

## Factors and Characteristics Associated with Employment for Individuals with TBI and Visual Impairment

### What Were We Trying to Learn?

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is an injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain, resulting in temporary or permanent disability. Visual impairment following a TBI is common. Individuals with both TBI and visual impairment face unique challenges. We wanted to learn whether vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency service strategies, specific services received, or consumers' individual characteristics were associated with competitive employment and job quality for this population.

### What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

- **Two VR agency service strategies were significantly associated with higher rates of competitive employment:** (1) employing staff with dual expertise in TBI and visual impairment and (2) providing staff training on TBI.
- The following factors and characteristics were also positively associated with being employed at the end of VR services:
  - Competitive employment at the time of VR application
  - Higher education level at the time of VR application
  - Receipt of a college degree or certificate during VR services
  - Receiving services from a separate agency for the blind
  - Receipt of job-related services
- The following factors and characteristics were negatively associated with being employed at the end of VR services:
  - Receipt of SSI
  - Minority race
  - Receipt of disability-related skills training
  - Having a case open for a longer amount of time
- These factors were positively associated with job quality of VR consumers with combined TBI and visual impairment:
  - Higher education level at the time of VR application
  - Receipt of a college degree or certificate during VR services
  - Receipt of information and referral services
  - Older age at the time of VR case closure
- These factors were negatively associated with job quality:
  - Receipt of job search assistance
  - Receipt of SSDI or SSI
  - Female gender

### Research Takeaway

VR agencies that have staff with dual expertise in TBI and visual impairment or that provide staff training on TBI had higher rates of competitive employment for consumers with TBI and visual impairment.

### How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

To improve services to your consumers with combined TBI and visual impairment, consider the following recommendations:

- Pursue training about working with people with TBI through online training opportunities, national and in-state conferences, or internal trainings offered by your VR agency. Consider taking our Basics of Brain Injury and Vision Loss continuing education course, which is offered online, free of charge.

- Be aware that consumers who have lower levels of education; are racial minorities; receive SSI benefits; or need disability-related skills training, such as orientation and mobility or rehabilitation teaching, may need additional support to achieve employment.
- Encourage, and provide support for, consumers to complete an educational program that results in a degree or certificate.
- Provide benefits counseling to consumers who receive Social Security disability benefits in a one-on-one format. This provides the opportunity to answer questions and discuss the financial benefits of working while receiving SSI or SSDI.

## How Was This Project Carried Out?

We combined national VR data with interview data to examine both individual-level and agency-level predictors of employment for individuals with both TBI and visual impairment. The two data sources were:

- RSA-911 data from 2013-2015, which included a sample of 880 VR consumers from 50 agencies
- Interview data with administrators from VR agencies that included questions related to service provision for consumers with combined TBI and visual impairment

## Learn More

Findings are from the following article:

McDonnall, M. C., Cmar, J. L., & Sui, Z. (2020). Service factors and personal characteristics associated with employment and job quality for vocational rehabilitation consumers with combined traumatic brain injury and visual impairment. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 52(3), 223-238.

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For more information about this project, visit the project overview page.

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