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BLIND PEOPLE CAN DO ANYTHING

BUT

NOT IN MY COMPANY

EMPLOYER ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
EMPLOYING BLIND AND VISION-  
IMPAIRED PEOPLE

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Previous international research has shown blind and vision-impaired people to be in the less favoured groups of employees employers are willing to hire. None of the research has addressed why this is the case.

The present study was undertaken firstly to see if in New Zealand also, blind and vision-impaired people were less favoured in comparison with other disability groups as potential employees; and secondly, to determine employer attitudes and perceptions towards employing blind people, and how or why these attitudes and perceptions influence employers to overlook the blind and vision-impaired when employing staff.

One hundred and two employers (sample 200) participated in a telephone survey and, of those, six were interviewed again in an in-depth face-to-face interview. A combination of attitudinal and perception survey instruments were used.

The research found participants had mainly favourable attitudes towards blind and vision-impaired people. However, in total contrast, blind and vision-impaired people (alongside those with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities) were regarded the least suitable or least employable for positions most and second most often available in firms across all industries.

The results were congruent with earlier findings (Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans & Peterson, 2000) in that of all of the disability groups, blindness and persons with moderate or severe (mental retardation) intellectual handicap were perceived as the hardest to employ in comparison with other disability groups.

Lastly, this report comments on how potential hiring practices (employers' potential behaviour) can be changed to better match their apparent positive attitudes towards blind and vision-impaired people. A range of recommendations are made such as the need for education programmes in schools, media campaigns and cultivating positive media relationships, workplace training and education, employer mentoring programmes, the development of government policies and strategies and the need for work experience programmes.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the blind, deafblind and vision-impaired people of New Zealand and, in particular, all of those blind individuals who have struggled against huge odds and the effects of persistent attitudinal barriers to obtaining and retaining employment.

“Prejudice is something we see in others and accuse them of it. We rarely admit it ourselves.” Reich and Adcock

“The formula for success is putting the right people in the right jobs and then sitting on the sidelines and being a rousing good cheerleader.” A. Marshal Jones

The DDA doesn't affect  
us here – We have 14 people  
working for us & a blind man



Note: DDA refers to the Disability Discrimination Act (United Kingdom)

## GLOSSARY

**adventitiously blind.** A person who acquires a vision impairment or blindness during their lifetime

**ADA.** Americans with Disabilities Act

**ANZIC.** Australian and New Zealand Industrial Classification (1996)

**ANZSCO.** Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (2005)

**ATDP.** Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons scale.

**ATBP.** Attitudes Towards Blind Persons scale

**attitude.** Cognitive representations of our evaluation of ourselves, other people, things, actions, events, ideas

**blind.** Someone whose vision is such that they meet RNZFB registration criteria

**blind and vision-impaired.** Refers to and is inclusive of blind, vision-impaired and deafblind people.

**congenitally blind.** A person who is born blind or vision-impaired

**deafblind.** People who have both a vision and hearing impairment

**disability.** Impairments which become disabilities when the organisation of society makes access or inclusion difficult

**environment.** Physical characteristics of the world as well as societal attitudes, organisational practices and processes

**habilitation.** Services to help people gain, maintain, and improve skills that allow them to live and participate in their local community

**impairment.** A functional limitation, e.g. person may have limited hearing or experience learning difficulties

**retardation.** Someone with an intellectual disability or handicap

**RNZFB.** Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind

**vision-impaired.** People who have reduced or low vision, some of whom are eligible for membership and receive services from the RNZFB