A Circumspect Inventory of Major Employment Problems of The Deaf

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INTRODUCTION

Having recently assumed the responsibilities of a specialized vocational rehabilitation counselor to the deaf, I am becoming increasingly aware of the tremendous void which exists in my knowledge and understanding of their special employment problems. It is imperative for those professionals who work with the deaf to be able to recognize these difficulties and understand the reasons for their existence.

The problem, then, involves the compiling of a circumspect inventory of major employment problems of the deaf through a review of recent research literature.

The purpose of the identification of these problems is to create, within the counselor, a self-awareness and an insight into vocational problems of the deaf. With this basic background of knowledge, I will be able to establish more effectively an empathetic counselor-client relationship. My understanding of the employment problems of the deaf should help me to remove the vocational barriers and guide them in the right direction toward full employment.

Numerous research studies have been conducted on the various problems of the deaf and hard of hearing. To limit this report, only the employment problems of the deaf adult who is of employable age will be considered.

A definition of terms is needed to further clarify the limits of this report. Circumspect is to be carefully attentive to all circumstances that may relate to a certain action, judgement, or conduct. An inventory is an itemized list or catalogue of goods or property. (Good, 1959) Employment is the thing at which one is employed. The deaf are those in whom the sense of hearing is non-functional for the ordinary purposes of life. The hard of hearing are those in whom the sense
of hearing, although defective, is functional with or without a hearing aid. Adult vocational education is instruction offered to adults or out of school youth over sixteen years of age who are already engaged in, or are preparing to enter, an occupation. A problem is any significant, perplexing and challenging situation, real or artificial, whose solution requires reflective thinking. (Webster’s Dictionary, 1960)

**APPROACH**

In reading case records of the deaf and in personal interviews with my clients, I realized that my biggest problem was in a lack of understanding of the obstacles which the deaf have to face in securing employment. The Dictionary of Education was a helpful resource in defining and limiting this problem. The DSH Abstracts, a list of sources of abstracts, including journals relevant to deafness, speech and hearing, was most helpful in locating recent periodicals. Another useful resource used, was the Bibliography of Deafness, an accumulative bibliography of the Volta Review and the American Annals of the Deaf. In my approach to obtaining further information of the employment problems of the deaf, I also consulted the Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications. By writing to Mr. Boyce Williams, Consultant for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing with the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration, I was able to secure sixteen research publications and articles on the deaf and hard of hearing.

Both the Kent State University and University of Akron libraries were used in the research of data for this report. The majority of research data was found in recent research journals, primarily during the years of 1960-1968. Mrs. Boyd Hume, a leading member of the deaf community in Akron, also supplied me with a valuable supply of reprints of government documents and federal grants in aid to the deaf.

**FINDINGS**

Employment in a purposeful and profitable vocation means as much to the deaf as it does to the hearing. The importance of employment should never be underestimated. Entrance into and maintenance of a job which has value for the employee can make life seem worth living in spite of many obstacles. To quote from Pattison, “Employment is nature’s best physician and is essential to human happiness” (Pattison, 1957, p. 733).

In order for the deaf adult to become gainfully employed, he must be able to realize his limitations and choose a suit-
able vocation which is commensurate with his abilities. The deaf adult often has no idea what his work abilities are and may not even know what vocational area he would like to enter. Hoemann found three factors related to deafness which tend to create vocational problems. (Hoemann, 1964) In his article, “The Deaf and Vocational Choice,” he stated that the deaf lack information on the world of work; they lack insight into their own interest and abilities; and many have personality problems which accompany the handicap of deafness. (Hoemann, 1964) Burke found that the deaf basically lack adequate exposure to employment opportunities. (Burke, 1967) Vocational areas are numerous, but it is difficult for the deaf adult to know what vocational opportunities will be open to him with his limitations.

Deafness limits employment opportunities for deaf persons due primarily to the communication and educational problems it presents. (Vernon, 1967) The problem of vocational choice is therefore accented with the deaf person. The job he chooses is related to the kind of life he intends to live. A low paying job, or one which offers little chance for advancement, will limit the deaf person’s economic flexibility in terms of housing, family support, and cultural, educational, and recreational activities (Burke, 1967). An incompatible work situation or job may lead to future emotional complications and employment problems. The solution to this problem is to become acquainted with the characteristics of a job and the conditions under which he would work. Unfortunately, the deaf person cannot be too selective in choosing a job, and he will often grab the first opportunity of employment, before considering the pros and cons of the given situation. There is great need for vocational guidance of the deaf adult. All too often, the deaf adult is unemployed, underemployed, or misemployed because he either does not know that vocational services exist, or if he is aware of them, does not know how to utilize them. (Burke, 1967) The deafened adult may be seriously inexperienced, and not realize how important training would be to his better employment opportunity, and job satisfaction. (Falberg, 1968)

The implications of communication and language deficiencies to the employment problem are particularly apparent when the deaf adult seeks employment for the first time. This can be disastrous to the deaf adult who is experiencing his first job interview. Craig and Silver discuss the importance of preparation for an interview and creating an image of self sufficiency. (Craig and Silver, 1966) The deaf applicant often faces a language problem when it comes to understanding specific terms on a job application form. For example, a deaf person may understand what the term “salary” means,
but may not know what "wages" are. The deaf adult must be able to sell the idea that he will be a good employment risk to the employer. Evidence of a deaf person's ability to communicate may be the deciding factor in favorable placement. (Quigley, 1965)

Many large companies will administer intelligence, aptitude and work experience tests to each applicant. These are usually written tests that measure the applicant's verbal ability, which is the very area in which most of the deaf are most deficient. These tests will often prevent the deaf from obtaining higher level jobs. Thus, it is apparent that the deaf must face the problem of meeting the non-deaf world on its terms, not his. The deaf person's vocational choice will require equal competition with the non-deaf. (Lowell, 1967)

Geist used his Picture Interest Inventory in a survey of the occupational interests of 931 employable deaf males and found that their profiles were very similar to a control group of hearing males. (Geist, 1968) As a result of this study it was shown that a disproportionate number of the deaf hold low-status, low-paying, and generally less desirable manual jobs. (Geist, 1963) This is the basic problem of underemployment which is characteristic of most deaf workers. The deaf adult is not working up to his potential and feels nothing but drudgery, frustration, and a feeling of purposeless existence. (Falberg, 1968)

Often, the able-bodied deaf adult will choose a low-paying manual labor job because it does not require much communication. When the deaf worker becomes dissatisfied with this choice because it does not offer chance for advancement or is not stimulating to him, he is often afraid to leave his job for fear that he may not be able to find another place of employment. (Burke, 1967) Craig and Silver conducted a national survey on the vocational status and adjustment of 10,000 deaf adults, of whom almost 8,000 were employed. (Craig and Silver, 1966) Their research efforts showed that the deaf have a heavy concentration in the skilled and semi-skilled manual occupations. Relatively few of the deaf are employed in professional, technical, clerical, or sales occupations, in which there is a considerable amount of communication used. Craig and Silver also found that over half the employed deaf were working in the manufacturing industries. (Craig and Silver, 1966) The industrial strongholds of the deaf were reported to be in the printing and publishing industries and in the schools for the deaf. (Craig and Silver, 1966) Lunde and Bigman found 17% of deaf in professional, technical, managerial, white collar, and clerical occupations compared to 40% in the general population which presents a rather clear proof of underemployment. (Lunde and Big-
There is a tendency to stereotype the deaf into certain occupations which is due partly to the limited training facilities of schools for the deaf. Too many young deaf people are simply pushed into an occupation which they happen to have learned at school. Again, we see no better attraction other than the fact that other deaf are already earning a living in this occupation and it is convenient. (Hoemann, 1964) There is an increasing concern for the growing concentration of deaf people in the printing trades. Automation has arrived in the printing industry; teletype setting has replaced a large number of linotype operators. What was once a fruitful field of employment for the deaf, is suddenly ending, and, according to Sanderson, there is now no real future for young printers. (Sanderson, 1963) Automation has also invaded the fields of concrete laying and finishing, which had at one time employed many of the deaf. Many deaf women returning to work want to enter into IBM key punch training and computer programming. However, not every deaf woman is capable of this type of work.

The special report on "Research Needs in the Vocational Rehabilitation of the Deaf" stated that vocational problems stem from the problem of communication, the problem of assessing the abilities, aptitudes and interests of the deaf, and the attitudes of employers and general public toward the deaf. (American Annals of the Deaf, 1960)

In a research study on "The Guide Lines for the Establishment of Rehabilitation Facilities for the Deaf," it was found that emotional instability, social immaturity, and educational deficiencies revolve around the lack of vocational experiences. The deaf person may have an unrealistic vocational objective; he may be unstable in employment; or he may completely lack any skills. (Williams, 1961)

When the deaf applicant is finally placed in a job, he finds that he must cope with new aspects of adjustment. Unless there is another deaf worker who communicates in the same way, special efforts will have to be made, to develop a system of communication between the employer and the deaf worker. The employer must be interested in and motivated to help the deaf person adjust to his new work environment. (Craig and Silver, 1966) The initial problem usually develops in training the deaf employee for his new job. (Craig and Silver, 1966) A longer training period is usually required than would normally be expected for a hearing person. Special training in special skills tends to de-emphasize a hearing handicap which in an untrained person in open competition may be emphasized. (Bluett, 1958)

To keep up with the competition of normally hearing
workers, the deaf adult is required to work harder than the average worker because in addition to meeting the mental requirements of a position, the impediment of the hearing handicap must also be overcome. In order to maintain employment and increase the chances for advancement, the deaf employee must show outstanding ability over and above his fellow hearing associates. In order to obtain a promotion he may have to display a familiarity with other phases of work outside the confines of his own specific job. (Lowell, 1967)

The bright deaf adult is sometimes able to overcome these obstacles of underemployment and secure a more important work position. However, the average deaf worker is usually not given the opportunity to prove his capabilities and underemployment becomes a life problem. An assessment of a deaf adult's potential through communicational and language skills, may not be indicative of the creative abilities he might have in a concrete skill. In most cases, on-the-job testing is usually the best method of assessing the deaf adult's vocational skills. (Sweetman, 1964)

An important obstacle to the substantial employment of deaf adults is in the ignorance of the employer and society to the problems of the deaf. Society labels the deaf person as being one who is "deaf and dumb," "retarded," "uneducable," and "odd." At times, this causes even the best qualified deaf job seekers to have trouble finding employment. (Craig and Silver, 1966) The employer may feel uncomfortable in the presence of the deaf adult, because he also feels an inadequacy in communication. People tend to avoid placing themselves in uncomfortable positions and the employment of a deaf person can appear as a threat to the employer's feelings of self-assurance. (Levine, 1960) The employer may have a strong fear of increased rate for industrial insurance if he hires a deaf person and this apprehension is not easily overcome. (Bluett, 1958) The client must meet a physical standard before he can be considered on the basis of his assets. (Bluett, 1958) Here is seen the problem of evaluating a deaf person first on what he can't do rather than what he can do. The employer must learn to place first in importance the question, "Can he do the job?" (Rahn, 1964) Large self-insured organizations are among the most difficult to penetrate because of their adherence to such policies. Some large organizations consider all employees as potential executives and want to shift them around from job to job so as to provide them with a wide range of experience. It was found by Bluett that the deaf do not adjust readily to frequent changes in situations because of the problems they must cope with in the area of communication. (Bluett, 1958)

The Federal civil service attitude is paving the way for
open[ing] job opportunities to the deaf. Each job is surveyed by medical officers of the Civil Service Commission. They determine exactly what tasks must be performed and if the person with a deaf handicap can handle the job. (Bluett, 1958) The Civil Service entrance exams for specific jobs such as clerical workers, key punch operator, post office mail carriers and sorters have been revised with special considerations such as providing interpreters for the deaf.

According to Craig and Silver, the greatest single problem on the job, over and above learning the skill, is the deaf adult's ability to understand his role as an employee. (Craig and Silver, 1966) Failure to identify this role may lead to anti-social behavior and to erratic work habits, which may result in termination of employment. The deaf employee must learn to adjust to working closely with hearing people. He must learn to control overt reactions to misunderstandings and feelings of suspiciousness, and vocal outbursts which sound strange and can be repelling to the hearing person. The deaf adult is usually very sensitive to the feelings of others and he must learn to graciously accept the constructive criticism of his employer and fellow workers. Feelings of suspiciousness and aggressiveness must be removed in order to develop desirable working relations. (Levine, 1960)

The deaf adult often benefits from vocational education. By learning a special skill, the deaf adult has something to offer the employer, and the demands on him are predictable to a certain extent. If he loses his job or is barred from one job opportunity, he can usually find another requiring the same skills and information. (Bluett, 1958)

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The major employment problems of the deaf can be summarized as follows: The problem of choosing a vocation; the problem of entry into a vocation; the problem of training and placement; the problem of maintaining the job; and the problem of advancement.

The general employment problem of the deaf depends on the communication problem and the attitude of the employer and society.

A more complete list of employment problems of the deaf follows.
1. Problem of choosing a vocation
2. Problem of entry into a vocation
3. Problem of realizing his limitation in employment
4. Problem of choosing a vocation which is commensurate with his abilities
5. Problem of lack of knowledge and adequate expo-
sure to employment opportunities

6. Problem of communication during an interview and selling himself to the interviewer

7. Problem of adjustment in employment

8. Problem of training the deaf on a new job and developing a system of communication between the employer and the deaf employee

9. Problem of language ability in understanding technical terms of applications and directions for training

10. Problem of unemployment before and after training

11. Problem of underemployment which is the most persistent problem of the deaf

12. Problem of society's tendency to stereotype the deaf into certain occupations.

These findings indicate the importance of adult vocational education and training; every deaf person should have training in some skill.

Most important, the deaf person is an individual and always an individual. He will not have all of the above problems, and it is difficult to generalize with the special problems of hearing because they are so unique to the individual personality.

Research in the area of vocational employment problems of the deaf is really beginning and most of the resources in this report are recent publications. The problem of educating the employer and society to the problems of the deaf are now starting to take a foothold. The breakdown of the employment barriers of the deaf has to begin with tearing down traditional ideas and planting fertile seeds of understanding in the minds of the public. Society should learn to accept the deaf adult for what he can contribute and from there develop his potential to its fullest.

With the rapidly expanding demands of our age more research is needed into the expansion of technical and vocational education and into the techniques of training the deaf.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


This article provided insight into the testing, training, placement, personal and artificial problems of the deaf.

This article places an emphasis of the importance of the family's role in preparing the adolescent for the world of work.


A thoughtful review which examines the many employment problems of the deaf. A useful resource for this report.


An article which discusses the most persistent employment problem of the deaf: underemployment.


A research article on the survey of occupation of employed deaf males.


A valuable dictionary of useful educational terms.


An article on the factors relating deafness which create vocational problems.


An excellent resource tool into the psychology of deafness and techniques if appraisal for rehabilitation.


This article discusses the competition between the deaf and the hard of hearing in job placement, maintenance and advancement.


The most comprehensive study concerning the economic status, vocational adjustment, occupational conditions and attitudes toward the deaf. An excellent resource for this report.


This book is concerned with the handicapped and with the problems involved in their rehabilitation and employment.


A valuable research report which points out specific vocational problems of the deaf and makes recommendations for
further research.


This is an excellent report on some of the vocational problems facing the deaf and the affects of increasing automation on the employment of the deaf.


A comprehensive booklet which contains a report on a summer workshop for vocational rehabilitation and employment counselors whose purpose was to develop an understanding of the deaf client.


A manual which contains guidelines for professional interpreters of the deaf.


This article describes the communicational and educational problems in employment.


An important reference tool used for defining the terms of the problem and checking on the correct spelling of words.


This article attempts to give attention to the circumstances related to vocational fulfillment.