

Losing Employment: At-Risk Employed Vocational Rehabilitation Applicants With Vision Loss

What Were We Trying to Learn?

Many consumers who are B/VI enter the VR system employed. Often, they are seeking assistance to keep their jobs or advance in their careers. Recent federal legislation emphasizes helping these consumers maintain employment.

However, there is minimal existing research on the characteristics and outcomes of employed VR consumers. We wanted to understand the characteristics and VR services that are linked to higher odds that employed B/VI consumers will lose their jobs.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

Most consumers in our study (84%) maintained employment during their time in VR. However, among those who did not maintain employment, we found some characteristics that make it more likely an employed B/VI consumer will lose their job:

- being female,
- having a secondary disability,
- working fewer hours at the time of application,
- having less education, or
- having a previous unsuccessful VR employment outcome.

Surprisingly, we found that the longer consumers were served by VR, the more likely they were to lose their job, especially for older consumers.

Consumers who were more likely to maintain employment also tended to share some traits, including:

- having at least an undergraduate degree,
- being Business Enterprise Program vendor, or
- having a previous VR closure with a competitive outcome.

Several VR services were also linked to higher odds of maintaining employment for VR consumers who are B/VI:

- on-the-job supports (short-term),
- diagnosis and treatment of impairments, and
- rehabilitation technology services.

How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

- **Assess employed VR consumers for risk factors.** As employed consumers open cases with VR, counselors should check if the consumer has any risk factors linked to job loss. Some of these risk factors, like part-time employment, can be addressed to improve the likelihood of maintaining employment.

Research Takeaway

Many applicants to vocational rehabilitation (VR) services who are blind or visually impaired (B/VI) are already employed. Our study explored the risk factors that make these consumers more likely to lose their jobs.

- **Fast service delivery matters when it comes to job retention.** The likelihood of losing employment increased with VR case length. VR agencies should prioritize job-retention cases and expedite services for consumers who are trying to maintain employment.
- **Improve data sharing to make it easier to keep track of consumers.** Almost one-third of consumers in our study who did not maintain employment had their cases closed due to difficulty contacting them. VR agencies should share data with other workforce partners to maintain current contact information. This helps counselors stay in touch with consumers and hopefully keep them motivated to continue the VR process.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

We analyzed data from the fiscal year 2015 Rehabilitation Services Administration Case Service Report (RSA-911 data) on 4,499 competitively employed VR applicants who are B/VI.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

Crudden, A., McDonnall, M. C., & Sui, Z. (2018). Losing employment: At-risk employed vocational rehabilitation applicants with vision loss. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 112(4), 461-474.

For more information about this project, visit the project overview page: [Job Retention and Advancement: A Mixed Methods Investigation](#).

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