The Emotions of Adult Children of Parents’ with Hearing Loss: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract
A qualitative analysis was performed in order to determine what emotions adult children undergo while dealing with their parents’ hearing impairment. In-depth semi-structured interviews were completed in two different U.S. states with a total of 12 participants. The researchers reported the emotions that arose and were categorized into behavioral contexts in which they occurred. Audiologists are probably aware of some of the more negative emotions expressed by adult children in relation to audiologic rehabilitation such as frustration and anger, but may be pleased to see that acceptance and joy were sometimes apparent as well.

Purpose
While seeking audiologic care, many older adults are accompanied by a spouse and/or an adult child. Research has demonstrated that hearing loss not only affects the person diagnosed with hearing loss, but also their family members (Donaldson, Worrall, Hickson, 2004; Hallam, Ashton, Sherbourne & Gailey, 2006; Hétu, Jones & Getty, 1993). Previous research has focused on the effects of hearing loss on an unpaired spouse and the emotions they express when dealing with their partner’s loss. Little research has focused on adult children and the emotions they display when a parent has hearing loss. By determining how adult children are affected by their parent’s hearing loss, more effective counseling tools may be created.

Methods & Materials
This qualitative analysis included 12 adult children of hearing impaired parents. The participants included 8 females and 4 males who ranged from 22 to 61 years old. Only one of the participants resided with his mother, while the other subjects were in frequent contact with their parents. Using individual semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to discuss how their parents’ hearing loss impacted their relationship and communication. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Emotions in the transcripts were discovered using both bottom-up and top-down analyses. Any excerpts when emotions were expressed (e.g. “I felt...”) were analyzed. Additionally, emotions terms described by Plutchik (2002) were located in the text and the surrounding excerpts were selected. Emotions and behavioral contexts were grouped into categories using NVivo software.

Results
In the analysis of the transcriptions the majority of emotions could be categorized into 11 categories: annoyance/frustration, anger, joy, sadness, vigilance, anticipation, appreciations, self-reflection, acceptance, audiologic rehabilitation, and hearing aid use and non-use. Figure 1 displays the emotions that occurred most often in the data and the behavioral contexts in which they occurred.

Figure 1. Emotions which occurred most frequently in the transcripts

Most of the negative emotions expressed by spouses in earlier research (Donaldson, Worrall, Hickson, 2004; Hallam, Ashton, Sherbourne & Gailey, 2006; Hétu, Jones & Getty, 1993) were expressed by the adult children in the current research. For example, Hétu, Jones & Getty (1993) found that wives with hearing-impaired husbands expressed frustration and anger due to their husband’s hearing loss. Hallam et al. (2008) determined that the effort of spoken communication gave rise to irritability, tiredness, depression and frustration. These findings were echoed in the emotions reported here.

Conclusions
Audiologists may want to consider the impact of audiologic rehabilitation on the family members of their patients. While close relationships are vulnerable to the effects of hearing impairment (Hétu, Getty & Jones, 1993; Hallam et al., 2008), Jones, Kyle & Wood (1997). From the findings in this research, and previous research, it must be stressed that counseling should focus on the needs of both the family member and the hearing-impaired person. Future research should be conducted to elaborate on the rehabilitative needs of the family members. By creating counseling tools for adult children and their parents, old habits of communication can be changed, leading to the development of understanding between family members and ultimately better relationships.

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References