

# **Exploring the lived experiences of British Sign Language (BSL) Users who access NHS Hearing Aid Clinics**



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### INTRODUCTION

73,000 British Sign Language (BSL) users in England >

Some wear hearing aids and access NHS adult hearing aid services

They are not typical users of hearing aid services and are an underrepresented group

Little
evidence
exists of their
experiences
of these
services from
their point of
view

Deaf BSL
users who
access
hearing aid
services are
sharing
anecdotal
accounts of
lack of equity

Objective is to explore Deaf BSL users experiences of NHS hearing aid services

To use data from interviews to develop a survey of Deaf BSL users' experiences of NHS hearing aid services

## **METHODS**

35085

Purposive expert sampling used where researcher recruited expert informants based on age, diversity, socio-economic background

INCLUSION

BSL user, 18+, live in England, currently wear acoustic hearing aids, use NHS hearing aid services



No hearing aids, live outside England, under 18, non- BSL user, have a cochlear implant



8 culturally Deaf participants, 4 female and 4 male, age range between 30 – 76 years old



Design – Qualitative, semi-structured interview conducted in BSL by the Deaf researcher



Analysis is underpinned by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Data were analysed using a 6-step process framed by Smith et al (2009)<sup>1.</sup> 1. Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

## **RESULTS**

The 6-step IPA analysis produced four main overarching themes, each with three subthemes.

# 1. Hearing/Deaf Literacy

- i. Identity most participants viewed themselves as a culturally Deaf person who happens to wear hearing aids.
- ii. Awareness and ownership of 'hearing' discussion around what they can hear and use hearing aids for is not usual practice in hearing aid clinics and the Deaf community.
- iii. Responsibility insufficient knowledge on hearing aids led to lack of agency, self-advocacy or patient activation.

## 2. Who knows best

- i. Expertise by experience participants reported their lived experiences of hearing aids are not respected by their clinics.
- ii. Sees the ear not the person and vice versa technology and audiograms are favoured to identify problems over communication.
- iii. Making informed choices 2 out of 8 participants reported they use interpreters in appointments but this did not guarantee that they were fully informed as probing questions are rarely asked.

## 3. Hearing aid - what for?

- i. Why reject hearing aids/why come back to them? rejected due to peer pressure, stigma, not beneficial or in a signing environment. Returned - to hear children, helps tinnitus, improved technology.
- ii. Why wear hearing aids? to hear background noises, to feel safe, gives confidence, being in control and to assist with lipreading.
- iii. Understanding hearing aids most participants are not fully aware of their hearing aids potential because of lack of BSL resources.

#### 4. Always the same

- i. Inequality of access participants described feelings of disempowerment caused by lack of autonomy.
- ii. Cultural competency reports of communication barriers where staff cannot sign and audiologists displayed little Deaf awareness.
- iii. Systemic discrimination all clinics are hearing-centric where all systems are sound-based i.e. telephone, sound-based patient calling systems and staff communicate in speech.

#### TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- This is the first study to explore and elicit culturally Deaf signers experiences of hearing aids and audiology services in the UK.
- The word 'hearing' and 'to hear' needs further exploration and has implications on Deaf identity literature.
- Hearing aids are not used primarily for spoken language access by Deaf signers. This will offer improved understanding for audiologists on Deaf signers motivations for hearing aid use.
- Results show many failings of cultural competence practices. Adult hearing aid services need to review their cultural competency practices with Deaf signers.
- The findings may be applicable to other under-represented groups who are not typical users of NHS acoustic hearing aids.
- Manuscript is currently under review at International Journal of Audiology

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