

Network 1000 Survey 1: Comparing the general population with the registered blind and partially sighted population

Introduction

This research was carried out for RNIB by the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR). It compares the circumstances and opinions of the registered blind and partially sighted population with those of the general population on a range of topics.

Method

The research, analysed people's responses to questions taken from national population surveys and compared these to responses given to equivalent questions by people who took part in the Network 1000 survey of registered blind and partially sighted people in Britain. The national surveys used for comparison included the British Household Panel survey, the General Household survey and the British Social Attitudes survey.

Key messages from the research

1. Registered blind and partially sighted people of working age are more likely to live alone than the general population. 19 per cent of blind and partially sighted people aged 18 to 29 live alone while only 10 per cent of the general population do so. Among the 30 to 49 age group, 24 per cent of blind and partially sighted people live alone, whilst only 8 per cent of the general population live alone. For people aged 50 to 64, the figures are 29 per cent versus 13 per cent.
2. Registered blind and partially sighted people between 30 to 64 years of age are more likely to be single compared with the general population of the same age. In the 30 to 49 age group, 29 per cent of blind and partially sighted people are single and have never married compared with 12 per cent of the general population.

3. Registered blind and partially sighted people are more likely to report having an additional long term health problem or disability compared with the general population. These differences are more pronounced in younger age groups. Among 18 to 29 year olds, 46 per cent of blind and partially sighted people have an additional disability while in the general population, 15 per cent of this age group have a long standing illness or disability.
4. Registered blind and partially sighted people between 30 and 64 years of age report greater financial difficulty than people of working age in the general population. 45 per cent of blind and partially sighted people in this age group describe their financial situation as “just about getting by” or worse, compared with 31 per cent of the general population.
5. Registered blind and partially sighted people aged between 30 and 64 years are less likely to have a home computer than people of the same age in the general population. 77 per cent of blind and partially sighted people and 88 per cent of the general population aged 30 to 49 have a home computer. For the 50 to 64 age group, 64 per cent of blind and partially sighted people and 73 per cent of the general population have a computer at home.
6. Blind and partially sighted people aged 18 to 29 are more likely to have a degree or higher qualification than those in the general population. 24 per cent of people aged 18 to 29 in the Network 1000 survey had a degree or higher versus 18 per cent of the same age group in the general population.
7. People registered as blind or partially sighted aged 18 to 49 are more likely to report having no qualifications than the equivalent groups in the general population. 10 per cent of blind and partially sighted 18 to 29 year olds and 16 per cent aged 30 to 49 had no qualifications compared with 7 per cent and 11 per cent in the general population.
8. Registered blind and partially sighted people with no qualifications experience exceptionally low levels of employment. Only 16 per cent of blind and partially sighted people who have no qualifications are in work compared to 62 per cent in the general population who are in work, and are without qualifications.
9. Registered blind and partially sighted people appear less likely to participate in some activities which occur outside the home, compared to the general population. 55 per cent of working age blind and partially sighted people and 24 per cent of retirement age describe “going out for a drink” as one of their leisure activities compared to 87 per cent of working age and 37 per cent of retirement age in the general population. Only 12 per cent of blind and partially sighted people of both working age and retirement age attend evening classes or similar activity groups, while in the general population, 30 per cent of working age people and 25 per cent of retirement age attend evening classes.

In summary

- This research has found that there are both differences and similarities between people who are registered blind and partially sighted and the rest of the population in the UK.
- Some of these differences are age related, with blind and partially sighted people between the ages of 30 to 64 being more likely to be single, to live alone and to experience greater financial difficulty, compared to people of the same age in the general population.
- Younger blind and partially sighted people between the ages of 18 and 29 are more likely to have another disability than those of the same age in the general population. They are also more likely to have a degree or higher qualification, or to have no qualifications at all.
- Registered blind and partially sighted people of all ages appear to participate less in activities outside the home compared to the general population. In particular, “going out for a drink”, attending evening classes and local group meetings, and attending religious worship.

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