

The Emotions of Adult Children of Parent's with Hearing Loss: A Qualitative Study

Karah Miller, B.S.¹, Joseph Montano, Ph.D.², Tine Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, Ph.D.³, Jill Preminger, Ph.D.¹
 University of Louisville School of Medicine¹, Weil Cornell Medical College², National Institute of Public Health (Denmark)³

Abstract

A qualitative analysis was performed in order to determine what emotions adult children undergo while dealing with their parents' hearing loss. 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 the 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, 2008; Héту, Jones & Getty, 1993). Previous research has focused on the effects of hearing loss on an unimpaired 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

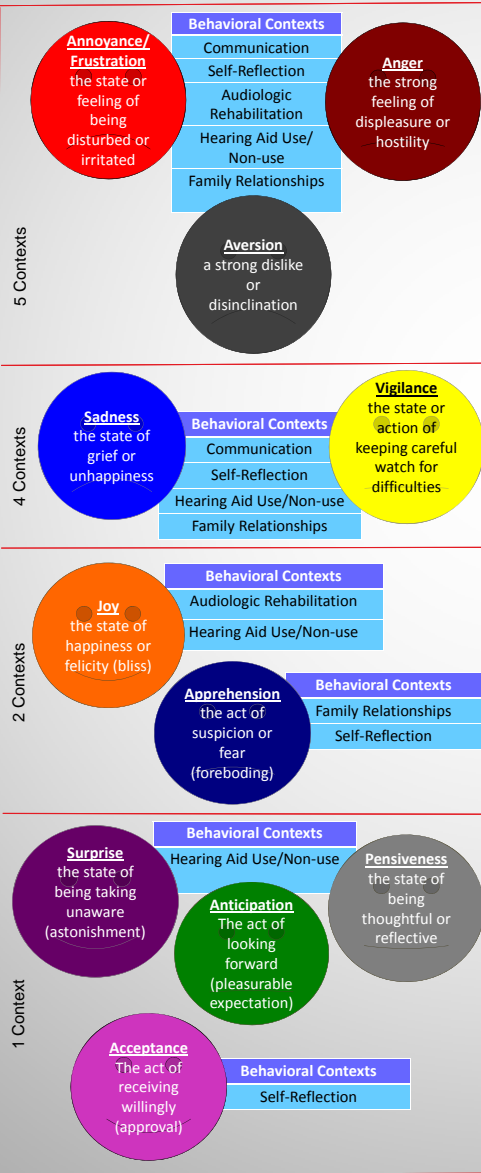
This qualitative analysis included 12 adult children of hearing impaired parents. The participants included 8 females and 4 males who ranged from 22 to 61 years. Only one of the participants resided with his mother, while the other subjects were in frequent contact with his or her parent. During individual 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 transcripts the majority of emotions could be categorized into 11 categories: aversion, annoyance/frustration, anger, joy, sadness, vigilance, pensiveness, surprise, apprehension, acceptance and anticipation. The behavioral contexts in which the emotions occurred were organized into five categories: 1) self-reflection (the subjects' thoughts on the impact of the hearing loss on his/herself), 2) family relationships, 3) family communication, 4) audiologic rehabilitation (attitudes about hearing loss and rehabilitation), and 5) hearing aid use and non-use. Figure 1 displays the emotions seen most often in the data and the behavioral contexts in which these emotions occurred.

Results

Figure 1. Emotions which occurred most commonly in transcripts with their behavioral contexts



As most audiologists might expect, the emotions which occurred most frequently were Annoyance/Frustration, Aversion, and Anger. For example, one subject felt Annoyance when talking to her father because repetition was often necessary (Table 1, row 1). Aversion was sometimes discussed when considering how the parent's hearing loss contributed to a negative relationship between the participant and parent (Table 1, row 2). Anger was expressed when one subject reported she was sick and tired of the high volume on the television (Table 1, row 3). Anticipation, Acceptance, and Surprise occurred rarely. Anticipation and Surprise occurred when the adult child discussed HA use/non-use. For example, one subject was Surprised that her mother would not wear her hearing aids, since her mother usually listened to what her doctors recommended. Throughout the transcripts two positive emotions were found: Joy and Acceptance. As can be seen in Table 1 (row 4), Joy was expressed when a participant noted that she did not have to repeat herself when her mother wore her hearing aids. Acceptance was noted once within the transcripts when a subject was discussing audiologic rehabilitation; this is shown in the last line of Table 1.

Table 1. Emotions, Behavioral Contexts, and Representative Excerpts

Emotion	Behavioral Contexts	Representative Excerpt
Annoyance/Frustration	Communication	He would ask us to repeat things a lot. He actually would accuse me and my sister of mumbling a lot, which was probably partially true, but a lot of times it was frustrating because it seemed like we would say it loud and clear and have to say it a couple times
Aversion	Family Relationship	(In regards to the impact of the HL on the subject's relationship with her mother) It puts a little more burden on me because I know she's not as capable, and it's also negative because it's much more difficult for her to interact with us
Anger	Self-reflection	I was sick of having the volume on the TV blaring. I mean even with the hearing aids, she still had it turned up
Joy	Hearing aid use/non-use	When we're face to face, I think she, never has to ask me to repeat myself. Which is really nice. Cause, when you have to repeat yourself, it's just, you know, a little bit... you know what I mean?
Acceptance	Audiologic Rehabilitation	I think you first have to realize that you are dealing with a person that is really disabled and so you have to really calm down, or tone down your expectations and sometimes it was difficult. I think my sister hadn't reached that point as early as I did, so I think she really expected more of my mother and so, I think I expected less of her than my sister does. I think once you accept it, it's easier to deal with

Conclusions

Most of the negative emotions expressed by spouses in earlier research (Donaldson, Worrall, Hickson, 2004; Hallam, Ashton, Sherbourne & Gailey, 2008; Héту, Jones & Getty, 1993) were expressed by the adult children in the current research. For example, Héту, 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.

Audiologists may want to consider the impact of audiologic rehabilitation on the family members of their patients because close relationships are vulnerable to the effects of hearing impairment (Héту, 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.

References

- Donaldson, N., Worrall, L., & Hickson, L. (2004). Older People with Hearing Impairment: A Literature Review of the Spouse's Perspective. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Audiology*, 26(1), 30-39.
- Hallam, R., Ashton, P., Sherbourne, K., & Gailey, L. (2008). Persons with acquired profound hearing loss (APHL): how do they and their families adapt to the challenge? *Health: an Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness & Medicine*, 12, 369-388.
- Héту, R., Jones, L., & Getty, L. (1993). The impact of acquired hearing impairment on intimate relationships: Implications for rehabilitation. *Audiology*, 32, 363-381.
- Jones, L., Kyle, J.G. and Wood, P. (1997). *Words apart: Losing your hearing as an adult*. London: Tavistock.
- Plutchik, R. (2002) *Emotions and life: Perspectives from psychology, biology, and evolution*. American Psychological Association. Washington, DC.
- Smith, S., Kämpfe, C. (1997) Interpersonal relationship implications of hearing loss in persons who are older. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 15-21.
- Wundt, W. (1897). *Outlines of psychology* (C. H. Judd Trans.). Oxford, England: Engelman

Acknowledgements

This project was funded by a grant from the Oticon Foundation. Thank you to Dr. Jill Preminger, Dr. Joe Montano, and Dr. Tine Tjørnhøj-Thomsen for their assistance on this project.