

Experiences of Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness After High School

What Were We Trying to Learn?

Research about individuals with deaf-blindness is sorely lacking, particularly regarding their experiences after leaving high school. We used survey data to explore the educational and job-related experiences and needs of young people who are deaf-blind, including those with both deaf-blindness and a cognitive disability.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

Receipt of services: After leaving high school, nearly all the young adults in our study received one or more services (92.8%), with the most common being case management and vocational services/job training. Although a majority received some sort of service, **over half (54.0%) of young adults with deaf-blindness needed additional services.** The areas of greatest need were vocational services and occupational/life skills training. Many families of these young adults reported that it took either “a great deal of effort” (45.1%) or “some effort” (23.0%) to get needed services.

Employment and education: A small majority (55.3%) of young adults with deaf-blindness had worked for pay since leaving high school. However, at the time of the survey, just 30.5% were currently working. More than 40% of those who had worked were full-time employees, but about 30% earned below minimum wage. **Among those not currently working, 36.6% were looking for a job.**

More than one-fifth of young adults with deaf-blindness were currently attending a postsecondary institution, such as a community college or four-year university. Over half (53.6%) had attended postsecondary school at some point, and 16.0% received a diploma or certificate. **More than a quarter of young adults with deaf-blindness were not engaged in either postsecondary education or a job.**

Young adults with cognitive disabilities: The experiences of young people with both deaf-blindness and a cognitive disability, such as autism or traumatic brain injury, were different in some ways compared to those without a cognitive disability. Thirty percent fewer of these young adults received vocational services or assistive technology. **A majority of young adults with both deaf-blindness and a cognitive disability did not receive any services from a vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency.** These young adults were also much more likely to be unengaged in either postsecondary education or a job after high school (43.1%). Many families of these young adults reported major challenges to getting the services they needed.

How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

- **Make sure young people with deaf-blindness are connected to their state VR agency.** All young adults with deaf-blindness should be referred to VR while still in high school. This allows VR counselors to help young adults with transition planning and facilitate a smooth connection between the youth and adult service systems. Young people with both deaf-blindness and a cognitive disability are in particular need of services.

Research Takeaway

Many young adults with deaf-blindness do not receive the services they need after leaving high school, particularly when it comes to job training and assistance. While a majority of these young adults spend at least some time working or pursuing a postsecondary degree, many are unengaged and unplugged from the service-delivery system.

- **With the right supports, young people with deaf-blindness can reach their education- and job-related goals.** More than one-third of these young adults are currently looking for work, and over half say they need more services in order to achieve this goal. VR agencies can provide these young adults with needed training and help them envision and achieve their vocational goals.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

We used data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) survey to build a nationally representative sample of young people with deaf-blindness. Data was collected from 2001-2009. About 90 young people, who were all in their early to mid-20s, were included in the sample. Either the young people themselves or their parents completed the survey. About 30 young people in the sample also had a cognitive disability, and we included this factor in our data analysis.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

McDonnall, M. C., & Cmar, J. (in press). Experiences of young adults with deaf-blindness after high school. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*.

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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