

## Research In Focus: A Weekly Digest of New Research from the NIDILRR Community

### High Parental Expectations and Early Supports May Improve Employment Prospects for Youth with Deaf-Blindness

About 10,000 infants, children, and youth in the United States are considered “deaf-blind.” Deaf-blindness is an uncommon and complex disability. People who are deaf-blind have both visual and hearing impairments that are significant enough to require special supports beyond those used by people who are blind or deaf only. Some people with deaf-blindness also have other disabilities which may impact their physical or mental health, or their ability to communicate as well as increase their need for specialized supports. There is limited research on transition-age youth who are deaf-blind, but past research has found that these youth have lower post-high school employment rates and more difficulty in post-school transition than youth with other disabilities. In a recent NIDILRR-funded study, researchers looked at the connection between the characteristics and experiences of high school students with deaf-blindness and their employment success after high school. The researchers wanted to find out which characteristics and experiences of high school students with deaf-blindness predicted their finding a job after leaving high school, and holding a job for at least six months.

Researchers at the [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment for Individuals with Blindness or Other Visual Impairments](#) looked at data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2), collected from a nationally representative sample of youth with disabilities. The youth began participating in the NLTS-2 in 2001, when they were 13-17 years old and enrolled in high school, and they and their parents were surveyed every 2 years until 2009. For this study, the researchers looked at data from about 100 youth with deaf-blindness. Most of the participants had some usable vision and hearing, although about one-fourth were either totally blind with some hearing, totally deaf with some vision, or totally blind and deaf.

The researchers looked at parents’ reports on the youth while they were still in high school to get the following information: whether or not the youth had paid work experience or received any vocational education services such as career counseling; how strongly the parents expected the youth to find a job and be financially self-supporting on a scale from 1 (definitely won’t) to 4 (definitely will); how involved the parent was in the youth’s school life such as attending meetings or events or volunteering; and the youth’s level of self-care, travel, computer, and communication skills. The researchers also looked at data on whether or not the youth had any other disabilities besides deaf-blindness, and whether or not the youth had completed high school. To get information on post-high school employment, the researchers looked at follow-up surveys completed by the youth or their parents after leaving high school. On these surveys, the youth or their parents indicated whether or not the youth had ever

held a paid job after high school, or had ever held a paid job lasting longer than six months.

The researchers found that:

- About half of the youth had held a job within 8 years of leaving high school, and about 40% had held a job for at least six months.
- Experience mattered when it came to finding a job. The youth who had paid work experiences while in high school were almost three times more likely to find a job after high school than the youth who never worked while in high school.
- The odds of finding a job also went up when parents had higher expectations for their children. Youth whose parents expected that their child probably would find a job and be self-supporting were 60% more likely to find a job than those whose parents had lower expectations. The odds of employment were even higher when parents expected their child definitely would find a job and be self-supporting.
- Both vocational education services and parental expectations were connected to holding a job. The youth who received vocational education services while in high school were more than twice as likely to hold a job for at least six months after high school compared to those who did not receive vocational education services. Those youth whose parents reported expecting them to find jobs and be self-supporting were also more likely to hold a job for at least six months after high school compared to those whose parents had lower expectations.
- For the youth with other disabilities in addition to deaf-blindness, parental expectations were especially important to maintaining a job. The youth with additional disabilities whose parents expected them to find jobs were more likely to hold jobs lasting at least six months than the youth without additional disabilities. By contrast, the youth with additional disabilities whose parents did not expect them to find jobs were less likely to hold jobs lasting at least six months than the youth without additional disabilities.
- After accounting for parental expectations, work experiences in high school, and vocational education services, the other factors (parental involvement in the youth's school lives, whether or not the youth had a high school diploma, and the youth's skill levels) were not associated with their likelihood of employment after high school.

The authors noted that parental expectations may have a powerful impact on employment outcomes for youth with deaf-blindness. If youth are expected to become employed and financially self-supporting as adults, their parents and teachers may begin providing services and supports early in their lives to help them achieve employment goals. Parental support may be especially important for youth with deaf-blindness and additional disabilities, who may require a high level of support to find and

keep a job. Educators may want to communicate with parents about the job possibilities for their children with deaf-blindness, and to introduce the youth and their families to adults with deaf-blindness who are employed and can serve as mentors. These discussions can begin well before students with deaf-blindness are in high school.

The authors also noted that paid work experiences and vocational education services during high school may help youth with deaf-blindness develop employment skills. Rehabilitation providers may want to begin providing services to youth with deaf-blindness early in high school, when there is time for them to identify their career interests, receive counseling and support, and obtain meaningful work experiences. With high expectations and appropriate supports, youth with deaf-blindness, even with additional disabilities, can find lasting employment after high school.

#### [To Learn More](#)

This project explored the characteristics and experiences of youth who are deaf-blind in a recent descriptive report.

<http://blind.msstate.edu/docs/characteristicsAndExperiencesOfYouthWhoAreDeafBlind.pdf>

The NIDILRR-funded project [Transition Services that Lead to Competitive Employment Outcomes for Transition-Age Individuals with Blindness or Other Visual Impairments](#) developed a From School to College: A Transition Activity Calendar for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired which includes a checklist of monthly activities beginning middle school through high school. The Calendar also includes links to vital resources for students, parents, teachers, and counselors.

<http://www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/providers/tac/>

This project also developed Career Advantage for V.I.P.s (Visually Impaired Persons), an online employment preparation program for transition-age youth and adults of all ages that includes 8 self-paced modules of instructional materials and activities to guide job seekers, taking them step-by-step from exploration of interests and abilities, through the application and interview processes, to the optimal goal of employment. <http://www.blind.msstate.edu/our-products/online-employment-preparation/>

#### [To Learn More About this Study](#)

Cmar, J.L., McDonnall, M.C., & Markoski, K.M. (2017) In-school predictors of postschool employment for youth who are deaf-blind. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 2017. This article is available from the NARIC collection under Accession Number J77161 and from the [project's publications page](#).

focus on the research funded by NIDILRR. NARIC provides information, referral, and document delivery on a wide range of disability and rehabilitation topics. To learn more about this study and the work of the greater NIDILRR grantee community, visit NARIC at [www.naric.com](http://www.naric.com) or call 800/346-2742 to speak to an information specialist.

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