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## THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN ADULTS

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**CAROL M. REICH, Ph.D.**

In the fall of 1972 and the winter of 1973 a follow-up study was conducted of the former students of the Ontario Provincial Schools for the Deaf at Milton and Belleville, and of the Metropolitan Toronto School for the Deaf (Reich & Reich, 1974). Using a variety of sources, a sample was identified of students believed to be currently living in Metropolitan Toronto, and an attempt was made to locate them for an interview.

Of this group, 66% were successfully interviewed (162). Fifteen per cent (36) refused to be interviewed. However from what was already known about these people, it was concluded that they did not differ in any appreciable way from those who were interviewed. Another 15% (36) could not be located. It is possible that this group represents a different type of individual. The remaining 4% (12), although located, could not be interviewed due to scheduling problems.

The average age of this group was 28 years. Seventy-eight per cent reported that they were born deaf or became deaf within the first year of life. Eighty-nine per cent reported that they can hear no speech without a hearing aid. Thus this group was largely profoundly and prelingually deafened. Average length of attendance at public and secondary school was 13 years.

This paper presents data on the occupational status of this group of deaf adults. It is felt that the data is quite representative of the former students of these schools since completion rate was fairly high and the data was collected by personal interview. Where possible, data from the deaf sample is compared with comparable data on hearing people, which, in some cases, was provided by interviews with 24 hearing siblings of the deaf group.

**THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN DEAF ADULTS**

**EMPLOYMENT RATE**

Almost all of the former students in the sample had been employed at one time or another—96% of the men and 93% of the women. Seventy-seven percent of the men and 58% of the women were employed at the time of the survey. For men, this is somewhat lower than the figure of 84% for Toronto as a whole, while for women, it is higher than the Toronto figure of 40% (Federal Department of Labour, 1973).

From the total job history, we find that men were employed an average of 84% of the time since leaving school. Women who were currently married were employed an average of 80% of the time up to the time of their marriage. After marriage, these women were employed for 48% of the time. Unmarried women were employed 73% of the time since leaving school. The overall rate for women is 61%. Thus employment is an important part of the life of deaf women as well as deaf men.

**ADVANCEMENT**

What is the progress of the deaf through the employment world? The first and last job that people had was coded as to general status using Blishen's (1967) scale. Table 1 gives the average value for deaf and hearing men and women by age, the hearing group in this case being the sibling control sample.

All the figures for the deaf fall in the middle 30's, which is where the average figures for Ontario workers fall (Blishen, 1967). It would seem then, that the deaf are doing relatively well.

Relative to the hearing group however, the deaf are doing more poorly. There was little difference between the two groups of men on the first job, but on the last (or current) job, the hearing men had advanced quite a bit while the deaf had remained stationary. Even though the hearing men were somewhat older than the deaf men in the sample, and thus had had more opportunity to advance, one would expect some movement among the deaf.

**TABLE 1**

**Average Job Status (Blishen's Scale) of Deaf and Hearing Males and Females**

	<b>Group</b>	<b>First Job</b>	<b>Last Job</b>
Males	Deaf (N=74)	36	34
	Hearing (N=7)	33	45
Females	Deaf (N=77)	34	34
	Hearing (N=17)	49	52

## THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN DEAF ADULTS

---

Among deaf women, there was also no movement from first to last job. Although the hearing women also made little advance, they started at a much higher level.

Seventy-four percent of the deaf men and 78% of the women had had a raise in their present job, and 75% of the men and 59% of the women had been promoted. However, only 3% were in a supervisory position. This is another indication of the limited opportunity that the deaf enjoy for advancement.

Several previous studies have concluded that the deaf show unusual job stability, however without presenting any real comparison data from the hearing population (Moore, 1969; Conner and Rosenstein, 1963; Justman & Moskowitz, 1967). However for this study some comparison figures are available from Eninger's research on the male graduates of 4 year technical schools in the United States (1965). This study, done in 1964, looked at graduates from 1953, 1958, and 1962. Graduates from 1958 would have been out of school for about 6 years at the time of the study. Since our male students averaged 8 years out of school, Eninger's 1958 graduates provide the closest point of comparison. Since our sample had been out of school an average of 2 years longer than the 1958 graduates at the time they were studied, and since employment stability generally increases with age, we would expect the deaf to be doing a little better. On the other hand, Eninger's study looked only at high school graduates while our sample included students who left school before graduating as well as those who completed their course of study. On the whole graduates do better than drop-outs, and on these grounds we would expect Eninger's 1958 students to be doing better than the deaf students.

Due to the lack of complete comparability between our sample and Eninger's 1958 sample, data from all three of Eninger's groups are presented (Table 2). However, the 1958 graduates are the best point of comparison for the deaf men. The deaf women had been out of school an average of 10 years and should, perhaps, be compared with Eninger's 1953 graduates. But any comparison of male and female data in this area is questionable.

The percent of time employed since leaving school, which was discussed above, is again presented here. The figure of 84% for men is similar to the figure for Eninger's 1958 graduates.

Average duration of the job currently held was 61 months for men and 44 months for women. The average duration over all jobs was quite a bit less—38 months for men and 32 months for women, both of which are higher than the figures for Eninger's 1958 graduates. Average number of jobs—2.5 for men and 2.2 for women—is also similar to the figures in Eninger's study. It thus appears that the deaf are at least as stable in their employment history as hearing workers. However it is not clear that they are more stable. In terms of present employment, however, deaf men are

**THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN DEAF ADULTS**

**TABLE 2**  
**Employment Characteristics of the Deaf and Graduates in Eninger's Study**

	Per Cent of <sup>a</sup> Time Employed <sup>b</sup>	Duration of Present Job in Months	Average Duration <sup>b</sup> of All Jobs in Months	Average No. <sup>b</sup> of Jobs
Deaf Males (N=78)	84	61	38	2.5
Deaf Females (N=81)	61	44	32	2.2
<b>Eninger's Graduates</b>				
1953	93	—	47	3.1
1958 ←	87	—	26	2.5
1962	84	—	13	2.0

<sup>a</sup>20 males and 6 females were excluded because they went to another school full time after high school.

<sup>b</sup>8 males and 3 females were excluded due to incomplete data.

worse off than the general population. Their present higher rate of unemployment may have been due to the increased rate across the nation at that particular point in time or may reflect seasonal patterns.

The general picture which emerges so far is that deaf people find and keep jobs as well as do hearing people. However, the deaf make little advance in their jobs, and are thus more vulnerable to general changes in economic opportunity. This increased vulnerability of deaf men, who are generally married to deaf women, may be partly responsible for the higher employment rate of deaf women over hearing women.

**EARNINGS**

This picture is reinforced by the data on earnings. Table 3 gives the average earnings by age of those in the sample who are currently employed. Respondents were asked to give their current weekly salary, and these were multiplied by 52 to obtain the yearly salary. This assumes that those who were employed would continue fully employed for the full year. This is not a completely accurate assumption, and the salaries of the deaf are therefore somewhat inflated. Weekly earnings includes income from all jobs currently held, part-time as well as full-time, and represents total gross earnings before any deductions. However, only 2 men and 3 women had more than one job. Our interviewers emphasized the fact that gross income was desired, and felt that people did indeed understand this and respond appropriately.

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**THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN DEAF ADULTS**


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Men in the youngest age group had a yearly average salary of \$5,747 while those in the oldest age group earned \$7,980, an increase of 39%. Women in the youngest age group averaged only \$4,535 and in the highest, \$4,843, an increase of only 7%. Table 3 also contains the average earnings for the nation as a whole obtained from the 1971 taxation returns (Department of National Revenue, 1972). For both men in the youngest group, and women in the two youngest age groups, the national average is lower than the average for the deaf. However, the national average increases dramatically with age—101% for men and 31% for women—so that eventually it far surpasses the averages for the deaf.

However, these national figures actually underrepresent the wages of hearing workers for two reasons—they represent the nation as a whole whereas workers in metropolitan areas generally have higher earnings, and they are derived from 1971 rather than 1972 data. An attempt was made to derive more accurate estimates in the following way. First a correction factor was applied to adjust for the disparity between the nation as a whole and Metropolitan Toronto. The 1971 taxation statistics show an overall national average of \$7,237 compared to Toronto's average of \$7,868, an increase for Toronto of 9%. This was applied to the figures in the second and fifth line of Table 3.

There is as yet no data on the rise in wages from 1971 to 1972. However, in the years 1967-1971, wages increased 7.8%, 7.9%, 8.2%, and 8.9% respectively (Federal Department of Labour, 1973). Since this represents a steady rise, the figure of 8.9%, the extent of increase from 1970 to 1971, should be a conservative estimate of the rise from 1971 to 1972, the year of our study. This correction factor was applied to the average salaries obtained after applying the first correction factor.

**TABLE 3**  
Average Yearly Earnings for the Deaf and the General Population by Age and Sex

Group	Age		
	15-24	25-34	35-44
<b>Males</b>			
Deaf — 1972	\$5747	\$6931	\$7982
Canada — 1971	4884	8216	9847
Toronto — 1972 (estimate)	5803	9761	11,699
<b>Females</b>			
Deaf — 1972	\$4535	\$5338	\$4843
Canada — 1971	3913	5140	5121
Toronto — 1972	4649	6107	6084

**THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN DEAF ADULTS**

The results of applying correction factors are given for men in row 3 and for women in row 6 of Table 3. They show an even greater disparity between the earnings of the deaf and the general population, completely obliterating the apparent advantage of the young deaf adult.

A study of the deaf in Vancouver also reported lower earnings (Boese, 1966). Several studies in the United States report higher earnings for the deaf than for the hearing population. However, in one of these, (Kronenberg & Blake, 1966), the investigators question their data on the hearing population. A second (Lunde & Bigman, 1959) found lower salaries for deaf men and equal salaries for deaf women, but did not take age distribution into account. In a third (Justman & Moskowitz, 1967), the investigators themselves suggest that the data might be biased because most of the deaf live in cities where wages are higher. They did not include enough data in their report to estimate if this fact would be enough to account for the discrepancy. Moores (1969) reports lower salaries in a U.S. study.

**JOB SATISFACTION**

The hearing group more often than the deaf said they liked their present jobs ( $t = 2.42$ ). On a 5 point scale running from "dislike very much" to "like very much," the deaf usually said they "like" their job while the hearing chose "like very much." There was no difference between men and women. When asked what aspects of their job they liked and disliked, the two groups tended to give similar answers. Table 4 presents the various factors and the percentage of deaf and hearing

**TABLE 4**  
**Per Cent of Deaf and Hearing Mentioning Various Sources of Job Satisfaction**

Source	Deaf (N=148)	Hearing (N=24)	Hearing (Adjusted for Responsiveness)
Work itself	57%	17%*	24%*
Pay	41	38	54
Relations with employer	32	17	24
Relations with co-workers	27	42*	60*
Job security	25	4	6
Working conditions	21	33	47*
Benefits	13	0*	0*
Opportunities for advancement	10	8	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>226%**</b>	<b>159%</b>	<b>226%</b>

\*Differences between deaf and hearing are statistically significant.

\*\*Percentages add up to more than 100% because most people gave more than one response.

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**THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN DEAF ADULTS**


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mentioning each one in a positive light. The factors are arranged in their order of importance to the deaf. Note that these percentages add up to more than 100%. This is because most people mentioned more than one aspect of their job in a positive light. However there was a large difference in the average number of responses from deaf and hearing people. Deaf people on the average mentioned 2.3 things and hearing people mentioned only 1.6. Therefore there are two columns for the hearing group. The first gives the raw percentages. The second gives these same percentages corrected for the difference in responsiveness (done by multiplying the raw percentages by 2.3/1.6).

There are four significant differences (test of proportion) between the two groups. The deaf mentioned the work itself most frequently as being a source of positive satisfaction. This is relatively low on the list of the hearing sample. The deaf, on the other hand, give relations with co-workers a relatively low rating, while the hearing saw this as the most satisfying aspect of their job. The choice of co-workers is low for both deaf men and deaf women, and the difference between the hearing and the deaf cannot therefore be attributed to the preponderance of women in the former group.

Pay is second on the list for both groups. Next, for the hearing group, is working conditions, which is significantly lower for the deaf. The final difference is in job benefits, which the deaf mentioned more often than the hearing, but which was mentioned relatively little by either group.

### FINDING A JOB

Table 5 gives the percentages of deaf using various means to find jobs. On both the first and current job, deaf agencies head the list, followed by personal friends. All other sources are relatively unimportant.

**TABLE 5**  
**Job Sources**

Source	First Job (N=146)	Current Job (N=95)
Deaf agency	57%	46%
Friend	29	29
School	9	0
Own efforts	1	9
Written Ads	1	7
Manpower	3	6
Other employment agency	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>



**THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN DEAF ADULTS**

Once a job is located, it is necessary to apply and undergo any selection procedures that are required. We asked each interviewee a set of questions about applying for a job. We asked the same set of questions three times—about his first job, about his current or last job (unless he is still on his first job), and about a job application which was unsuccessful. Table 6 shows the results. Since one-third of the deaf never applied for a job they didn't get, response to this question is somewhat limited. Comparisons of results with these three questions were tested for significance using the Chi Square statistic.

In actually applying for their first job, only 16% of the deaf applied themselves. The remainder had someone else apply for them. On both the first and current job, 70% had a personal interview. On the first job, 85% of these had someone accompany them to the interview. This declined on the current job to 64% (p less than .03). On unsuccessful applications,

**TABLE 6**  
**Behaviour when Applying for a Job**

<b>Part A – The Interview</b>						
	<b>First Job</b>		<b>Unsuccessful Application</b>		<b>Last Job</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>(N)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>(N)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>(N)</b>
Went for an interview	68	148 <sup>a</sup>	62	52	71	95
Was accompanied to interview	85	101	44	32	64	67
Method of communication used in interview						
Speech	40	100	53	32	50	66
Writing	21	100	41	32	30	66
Manual	5	100	0	32	3	66
None	34	100	6	32	17	66
<b>Part B – Filling Out An Application Form</b>						
Filled out a form	67	143	67	52	71	95
Received assistance						
No assistance	37	96	67	34	55	65
Some assistance	43	96	24	34	32	65
Form completely filled by someone else	20	96	9	34	12	65
<b>Part C – Qualifying Tests</b>						
Took a test	18	148	15	52	23	95
Found test difficult	44	27	50	8	27	22
Didn't understand directions	18	27	12	8	23	22

<sup>a</sup>Whether or not a particular question was asked sometimes depended on the answer to a previous question. Therefore the N's vary from question to question.

## THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN DEAF ADULTS

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only 44% of the sample were accompanied to the interview. Thus it seems that the deaf benefit from help in the interview situation.

On the first job, 67% had to fill out a form and 71% had to meet this requirement on the current job. Only 38% could fill out the form without help on the first job, increasing to 55% on the current job ( $p = .10$ ). Relatively few employees were required to take a test when applying for a job, and there was no change over time—18% on the first job and 23% on the current job.

Thus the deaf appear to be very dependent for help in obtaining a job. Although this dependency is greatest for the first job, most remain dependent to some extent in later job seeking as well. Agencies for the deaf provide a real service in this regard.

Additional information on job applications is given in Table 6.

### THE SITUATION ON THE JOB

A fair number of the deaf reported getting special help to learn the job—25%. This help came almost exclusively from hearing employees rather than other deaf employees of an outside agency. However a large number do work with other deaf—31% of the employed men and 43% of the employed women. Almost none said that their job was changed in any way to compensate for their handicaps.

The deaf are aware that their handicap limits their job opportunities; 51% of the men and 61% of the women felt that this was so. 46% of the men and 34% of the women report that deafness is a problem to them in their current job. However, 27% of the men and 15% of the women reported deafness to be an advantage, the most frequent comment being that it allows increased concentration or freedom from noise.

### SUMMARY

A follow-up study of former students of three schools for the deaf in Ontario shows that deaf adults are economically disadvantaged relative to the hearing population. Although the overall employment history of deaf men is similar to the employment history of hearing men, their present rate of employment was lower. Deaf men are at least as stable in their employment patterns as are hearing men, and there was some evidence that they are even more stable. However they have had little advancement within their jobs, and salaries are much lower, particularly for those in the middle years.

The employment rate for deaf women is higher than for hearing women, and may be due to the lower economic standing of their hearing impaired husbands.

## THE OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY OF URBAN DEAF ADULTS

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Deaf adults seem quite dependent on help in getting a job, although this decreases somewhat with experience. Agencies serving the deaf are the most important resource in locating jobs. Many deaf people have someone else actually apply for them, whether an agency or a friend, and most who have an interview, find someone to accompany them. Many deaf need help in filling out the employment forms that are required. However only 25% reported getting any special help to learn the job and virtually no one said that their job was changed in any way to compensate for their handicap.

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