THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

# Hearing Loss: You're not alone!
# A quick guide for living well with hearing loss

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## ABSTRACT

Social isolation and feelings of inadequacy are reported by older adults with hearing loss. The detriment to the psyche may lead to withdrawal from relationships and community. Individuals with hearing loss may not understand that others share the same feelings. An informational brochure highlighting the emotional consequences of hearing loss and information regarding coping techniques, technological assistance, and resources was provided to older adults. Receptiveness to information regarding emotional aspects of hearing loss was evaluated.

## INTRODUCTION

Assessment of hearing loss often includes investigation of activity limitations for individuals with hearing loss. Audiologists favor Informational counseling techniques, which may mean that assessing and addressing emotional detriments such as isolation and impact on self-perception is insufficiently explored. The relationship between hearing loss and social isolation, particularly for the elderly, has long been realized (i.e. Weinstein and Ventry, 1982); however, it is important for individuals with hearing loss, and their families, to realize that these feelings are common consequences of hearing loss and appropriate resources may be helpful .

A service-learning project was initiated by AuD students from UT Dallas and community mentor from the Deaf Action Center of Dallas. As a group, we wanted to better understand the frequency and nature of the emotional distress caused by hearing loss for the elderly, considered age 50 and older according to the AARP. The Deaf Action Center Hearing Loss Specialist noted that many clients experienced substantial emotional effects and stress and often were unaware that these consequences were shared by others with hearing loss. Further, whether or not clients used hearing aids or cochlear implants, many were under informed about resources, including hearing assistive technology. This project aimed to explore the emotional consequences of hearing loss, discern technological usage other than hearing aids, and ultimately create a resource that addressed these issues. The group sought to provide information that resonated with adults with hearing loss and offer strategies and resources to combat altered self-perception, loneliness, and emotional distress. Further distribution of this information to the friends and family members of people with hearing loss was also deemed important.

## PROCEDURES

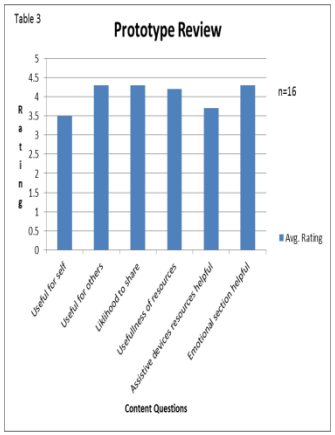
**Information Gathering/Primary Sources:** An 18-question survey was created for use with adults with hearing loss to investigate emotional health, current use of local and state resources, and experience with available technology. Most of the questions were adapted from the HHIE (Hearing Handicap Inventory for the Elderly) and COSI (Client Oriented Scale of Improvement). Sixteen older adults who attended a health fair, and who were long term hearing aid or cochlear implant users, completed the survey. Initial survey results are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. Regarding emotional turmoil and social effects, more than 50% of our respondents reported emotional detriment as a consequence of hearing loss. Most had experience with various forms of hearing assistive technology yet continued to experience problems over the phone and with television.

## SUMMARY

**The Prototype:** A prototype of an informational brochure and reference guide, *"Hearing Loss: You're not alone! A quick guide for living well with hearing loss,"* was created that highlighted the emotional and self-perceptual consequences of hearing loss. It also offered solutions to communication breakdowns, information about access in the Dallas-Fort Worth area to hearing assistive technology, and contact information for local support groups and agencies. The brochure was provided to residents of independent living facilities and members of local chapters of the HLAA. A 12 question survey, using a 5-point Likert scale, that addressed the usefulness of the brochure content was distributed alongside the brochure. Sixteen surveys were returned and results are indicated in Table 3. Average ratings for all content questions were 3.5 or greater. Nearly all respondents indicated that content on emotional and perceptual consequences of hearing loss was informative and helpful and that information about access to technology and other resources was important. Respondents provided useful suggestions regarding additional resources and clarifications of terms such as "telecoils." The goal of this experience was to make a product that was relevant and useful, and through continued refinement, nears closer to completeness.

## OUTCOME

Table 3




## STASTISTICAL INFORMATION

Table 1

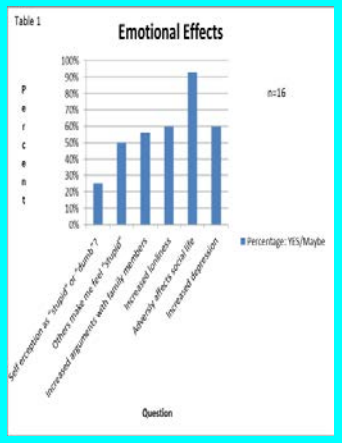
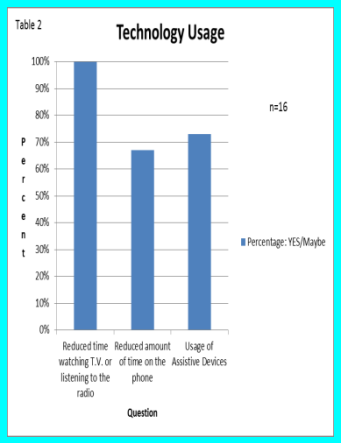



Table 2




## CONCLUSIONS

**Benefits to the Community:**

Provides a resource for those with hearing loss
Provides information on available esources and support groups
Creates public awareness about hearing loss
Provides information on services for hearing impaired
Gives insight into how hearing impaired people feel

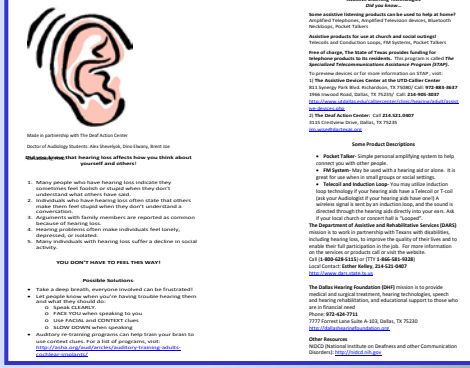
**Benefit to Us as a group:**

Gives us more insight into emotional aspects of hearing loss
Have a better understanding about needs of senior citizens with hearing loss
We realized the importance of using outcome measures
We learned that doing a seemingly small task can make a difference

**Next Steps:**

Continue incorporating community feedback into updated versions of brochure
Make sure all info is up to date
Investigate opportunities for the mass spread of this information
Continue working with the Deaf Action Center to incorporate future patient concerns
Clear up confusing definitions

## Brochure:



**Hearing Loss: You're not alone!**

A quick guide for living well with hearing loss.

## SAMPLE OF PRODUCT FEEDBACK

"I think this is an effective way to draw in people who are struggling with hearing loss and don't know what to do."

"The brochure is excellent and something we can use to benefit potential clients and members …"

"I work with people that deal with hearing loss on a daily basis and would love to use this brochure for those new patients with hearing loss."

"This [brochure] contained great information; however I would change the word "stupid" and "dumb" in the survey. My hearing loss doesn't make me feel dumb."

"I was aware of most everything provided in the brochure, but I think it would be great for my friends and family."