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A BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS: COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND A DEAF CHILD

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Abstract

With the birth of a child, parents are also born. Parents and children develop, grow, learn and make mistakes together. There is no manual to indicate whether parents are making mistakes in raising another being, nor is there a reward when they do something well. It is a subjective assessment of how good a parent someone is, mistakes in upbringing are often overlooked or it turns out that situations that seemed wrong and unsuccessful resulted in a positive outcome. Questioning the correctness of raising one's own child is a daily routine for parents. However, what happens when hearing parents have a hearing-impaired child? How do they adapt, with the added pressure of how to deal with the new situation and how to raise a child who will understand them and who they will fully understand? Of course, there are differences in raising a deaf child depending on the fact if parents are hearing or deaf, but both are guided by their natural instincts in order to achieve the best possible communication with their own child. According to one definition, communication is the ability to share values, beliefs and feelings. We can communicate verbally and non-verbally. Verbal communication refers to speech, and non-verbal communication refers to visual interaction.

The aim of this research was to examine the hearing parents of hearing-impaired children about the challenges they face the most when it comes to communication with their own children and how they solve the issues.

The research results showed that hearing parents of deaf children communicate with the child at an early age. However, with all the efforts they make while their child grows up, there is one significant part of the child's personality that won't develop properly due to missing verbal communication. For the same reason, there is a distance in mutual communication that cannot be overcome even with the unconditional love they provide. From all of the above, the conclusion emerges that it is necessary to work on the education of hearing parents of deaf children with adequate forms of communication.

Keywords: hearing parents, hearing impaired children, communication.

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Introduction

It has been a well-known fact that the development of every child, including a hearing-impaired child, is primarily influenced by the family. It is said that family is the basic educational institution and an important place for the material and spiritual security of its members. Family life is an intertwined, conscious and unconscious network of mutual relationships that becomes even more complex if there is a hearing impaired child in it. Coming into the world, a child enters a family with already built and well-established relationships, which influence him. There, the child acquires emotional experiences, adopts life values and acquires the rules of interpersonal relations and behavior in society. It receives the culture of his environment and speech, which is an important factor in the child's social life. In order for a child to develop into a mature person, the help of an adult is extremely important (Dulčić, Kondić, 2002). Adult relationships must be of high quality, especially in the first phase of development. The quality of the child-adult relationship depends on the personality of the participants in that relationship and on the way of communication. According to Tubbs (2015), sharing and exchanging information is an essential human trait because life without communication is unimaginable. In addition to the social aspect, communication is key to creating a personal identity because by interacting with others, feedback is received on the basis of which it is possible to compare oneself with others. Therefore, communication is the basis of human experience, which ensures the exchange of information, the expression of emotions and the realization of deeper interpersonal connections. When communicating with a deaf child, hearing parents often encounter obstacles that require extra effort in order to overcome all the challenges. When a deaf child is born in a family where the parents are not hearing impaired, then his development in every segment is more compared to the development of a deaf child whose parents are deaf. Deaf children of deaf parents are intellectually superior to deaf children of hearing parents, but also to hearing peers, which can be explained by heredity, bilingualism, training in visual-manual communication that can improve the development of general intelligence. The potentials of the deaf often remain unrealized if they do not have enough support, understanding and a sense of belonging. Deafness represents a way of living, of belonging to a population that has its own language, its own culture and its own place in society. When the whole society realizes that being deaf is the same as being a member of a certain national or ethnic group of people, then the deaf will get the status they deserve in society. According to data from 2022 presented by members of the world organization of the deaf, there are 34 million deaf children in the world. It is characteristic that even 90-95% of them were born in families of hearing parents. This data shows how deaf people from birth face limitations and barriers both in communication and in understanding the situation they are in, starting with the family in which they live.

Deaf families or "deaf child of deaf parents" called "doda" are a minority. About 5-10% of deaf children are born to deaf parents, while the remaining 90-95% of all deaf children are born to hearing parents. This means that about 90% of deaf parents give birth to hearing children (called "coda"), while about 90% of all deaf children are born to hearing parents. That is, the deaf community consists mostly of deaf children from hearing families. There is no big difference between a hearing family and a deaf family in terms of growing up in a family with full access to the same language and culture, with normal language acquisition from birth and with the same access to communication. What is it like to grow up in a family of deaf and deaf? Is there something unique about a hearing family? Nothing (except that every family is unique). So it

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shouldn't be anything out of the ordinary for a deaf family. A deaf family's life is pretty much as normal as any hearing family, just like a Spanish-speaking family' a French-speaking family, etc. The difference is only in language and culture. But the deaf family is not common to hearing outsiders. The deaf family is fascinating. Through stories and explanations, they learn about the world of sound, vibration, visual culture and precious language in the visual-spatial modality. However, Amy Cohen Efron shared her experience of hanging out with deaf friends who have deaf parents. Her testimonies show that as a deaf child from a hearing family, she was often amazed at the ease of full access to dinnertime conversations in a deaf family's home. The home of deaf parents who have deaf children is full of life, lively conversations, laughter and jokes. They talk about anything from politics to school. No saying the "I'll tell you later" and "never mind" sentences that many deaf children from hearing families used to say on a regular basis. Deaf children consider a deaf family a blessing. Because, unfortunately, the majority of hearing parents of deaf children do not know or do not learn sign language, which always leaves vagueness and weak communication, and thus a weak connection between parents and children.

Hearing-impaired children who have one or both deaf or hard-of-hearing parents are at a definite advantage compared to hearing-impaired children of hearing parents. The birth of a deaf/hard of hearing child in a family of deaf/hard of hearing parents does not represent a stressful situation, it does not inhibit intuitive parental behaviors that are important when it comes to communication. Deaf/hard of hearing parents know how to communicate with their deaf/hard of hearing newborn, how to draw his attention to his face and hands and how to make early communication stimulating, interesting and important for the child. All scientific research that longitudinally followed the interactions of deaf mothers and deaf/hard of hearing children agree on one thing: early communication in sign language encourages the cognitive and emotional development of a young child with hearing impairment, social interaction, and later contributes to more effective development of literacy - reading and writing and spoken language (Pribanić, 2015: 20-23). This is precisely why the authors of those studies recommend hearing parents of young children with hearing loss to follow those communication strategies in interaction with their deaf/hard of hearing children that deaf parents use intuitively. Studying the communication of deaf/hard-of-hearing mothers with their hearing-impaired newborn, Erting (1992) observed that mothers modify their sign language similarly to when they speak to a hearing baby by speaking motherly (baby talk). The location of the sign is always closer to the child, which allows the parent to intuitively adapt to the infant's visual capabilities. The mother repeats the same sign multiple times allowing the child to process the message, simplifies the sign for the child to understand, and conveys emotions in response to the child's reaction. When the newborn is looking at the mother, she will produce the sign directly next to her face without occupying a large space as it would be in communication with an adult. Likewise, if the child directs attention to another object, mothers try to sign as close as possible to the object, on the object itself, or try to enter the child's field of vision in order to communicate. Erting (1992) concludes that deaf/hard-of-hearing mothers already have culturally adopted certain intuitive knowledge of how to communicate with their newborn in such special conditions. Hearing-impaired children who have deaf/hard of hearing parents who communicate in sign language, already during the first month of life, acquire the basics for further language socialization through interaction that is adapted to the requirements of visuo-spatial language. However, 95% of hearing-impaired children have hearing parents who are completely unfamiliar with such adaptation, as well as with sign language. If they decide to sign language, they should not only learn it, but also learn many intuitive behaviors on a conscious

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level (paying attention and keeping attention through visual and tactile channels, facial expression, etc.) that would later become spontaneous and natural behavior in addressing your hearing-impaired child. Research by Meadow-Orlans et al. (1981) as well as Koester (1992) showed that the behavior of hearing mothers show that they too increase eye contact and visual activities during interactions with their hearing-impaired babies even when the child is only a few months old and that they do so significantly more than mothers of hearing children. There may seem to be very good communication with the newborn, which is based on eye contact, facial expression and touch. The only drawback is that the child does not develop symbolic language. Professionals are aware of the desire of every parent for their child with hearing loss to hear, listen and speak, to be competent in reading and writing, to master academic skills, and to readily accept the oral method for communication development. Very rarely do parents force the learning of sign language from the beginning, but in case they decide on this form of communication, it should be emphasized that this choice does not negate the development of verbal communication, but on the contrary - the child acquires sign language, the natural language of the deaf community, which provides him with the possibility of early development in all aspects. Back in 1975, Bates et al. achieved the result that the use of gestures during the first year of life is a clinically important predictor of later language development and quality communication. Greenfield and Smith (1976) found that children continue to use gestures even when speech becomes their dominant part of communication, although according to Özçalışkan and Goldin-Meadow (2004), the share of gestures in communication decreases with the progress of language-speech development. According to Capone and McGregor (2004), gesture in comics becomes an integral part of spoken language during the preschool period. Hostetter (2011) reviewed research and concluded that gestures improve the listener's understanding. While Knapp et al. (2013) came to the conclusion that gestures help the speaker to remember certain words or to describe the movement of objects. The listener can benefit more from gestures when they emphasize or clarify the speech, they also help the content to be remembered more easily. This paper explores the importance and complexity of communication between hearing parents and their deaf children. Understanding the dynamics of this interaction can provide valuable insight into how to support better mutual understanding, connection, and emotional well-being in a family with a deaf child. Newer studies in the last decade imply that deficits in hearing parent-deaf child communication are the reason deaf children often have behavioral problems, such as social immaturity and hyperactivity. These data open up new topics for research, which concern the communication of deaf children with hearing family members.

METHODS

The aim of the research

The goal of the research was to examine the hearing parents of hearing-impaired children about the challenges they most often face when it comes to communication with their own child and how they solve the challenges.

Research tasks

Based on the defined goal of the research, the research tasks were set:

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- Investigate and determine whether hearing parents of a deaf child are satisfied with the quality of communication they have with their child.
- Investigate whether hearing parents need education and help from professionals in conveying information to their deaf child.
- Examine and analyze the existence of a statistically significant difference in the quality of communication in relation to the age of the respondent, professional education and gender of the child.

Procedure

The method of theoretical analysis and the survey method were used for this research. The method of theoretical analysis was chosen based on the problem, goal and tasks of the research. We studied the relevant written sources that were available in the collection of sources used to define the basic terms and to study written sources of theoretical importance related to the research of the topic. The survey method was also used, i.e. the method of non-experimental research, which is often used in special education research and school practice research important for special education teachers, as well as the method of systematic non-experimental observation. The Survey method is suitable for examining the opinions, attitudes, beliefs and behavior of special education teachers, students, teachers and parents in the educational work process. This method was used to examine the views of hearing parents who have a deaf child about how mutual communication takes place and what challenges they most often face in communication. Appropriate statistical analysis was used for data processing, in order to explain and interpret the obtained data from the conducted research, and the obtained values were presented tabularly and graphically.

Instruments

For the purposes of the research, the Scale of Communication Attitudes of Hearing Parents with a Hearing-Impaired Child was constructed with the aim of determining the respondents' attitudes about communication between hearing parents and a deaf child, the quality of communication, the importance of learning sign language and alternative forms of communication, and the involvement of experts as one of the forms of help in overcoming communication barriers. The scale consisted of 12 statements with a Likert-type response format from 1 to 3 (disagree, not sure, agree). The statements are written in positive (1-8; 11-12) and negative (9-10) contexts. Statements written in a negative context were scored in reverse and this was taken into account during the statistical processing of the obtained results. The measuring characteristics of the instruments have been determined and checked, and they meet the methodological criteria. Alpha Cronbach coefficient, as an indicator of internal homogeneity, for this scale is 0.842, so we can say that the internal consistency of the scale is satisfactory, and that the scale has satisfactory validity. Based on the obtained research results, we can determine that the measuring instrument has satisfactory reliability and that the measurement error is reduced to a minimum. To check the measuring instrument, the metric characteristics of the particles and parts of the scale were calculated using the standard Reliability test from the statistical package SPSS.

A sample of respondents

Hearing parents of hearing-impaired children from the area of Sarajevo Canton were included in the research. The research was conducted on a sample of 72 subjects, 42 mothers and 30 fathers, aged from 22 to 50 years.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the very beginning of the analysis of the obtained data, we wanted to analyze the answers of the parents in the complete measuring instrument in order to determine which challenges they most often face in communication with the child. Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of parents' answers about communication with their hearing-impaired child in the complete measuring instrument. The statement with the highest percentage of 100% agree responses is the statement "I educate the family and people from the immediate area about how to communicate with my child", where all respondents point out that they completely agree with the stated statement, while the statement with the highest percentage of responses is no I agree "Hearing-impaired children communicate better with deaf than with hearing parents" with 45.8% of responses.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages of parents' answers about communication with a hearing-impaired child in the complete measuring instrument

No.	Item	disagreement		not sure		agreement	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I first encountered hearing loss when I had my child.	15	20,8	9	12,5	48	66,7
2	Hearing-impaired children communicate better with deaf than with hearing parents.	33	45,8	12	16,7	27	37,5
3	Hearing parents of deaf children need more communicational education than deaf parents.	15	20,8	0	0	57	79,2
4	I am sufficiently educated about the communication difficulties faced by the hearing impaired.	9	12,5	6	8,3	57	79,2
5	I attended a sign language course in order to communicate better with my child.	18	25,0	3	4,2	51	70,8
6	I fully understand my child's wishes and needs.	6	8,3	6	8,3	60	83,3
7	I communicate with my child without any problems.	9	12,5	3	4,2	60	83,3
8	I need the help of an expert in learning the teaching content because I am not able to convey the information to my child completely.	30	41,7	3	4,2	39	54,2
9	I don't talk much with my child because I'm afraid I won't understand him well.	9	12,5	3	4,2	60	83,3
10	Sometimes I am unable to help my child because I do not understand him.	30	41,7	0	0	42	58,3
11	I made the maximum effort to ensure quality communication between me and my child.	0	0	3	4,2	69	95,8
12	I educate the family and people from the immediate area about how to communicate with my child.	0	0	0	0	72	100,0
TOTAL		174	20,14	48	5,56	642	74,31

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1. QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION OF HEARING PARENTS WITH A DEAF CHILD

Our first task was to investigate and determine whether hearing parents of a deaf child are satisfied with the quality of communication they have with their child. By looking at the columns of graph 1, we can state that a very high percentage of parents express satisfaction with the quality of communication they have with their child, where 80.83% of parents expressed a positive opinion.

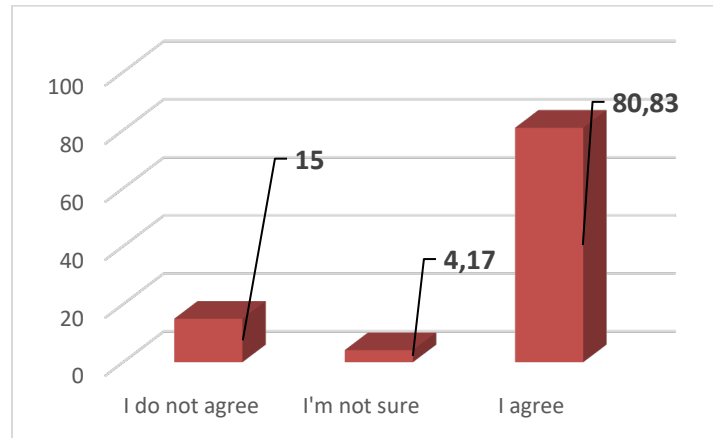


Figure 1. Percentages of parents' answers about satisfaction with the quality of communication.

2. THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

The second task was to examine whether hearing parents need the help of professionals in conveying information to their deaf child. The analysis of the obtained data showed that a very high percentage of parents expressed the need of education and support in the form of professional help from professionals, in fact 75% of parents.

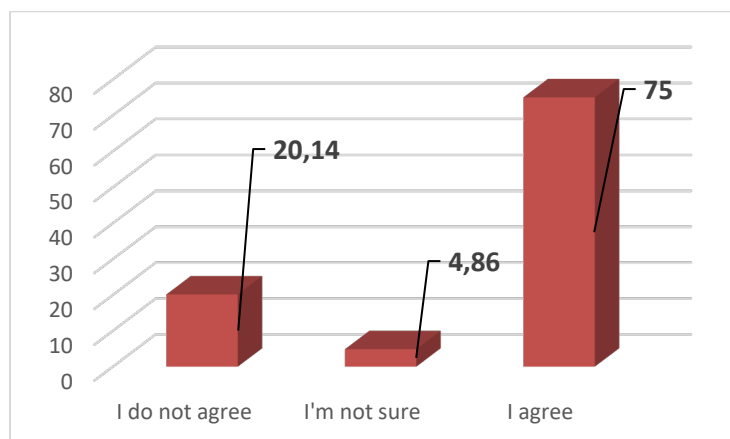


Figure 2. Percentages of parents' answers about the need of education and professional help.

DOI: 10.59519/mper6111

3. FACTORS OF QUALITY COMMUNICATION

As part of the third task, we were interested in whether there is a statistically significant difference in the responses of parents of hearing-impaired children in relation to the child's age, education and gender.

On the basis of the conducted statistical analysis, a significant difference was found only when it comes to the professional education of the parents, in favor of parents with a higher education who expressed greater satisfaction with the quality of communication with their child, but also with the expressed need for additional education and help from professionals in order to achieve the best quality of communication with their hearing-impaired child. The value obtained by testing the arithmetic means of two independent samples $t = -2.899$ at the level of significance $p = 0.042$.

Table 2. Testing the difference of the arithmetic means of parents' answers in relation to vocational education

Professional equipment	N	M	t	df	p
High school	33	2,46	-2,899	70	0,042
College	39	2,84			

CONCLUSION

Although we often come back to the problem of communication between hearing parents and deaf children in individual conversations, the research we conducted did not show this to a significant extent. Parents who participate in research often do not want to present the situation as it is, but to embellish and soften the answers they give. The truth is that the challenges of raising a deaf child remain, whether we admit it or not. This is supported by various testimonies of deaf children from hearing families. One of them is the testimony of the American artist Amy Cohen Efron, who shared her experience of hanging out with deaf friends who have deaf parents. Her testimonies show that as a deaf child from a hearing family, she was often amazed at the ease of full access to dinnertime conversations in a deaf family's home. The home of deaf parents who have deaf children is full of life, lively conversations, laughter and jokes. They talk about anything from politics to school. No saying the "I'll tell you later" and "never mind" sentences that many deaf children from hearing families used to say on a regular basis. Deaf children consider a deaf family a blessing. Because, unfortunately, the majority of hearing parents of deaf children do not know or do not learn sign language, which always leaves vagueness and weak communication, and thus a weaker connection between parents and children. By including a deaf child in a hearing environment, parents prevent the child from finding their place in the deaf community, and force them to adapt and accept the standards of the hearing world. It is extremely important in this period to provide parents with psychological support through counseling in order to accept the new situation, to accept the existence of hearing impairment in their child and to make an adequate plan

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to raise and treat the child. Thus, hearing parents will think about the education of themselves and their children, as well as the cultural significance of the deaf community. This knowledge will help them avoid portraying their child's deafness as an "impairment", allow them to learn more about the deaf experience and ensure that their child feels a sense of belonging rather than insecurity because they are neither in the hearing world nor in the deaf world. The ability to communicate with parents, family members, friends and teachers is crucial to the academic and social progress of deaf children. Researchers such as Crowe (2003:199-200), Polat (2003:331-332) and Ross, Storbeck and Wemmer (2004:148) claim that deaf children and hearing parents, as a direct result of mutual communication problems, struggle to establish a satisfactory parent-child relationship pattern. Deaf children who are unable to communicate their needs, thoughts and experiences may experience social isolation, depression and low self-esteem. In addition, inadequate language stimulation experienced by deaf children, together with limited exposure to the formal language system, can result in serious deficits in communication and language acquisition (Akamatsu, Musselman, 1998:265-301; Goldstein, Bebko, 2003:452; Fung, Chow, McBride-Chang, 2005:82). Hameed et al. (2023: 519), observed that there are significant differences in the frequency and manner of expression of emotional and behavioral difficulties in hearing-impaired children compared to hearing children. Also, members of the deaf community do not want the hearing majority to consider them damaged, unsuccessful, disabled, but members of a linguistic or cultural minority with their own language, cultural creativity and institutions, values, customs, history, associations, which have the same right as the hearing on education and training for work (Pribanić et al. 2000). Research on the relationship between emotional and social functioning has shown that already in preschool age there are difficulties in the social functioning of this population, including more aggressive behavior, more problems with peers and worse adjustment compared to children with normal hearing (Chao et al., 2015; Dammeyer, 2010; Fellingner et al., 2016; Van Eldik et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 2015). However, in some studies that focused on preschoolers with cochlear implants (aged 1-5 years), comparable levels of social functioning were observed (Ketelaar et al., 2013; Ketelaar, et al., 2015; Netten et al., 2018). This may indicate the benefit of early intervention and support from parents and professionals (as a result of newborn hearing screening), or that social problems are more noticeable when hearing-impaired children enter school age. Namely, hearing loss alone may not explain group differences in social functioning (Antia et al., 2011; Bat-Chava et al., 2005; Fellingner et al., 2009; Huber and Kipman, 2011; Leigh et al., 2015; Patrick et al., 2018; Theunissen et al., 2015). Compared to children with normal hearing, hearing-impaired children who grow up in a predominantly hearing environment among people who use oral language have fewer opportunities for social interactions and everyday incidental learning (unplanned learning), which disrupts their learning about the communicative functions of emotions and, in turn, may further hinder social functioning.

As professionals who work with the population of hearing impaired people, we are left with the task of building bridges for better communication of the deaf, both with parents and with the wider social community. By organizing seminars, sign language courses, educating parents and

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extended family members about the importance of communication with a deaf child and overcoming communication barriers, we will provide a better and easier future for a deaf child.

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