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## A National Pilot Study of Psychological Evaluation Services to Deaf Vocational Rehabilitation Clients

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## **A NATIONAL PILOT STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION SERVICES TO DEAF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CLIENTS**

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**and**

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The use of the psychological evaluation in the Vocational Rehabilitation process has been consistently justified by a philosophy of comprehensive service (Jaques, 1970) and a pervasive interest in the psychosocial aspects of adjustment to disability (Shontz, 1975; Wright, 1960). The psychological evaluation is most useful when conducted by an experienced, qualified rehabilitation psychologist (APA, 1970; APA, 1975; Brieland, 1971), when testing instruments are reliable and valid (Anastasi, 1968; Cronbach, 1970), and when the psychological evaluation can be implemented by meaningful vocational, educational and counseling services (McGowan & Porter, 1967).

Psychological evaluations can be especially useful in the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation services to deaf clients. Levine (1960), Stewart (1968), and Vernon (1967; 1971), experts in the psychological and vocational implications of deafness, have endorsed the use of the psychological evaluation with deaf Vocational Rehabilitation clients. Brenner and Thompson (1967), Falberg (1967), Levine (1960), Ross (1967), Vernon (1967, 1971) and others have offered guidelines for examiner qualifications, testing instruments, and communications techniques used with deaf clients. In spite of these initiatives, questions are being raised in many parts of the country about the quality of psychological evaluation services available to deaf Vocational Rehabilitation clients.

This pilot study was conducted to obtain the names and academic degrees of persons providing psychological evaluation services to deaf voca-

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tional rehabilitation clients in the 50 states, Washington, D.C., Guam and Puerto Rico. Much research remains to be done on the manual communication skill, academic preparation and experience in deafness of the psychological examiners of deaf VR clients, but it is hoped that this survey will be useful to Vocational Rehabilitation agencies planning services for deaf clients.

**Method:**

Letters were sent in the spring of 1975 to Vocational Rehabilitation directors of the 50 states, Washington, D.C., Guam, and Puerto Rico requesting the names and academic degrees of persons employed or contracted to provide psychological evaluation services to deaf Vocational Rehabilitation clients in their state.

**Results:**

Responses were received from 43 state Vocational Rehabilitation directors or their delegates. Eleven state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies reported that they have no one in their states at any academic qualification level with a sufficient understanding of deafness to provide psychological evaluation services to deaf VR clients. It is interesting to note that the 1971 national census of the deaf population (Schein & Delk, 1974) indicates that approximately 300,225 deaf people reside in the eleven states having no psychological examiners for deaf VR clients.

One state and two territorial Vocational Rehabilitation agencies report that they use doctoral degree psychologists exclusively in the psychological evaluations of deaf VR clients. Eight state VR agencies reported the use of only sub-doctoral psychometrists, counselors, or psychologists when psychological evaluation services are needed for deaf Vocational Rehabilitation clients. It was not established that psychological evaluation services provided by these sub-doctoral degree examiners were conducted under the supervision of certified VR psychologists in compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 guidelines and American Psychological Association (1975) standards for providers of psychological services.

Sixteen state VR agencies use both doctoral degree and sub-doctoral degree examiners for the psychological evaluations of deaf clients. Three state VR agencies forwarded their entire undifferentiated statewide list of licensed psychologists available for all VR psychological evaluation referrals. It is possible that these state VR agencies err in assuming that a license to provide psychological services is adequate for psychological evaluations of deaf people.

One responding state VR agency was unwilling to participate in this survey. Two other state VR agencies were unable to forward the information

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requested though they knew that psychological evaluations of deaf VR clients were being done. We have no information about the psychological evaluation services available to deaf VR clients in the nine states and one territory not responding to the survey after three letters.

**DISCUSSION**

In spite of the increasing numbers of deaf and multiply disabled deaf people (Schein & Delk, 1974) and the vocational crises they face (Vernon, 1971b), the results of this survey suggest a lack of commitment to deaf Vocational Rehabilitation clients in many parts of the country. Several concerns emerge from this study:

1.) Some state VR agencies have reneged on their responsibility to provide meaningful service to deaf people. These states may be in violation of the law and compounding the impact of deafness through subtle discrimination.

2.) Other state VR agencies having an adequate commitment to deaf clients are hard pressed to find qualified rehabilitation psychologists with academic and practical experience in deafness. There are still only three academic institutions in the United States today offering doctoral degree training in the psychosocial assessment of deaf people (Craig & Craig, 1975).

In summary, this study demonstrated that no psychological evaluation services are available to deaf vocational rehabilitation clients in at least eleven states. Thirty-one state VR agencies offer psychological evaluation services to deaf clients, but few states subscribe to equivalent qualification criteria in selecting psychological examiners of deaf Vocational Rehabilitation clients.

This situation can only be remedied through a renewed dedication of rehabilitation professionals to the spirit and letter of Vocational Rehabilitation law and through the increasing mobilization of deaf citizens (Vernon, 1974).

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