

# Hearing loss: The impact of hearing loss on the youth.

NID Training Disability Diary

- Compiled by Dr Jean Mitchell



## Introduction

In a previous Diary Entry the broad impact of hearing loss was discussed. In this entry more specific problems are highlighted. If hearing loss goes undetected in the early years of a baby's life, the consequences can be felt for the rest of the individual's life. School years will be affected, as will the choice of training, further education, and careers.

## Discussion

Although attempts are being made to introduce early detection of hearing loss as early as possible, it is still unclear whether children with hearing loss are able to reach their full potential in education. While there is a move towards inclusive education in which all learners, whether disabled or not, attend the same main-stream schools, it is also unclear whether such integration is beneficial to all. More research is necessary.

Teaching methods and facilities need to be adapted to accommodate learners with various types and degrees of disability, but it seems that this is not always possible. Poor acoustics in large classrooms, background noise caused by classmates and so on, can interfere with Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) learners' understanding of instructions and explanations. In addition, DHH learners tend to have different learning styles from their hearing counterparts (Sz cs, 2019).

Researchers in the Netherlands (Van der Straaten et al., 2021) have found that DHH learners learn language and mathematics in unique ways that depend on visual stimuli. Comprehension of mathematical concepts often depends on understanding of the language used to explain them. If a DHH learner has a language deficit, the problems are multiplied as learning of most school subjects depend on the comprehension of language.

The COVID pandemic has brought issues of mental health into the foreground across all age groups. There is little information on the mental health of youths with hearing loss who do not attend school or receive post-school training. However, most who are in the education system seem to live normally and productively (Sz cs, 2019), thus hearing loss itself might not have any direct impact on the mental health of individuals.

Youths with hearing loss form part of the high unemployment rate amongst people with disabilities. The chances of DHH youths having access to employment are lower than those of the hearing population even though there are many laws in South Africa that aim to protect them. The Government has set a target to employ 2% of disabled persons but this target has not yet been met. The

persons with disabilities represented about 1% of the total workforce between 2015 - 2017. StatsSA's report (2021) on marginalised groups provides similar information.

## Conclusion

Only through systematic, early detection programmes will infants with hearing loss in South Africa be assured of a chance to develop their full potential and grow to become fully active, contributing and integrated members of society. Awareness of the impact of hearing loss among South African youths needs to be raised to undo the general public's misinformation. If all South African policies and laws were implemented, monitored and evaluated, the unemployment of DHH youths should diminish to the benefit of the youths as well as society.

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## References

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