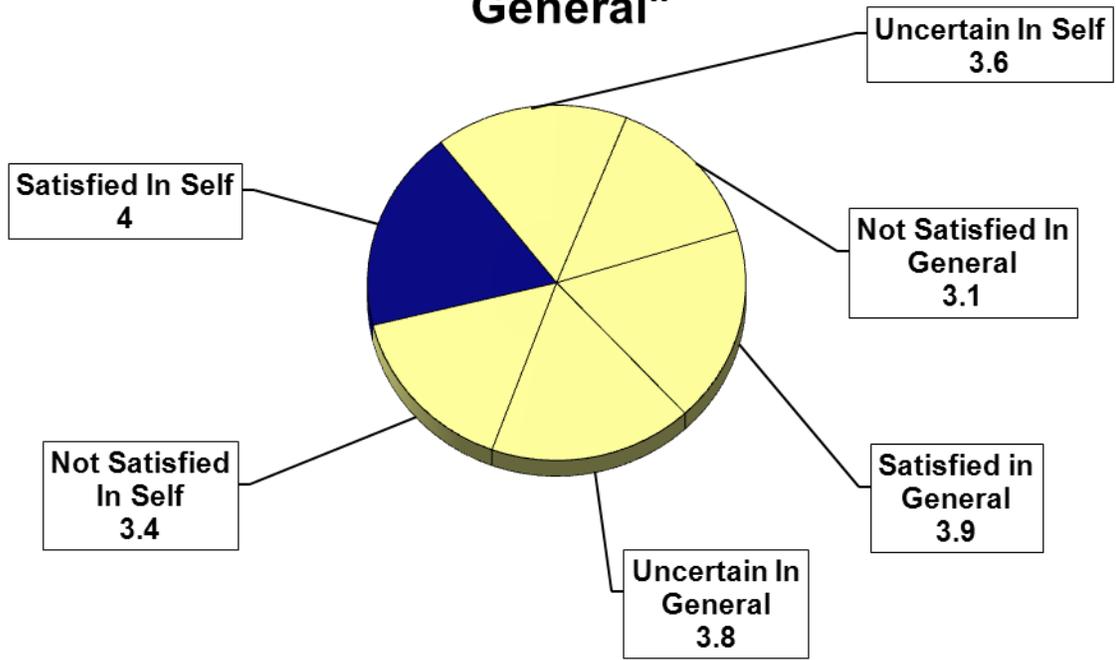


No effects on satisfaction
Or on promotion for "self"

Living Arrangements

Figure 24

Satisfaction Highest for Those that Expect a Chance for Promotion for Self and "In General"



Promotion Expectation

Figure 25

Others stated they would never be promoted because there was no position in which to promote them from their current position. Some workers stated that management would not promote them because they "don't play the game" or were "too outspoken." Workers with varying degrees of vision did not differ significantly in their assessments of their own ability to be promoted. (Figure 23, p.32) Women were less likely than men to believe they could be promoted. (Figure 22, p.32) Workers who believed there were chances for promotion were more satisfied than workers who thought there was no chance for promotion. (Figure 25, p.33)

Most workers (65%) stated that if a promotion was offered to them, they would accept it. Of these workers, many (26%) were unable to identify what particular job they could do if promoted. Almost one quarter (24%) of the workers stated they could perform higher direct labor duties. Although some workers stated that they could do any job at the affiliate, or any job offered them, most indicated they did not know what they could do, but felt other duties could be more challenging activities. This indicated a level of frustration among those workers with the nature of the tasks available to them; 21% of the workers did, however, state the type of work was a good point of the job. Of those persons stating that they would not accept a promotion (17%), reasons included too much pressure (25%), fear of losing unearned income (5%), lack of qualifications (6%), or satisfaction with present work (23%). The remainder of the group (18%) stated they were unsure regarding whether or not they would accept a promotion.

Other Employment Options

In response to the question, "Where do you think you would be working if you didn't work here?", approximately one-third of the workers (29%) said they would not be working, and nearly as many said that they did not know (28%). A smaller number of persons (22%) said they would be employed in general industry, other facility-based work (10%), or self-employment (8%).

Consumer Groups

Of the three major consumer groups listed in the survey, the most frequently recognized (87%) was the National Federation of the Blind. The Blinded Veterans

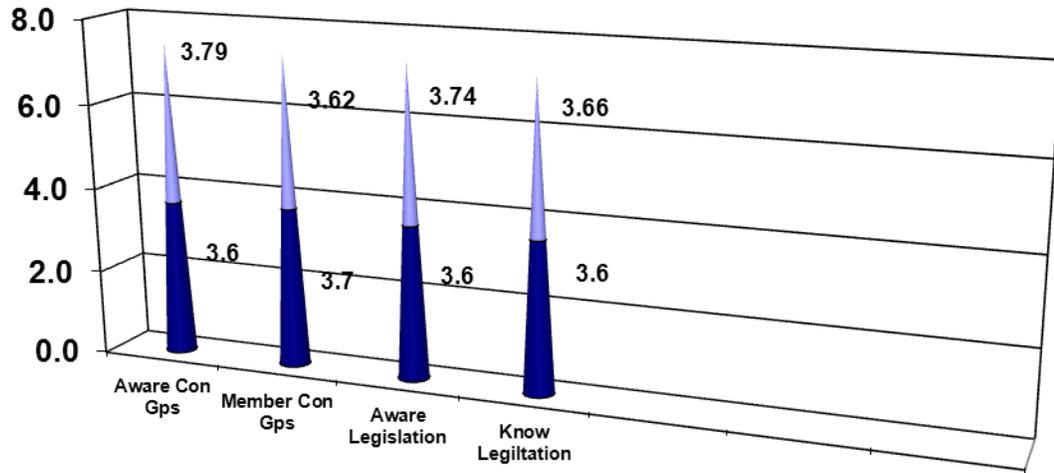
Association was the least commonly recognized (37%), with the American Council of the Blind in the middle (67%). Only a few additional groups were mentioned. There was no significant difference between satisfaction levels of those who were familiar with these organizations and those who were not. (Figure 26, p.36)

Most workers (78%) did not belong to any of the groups; however, the National Federation of the Blind had the largest membership with 14% of the workers claiming membership. The American Council of the Blind had only 8% membership among these workers and the Blinded Veterans Association claimed only 2 members. Members of these organizations had comparable satisfaction levels to non-members. A very small percentage of persons made comments about the groups, most either stating that all of the groups try to help people and are a positive influence, or that the groups are a negative influence and include people who just talk and fight amongst themselves.

Legislation

Over half (61%) of the direct labor workers interviewed stated they had not heard of either the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act or the Fair Labor Standards Act. Of workers who had

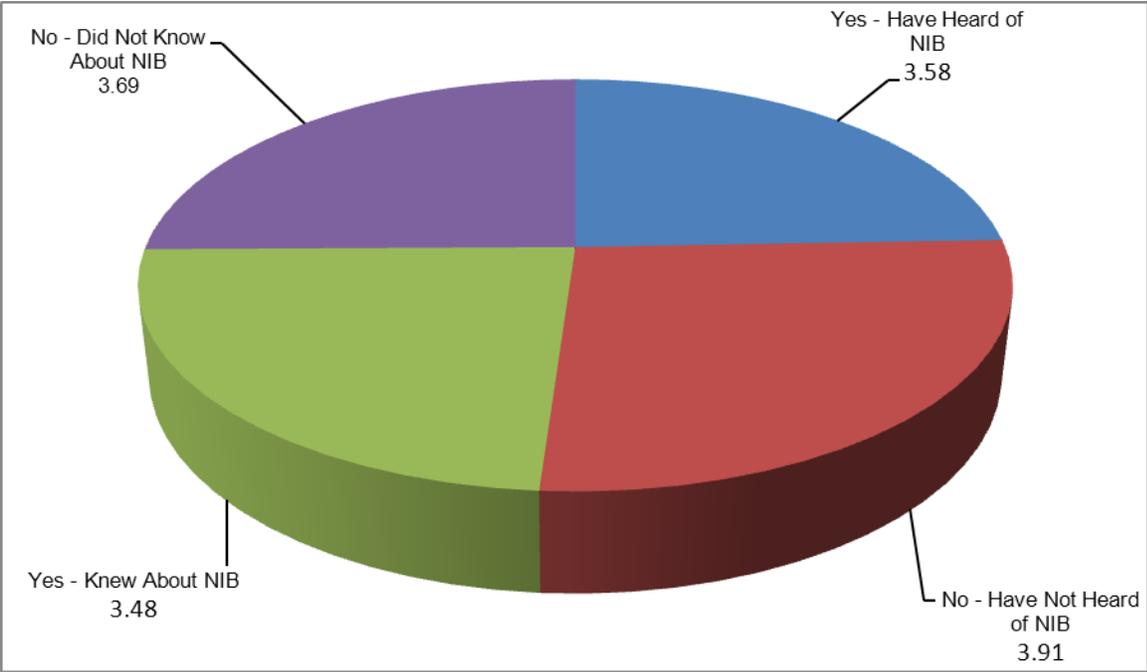
Marital Status by Gender



| | Aware Con Gps | Member Con Gps | Aware Legislation | Know Legiltation |
|-----|---------------|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| No | 3.79 | 3.62 | 3.74 | 3.66 |
| Yes | 3.6 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 3.6 |

Figure 26

**Satisfaction Higher for Workers Who
Had Not Heard of NIB**



No difference in satisfaction for workers who knew about NIB versus those who did not

Figure 27

heard of the JWOD, only 24% were able to explain it, and of workers who had heard of the Fair Labor Standards Act, less than one in ten (8%) were able to explain it. A greater number of direct labor workers (59%) stated they had heard of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Only 14% of direct labor workers thought that ADA had a positive effect on their lives, usually in the area of transportation, while less than 1% stated that ADA had a negative effect on their lives. Neither awareness nor knowledge of legislation had an effect on satisfaction levels.

The majority (82%) of direct labor workers had heard of NIB. Surprisingly, only 28% of those who had heard of NIB were able to relate any information about what NIB is. Some workers who were not able to relate any information about NIB reported that they had been named Worker of the Year and had attended NIB conventions. Workers who had heard of NIB were more dissatisfied than workers who had not; however, this difference did not occur among workers knowledgeable of NIB. (Figure 27, p.36)

Worker Comments

At the end of the survey, workers were given the opportunity to express questions or concerns to NIB management. Common themes were pleas to NIB to provide more work, requests that NIB take a greater role in affiliate management and administration, and remarks about affiliate staff. A large number of workers expressed appreciation to NIB for including them in the survey and for giving them an opportunity to express their opinions.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a clear mandate from the workers supporting the concept of specialized work for persons who are blind/visually impaired. Although workers recognize many problems within the affiliates, there appears to be widespread grass roots support for correcting these problems, rather than eliminating this employment option. Anxiety regarding the stability of employment appears to be a major concern and is likely negatively influencing worker satisfaction. Benefit packages, wages, and treatment by staff are also major concerns of direct-labor workers.

Workers repeatedly reported that the public, including general sector employers and their current affiliate employers, are unaware of the work capabilities of persons who are blind. Many workers stated their blindness itself was the "single most important thing" preventing their employment in the general sector, leading to the conclusion that some workers are likewise unaware of their own abilities. It is not surprising that the general public is unaware of the many ways jobs can be adapted, or that people who are blind can compete in a variety of occupations, when professionals in the field and people who are blind hold such views themselves. The need for widespread education in the field of adaptive technology and job modifications for professionals and workers appears clear.

Although broad patterns were revealed in this study, additional analysis is needed to determine more specific relationships among the variables. The wage disparity with levels of vision needs further investigation since the differences may be attributed to other factors correlated with vision level, e.g., experience, age, education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list of recommendations is suggested for consideration by National Industries for the Blind and the management of each affiliate. More specifically, it is recommended that NIB:

1. Adopt policies which insure that persons with less vision can compete fairly with more sighted workers for higher salaries and promotional opportunities.
2. Conduct sessions at various affiliates that focus on promoting cohesiveness among workers and staff, particularly directed toward reducing the perceived rivalry or division that is reported among workers who are visually impaired and those who are totally blind.
3. Encourage workers to remediate academic deficits by enrolling in high school equivalency degrees programs.
4. Assist affiliate staff in securing adaptive equipment that will enable workers with less vision to compete for more challenging jobs.

5. Encourage affiliate staff to visit other affiliates to learn about adapting jobs for persons who are the most severely visually impaired. When NIB staff visit local affiliates, visits should include private interviews with a few randomly selected direct labor workers. Such visits establish rapport with direct labor staff and give NIB staff insight into the daily activities and issues of each affiliate.
6. Assist affiliates in obtaining the necessary equipment for large print and tape correspondence so that each worker receives correspondence in their preferred medium, which is primarily large print or tape.
7. Develop mentoring programs so that Directors and Plant Managers who are successful can provide assistance and advice to other Directors and Managers who may be new, or are attempting to make major changes in management styles.
8. Provide training opportunities for affiliate board members to promote enhanced communication between management and direct labor workers.
9. Systematically compare differences, if any, in benefit packages available to management and direct labor workers. Assist affiliates in developing benefit packages for direct labor workers that are identical to benefits received by staff.
10. Insure that affiliate staff, particularly plant managers who do not have a background in the field of blindness, are provided training in facilitative skills/techniques and in issues related to blindness and vision loss.
11. Provide training to affiliate staff in areas that appear to be problematic, or have the potential of becoming problematic, i.e., gender-related issues, including sexual harassment; sensitivity to multi-cultural differences; information flow among labor, staff and management; technology and its impact on work abilities of persons who are blind; the Social Security Disability system and how benefit rates are determined.
12. Assist affiliate staff in their efforts to explain how piece rates are determined to direct labor staff; and
13. Enlist workers to serve as spokespersons for affiliates and NIB as to the profound benefits made available to them through their employment.

FUTURE RESEARCH ON COLLECTED DATA

Based on the results of this survey, the following issues appear in need of further study:

1. A comparative study of the issues of concern and satisfaction between workers in NIB affiliates and workers in light manufacturing industries in the general labor market;
2. A qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses (narrative data) to identify further concerns and trends among direct labor workers; and
3. Further statistical analysis of data collected to determine factors which contribute to wage discrepancies, such as age, education, etc.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

The results of this study can be used to develop additional information regarding the following:

1. Identify vision levels of direct labor workers within affiliates to determine whether there is a hierarchy within the system which allows persons with more residual vision to obtain jobs of greater prestige and salary, as currently perceived by the workers.
2. An analysis of the number of direct labor workers who receive unearned income and the effect of this unearned income on the number of hours worked and productivity level achieved.
3. An in-depth study of affiliates where there is widespread discontent among workers to determine underlying causes and provide assistance in developing corrective action plans.
4. A study of the transportation problems that exist, efforts made to remedy those problems, and efforts which have met with success or failure.
5. A study of the upward mobility strategies that are being utilized by direct labor workers to secure employment in the general labor market.

6. Evaluate the effect of general unemployment rates on job satisfaction, salary and part-time and full-time employment.
7. Survey affiliates to identify strategies for encouraging direct labor workers to take advantage of adult basic education programs; and
8. Contact persons recently separated from employment to collect demographic characteristics, vision levels, salient concerns, etc. for comparison of key factors to currently employed workers.