Deaf people has a lower level of education

The study will be part of a dissertation which main focus is: deaf people’s position on the labor market. Other studies to this dissertation are in progress.

Differences between the education of deaf and hearing

Deaf and hearing pupils have not had access to similar educational opportunities in Sweden. One major difference between education for deaf and hearing is the educational focus, which for deaf persons mainly has been towards vocational education whereas the focus for hearing persons has been towards theoretical education. Another difference is the duration of compulsory education, which has always been longer for deaf persons. However, in 1965 the special schools for the deaf were turned into a compulsory 9-year comprehensive school, as the schools for hearing already had been for some years. Because of this unified education in Sweden, the education of deaf persons became, in terms of content, more similar to the education of hearing persons. But it was not until 1981 that deaf and hearing persons gained the same opportunities to assimilate the education. In 1981 the Swedish sign language was recognized which made it possible for deaf persons to receive education in sign language. Because of these two reforms, the education for deaf and hearing persons was formally equal. Has this formally equal education resulted in equal levels of educational attainment between deaf and hearing people in Sweden?

Previous studies concerning the level of educational attainment among deaf

A few studies have attempted to examine the levels of educational attainment among deaf people in Sweden but these studies have limitations. For instance; they have difficulties separating prelingual deaf from persons with other hearing impairments, making representative samples and having large rates of non responses (Rydberg, 2006). Because of these limitations it is not possible to present the level of educational attainment among deaf persons in Sweden.


Swedish scientists have performed a study on the level of Educational attainment among deaf people in Sweden.

An extended version of this study was originally presented in the Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education.

The study compares the education level of the deaf compared to the normally hearing.
Studies from other countries suggest that the levels of educational attainment among the deaf are lower than in the rest of the population and that deaf women have higher levels of educational attainment than deaf men (Barnartt & Christiansen, 1996; Døves uddannelses- og arbejdsmarkedsforhold, 2006; Lehtomäki, 2004; MacLeod-Gallinger, 1992).

### Participants and material of this study

In this study the deaf population consists of 2,144 individuals born between 1941 and 1980 who have attended a special school for the deaf in Sweden and/or the Swedish National Upper Secondary School for the Deaf. This deaf population is a total population of all persons who attended these schools but it does not include all deaf people born in Sweden between 1941-1980, because to be included in the deaf population persons also had to be registered in the national population register in Sweden on the 31st of December 2005. Persons from schools for the deaf with additional impairments are excluded and none of the persons in the deaf population got a cochlear implant at an early age. To be defined as deaf in this study, a person has to have a hearing loss at an early age and must have attended a special education program for the deaf. The deaf population is compared to a reference population which consists of 100,000 randomly chosen individuals from the total population living in Sweden in 2005. They are, as people in the deaf population, born between 1941 and 1980. Data consist of registered information from the year 2005 and are taken from a database at Statistics Sweden; the ‘Integrated database for labor market research’. The main variable in this study is the level of educational attainment. It is measured as the highest level of education that a person has completed. The variable has three subgroups: (a) maximum upper secondary education, (b) from post-secondary education one semester to two years, and (c) post-secondary education of three years or more.

### Level of Educational Attainment

The results show that the level of educational attainment in the deaf population is lower than in the reference population. Almost nine out of ten (87%) in the deaf population have ‘upper secondary education’ at the most as compared to 65% of the reference population. The requirement in Sweden for getting a university degree is at least 3 years of postsecondary education. In the deaf population, 5% completed this level of education, as compared to 21% in the reference population. Women have higher level of educational attainment than men in the deaf, as well as in the reference population. Another similar pattern in both populations concerns age. Higher levels of educational attainment are more common among younger people than older. When it comes to immigrant background there are differences between the deaf and the reference population. In the deaf population the percentage with a postsecondary education of at least 3 years is a little higher in the group with an immigrant background than in the group with Swedish background and the percentage of upper secondary education is a little lower. There were no differences noted between persons with an immigrant or Swedish background in the reference population. Neither sex, age category, nor immigrant background can explain the differences in level of educational attainment between the two populations. There are although other factors that might influence the educational attainment.

### Factors with possible influence on the level of educational attainment

One important factor is communication. To assimilate an educational program it is important that communication between teachers and pupils work properly. If it does not, the pupil will surely have difficulties taking in the provided education. This could happen if teachers and pupils do not have the same standard in sign language. Teachers with Swedish as their first language may have
Level of educational attainment (%)

A standard of sign language that is below that of deaf pupils who have sign language as their first language. It is central that teachers have high standard in sign language.

Another important factor connected to higher education and the level of educational attainment is good knowledge in the Swedish language. Since deaf people have Swedish as their second language, they may lack sufficient knowledge of the Swedish language. The expectations people in the surroundings have on an individual may also have an impact on the level of educational attainment. In a study concerning hard-of-hearing students it was found that low expectations from persons in the surroundings had an impact on the students’ level of educational attainment (Danermark, Antonson, & Lundström, 2001).

Other studies show that 30-40% of deaf pupils have additional difficulties.

References


Conclusions

The level of educational attainment among deaf people is lower than among the reference population. Even if the education of deaf and hearing people are now formally equal in Sweden, deaf people do not have the same level of educational attainment as other citizens. Educational reforms, such as those implemented in Sweden since 1965, are most certainly necessary to raise the educational level of deaf people but measures taken so far are not enough for deaf people to reach the same level of educational attainment as the rest of the population in Sweden.