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Stories Unheard: The Lived Experience of Parents with Hard of Hearing Children

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Abstract. An increasing number of children with hearing loss are born to hearing parents. Learning about the diagnosis of their children often evokes strong emotions from parents including confusion, sadness, and apprehension due to their lack of prior experience in raising hard of hearing children or using sign language to communicate with them. As a result, this creates a challenging situation where parents must navigate. The objective of this study was to delve into the lived experiences of parents with hard of hearing children. Therefore, this study utilized qualitative research using a phenomenological approach. Through in-depth interviews, data were collected from seven parents with hard of hearing children who were identified through purposive sampling. Furthermore, four major themes emerged from this study namely: (1) *A Bend in the Road: Navigating the Unexpected Parental Journey*, (2) *The Longest Ride: The Journey of Parenting a Hard of Hearing Child*, (3) *The Best of Me: The Resilient Parent*, and (4) *Dreamland: Pursuit of Dreams and Aspirations*. The following are the subthemes: (1) *The Rescue: Navigating Assistive Devices*, (2) *The Choice: Choosing the Best Option for the Child*, (3) *Message in a Bottle: Communication and Its Complexities*, (4) *See Me: Dealing with Unkind Treatment*, (5) *The Guardian: I Protect the Family*, (6) *Counting Miracles: Journey Towards Acceptance*, (7) *True Believer: Anchored in Faith*, and (8*) Safe Haven: Seeking and Receiving Support*. Findings of this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the lived experiences of parents with hard of hearing children.

Keywords. lived experiences, hard of hearing children, parents of children with hearing loss

A. Introduction

Navigating a world of silence is a challenge faced daily by deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) individuals. One is left to rely on their remaining senses to comprehend the ever-changing world around them. Tirelessly traversing the complex world with them are their parents.

Reports revealed that two out of a thousand new-borns are diagnosed with hearing loss (Holzinger et al., 2022). With every child that is diagnosed with hearing loss, there is a parent. Raising a child is a role that proves to be challenging for many parents. For parents with deaf and hard of hearing children, the limited knowledge and experience in handling children with hearing loss create a situation that is even more difficult to navigate. Moreover, parenting a child who is deaf and hard of hearing poses many obstacles including communication barriers, insufficient knowledge and information about hearing loss and the lack of support received by the parents (Davids et al., 2021).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), hard of hearing individuals may experience mild to severe hearing loss and usually communicate using spoken language. The use of hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other assistive devices, including captioning, are beneficial to them, especially in communicating with others.

A study conducted in the Philippines, described the crucial role that parents play in the education of their children. It was revealed that they are the main assistants of their deaf and hard of hearing children during their online education. It was also shown that most of the parents found it difficult to engage their children in learning during the pandemic since they did not have enough knowledge on how to communicate with their deaf or hard of hearing children because they lacked sufficient proficiency and training in using the Filipino Sign Language (Agbay & Padillo, 2024).

In the context of Western Visayas, Pangilinan (2020) reported that deaf and hard of hearing individuals consider “financial stability” as a common hindrance in pursuing their education, career goals and even relationships. It can also be noted that there is limited opportunity for the deaf and hard of hearing people to pursue certain career aspirations due to their condition. The challenges that the Deaf and hard of hearing individuals encounter do not only affect them but also affect their families and their dynamics.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) plays a crucial role in elevating the lives of persons with disabilities, which includes hard of hearing individuals. A study conducted in Negros Occidental reported that availability and access to the resources for Persons with Disability (PWD) remain a challenge for these individuals (Marcella & Nalumen, 2020).

There is abundant research on the educational experiences of the deaf and the hard of hearing children (e.g., Wauters et al., 2024; Alqraini & Alasim, 2021; & van der Straaten et al., 2021) but the studies on the experiences of parents with hard of hearing children remain scarce in local and national settings. A study conducted by Sealy et al. (2021) suggests that further research on the impact of having a child with hearing loss is necessary in understanding the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, this research may contribute to the growing field of Parenting Psychology, including family dynamics, as well as the Person with Disabilities (PWD) Psychology in the Philippines. Aiding psychologists in enhancing their intervention programs and methods in handling clients who are parents, families, and members of the hard of hearing community.

Thus, the researcher deems it necessary to conduct this study in hopes to understand their unique and usually unheard journeys of parents with hard of hearing children to shed light on their experiences so that they may receive the necessary support from the community. The results of this research also hope to provide information for policy creation for the public and private to develop policies, right programs, and interventions that may address the unheard needs of the parents and children and amplify their voices in the society. Beyond policy creation, this study also hopes to empower these parents and validate their unique experiences in raising their children given the crucial role they play in their families. This ensures that valuable insights gleaned from this study contribute meaningfully to both academic and practical contexts.

B. Literature Review

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Culture and Its Challenges

The Deaf community is a longstanding and time-tested solution which supports the needs of individuals who identify as deaf and hard of hearing to live a quality life. It is neither a new phenomenon nor outdated (Holcomb, 2023). It is essential to note the importance of capitalizing "D" in the word Deaf since it not only describes the physical condition, but it also encapsulates their cultural identity. The Deaf culture describes the unique community with shared values, outlook, language, and experience.

In the Philippines, individuals with disabilities also continue to face scientific, social, and systemic barriers to healthcare. Barriers in accessing medical services expand to availing mental health services for persons with disability, which includes the hard of hearing individuals. These health barriers include the lack of support from medical experts and non-profit organizations, essential health services that are not accessible, and lack of recent research and outdated mental health data for persons with disabilities (Toquero, 2021).

Deaf Culture and Its Impact on Family Dynamics

The limited knowledge and experience in handling deaf and hard of hearing children creates a situation that is difficult to navigate, impacting family dynamics. Moreover, the diagnosis of hearing loss in children is a stressful experience and a time of crisis for parents (Mundayoor et al., 2022). This is especially true for hearing parents who have no prior knowledge of hearing loss. Family cohesion describes the level of connectedness between family members (Olson, 2000, as cited in Yuen et al., 2019). This is important to ensure that family members are emotionally connected. A study conducted by Yuen et al. (2022) investigated the family systems and emotional functioning in Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) preschool children and showed that there are lower family cohesion and lower positive emotions in DHH children when compared with normal-hearing children.

It has also been reported that despite the challenges, some hearing parents successfully emerge from the situation with a positive outlook. A qualitative study that explored the type of stories hearing parents share about rearing their children who use cochlear implants revealed that one of the significant emerging themes is the stories of personal growth among the parents. These parents usually face a turning point, then a crisis, which is the diagnosis of their children, and eventually they find resolution and emerge with a more positive outlook in life (Barker et al., 2021).

Support for Parents with Hard of Hearing Children

The community's support is necessary to promote the child's overall development. Similarly, families who have access to the Deaf-Role Model (DRM) for deaf and hard of hearing children have a positive impact not only for the child but also for the parents. The involvement of DRM boosts the confidence of hearing parents as they come to embrace that their children are simply different and not necessarily broken and that they can grow up and become contributing members of society with degrees in higher education (Hamilton & Clark, 2020).

Although there are support and programs available for the parents and their deaf and hard of hearing children, this support has proven to be lacking. According to Studts et al. (2022), children who use assistive hearing devices were reported to experience disruptive behaviour as high as normal-hearing children. One of the evidence-based interventions to manage disruptive behaviors among children that are available for caregivers is Behaviour Parent Training.

Numerous research studies have proven their effectiveness in improving caregivers and child outcomes. However, access to and further research on this has been futile.

Psychological Wellbeing of Parents with Hard of Hearing Children

The mental well-being of a parent significantly affects how their children are raised. In a study conducted by Kathuria & Bhanudas (2022), it was found that the mental health of parents who have children with disability was found to be poor whereas the mental health of parents who have children without disability is reported to be average. The study contrasts the different status of mental health in parents of children with disabilities and those without disabilities. Their varying degrees of circumstances may have contributed to their well-being.

In a related study that investigated the mental health of parents with deaf and hard-of-hearing children during the pandemic, the results reported that the parents were experiencing elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Moreover, significantly higher levels of parental distress were also observed (Coto et al., 2024). The stress they experience may not only affect their self-efficacy but also impact the development of their children.

C. Methods

A qualitative research design with phenomenological approach was utilized to explore the experiences of parents with hard of hearing children. The data were gathered using in-depth interviews, which is appropriate for the conduct of this study. This is a technique used to conduct a detailed interview with a small number of participants using a conversational format. In this technique, the researcher invests a significant amount of time with the participants (Rutledge, 2020).

The participants in this study were seven parents with children who are hard of hearing based in Negros Occidental, Philippines. In identifying the participants, purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling technique, was utilized. Using this sampling technique, the participants were carefully selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria set, ensuring that they were able to best aid the researcher in understanding the research problem.

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide. The interview included personal questions about the participants' unique experiences before, during, and after the diagnosis of their children as hard of hearing and how this diagnosis had impacted their lives and experiences as parents. With the overarching question: “*How is life having children who are Hard of Hearing?”* Follow-up questions were asked to probe their responses.

In analyzing the data, the researcher followed a sequential process using Creswell’s Steps in Analytic Process (Creswell, 2023). The researcher proceeded with the data gathering procedure once the clearance from the University’s Research Ethics Review Committee was secured. This is to ensure that the research is compliant with the ethical standards set by the institution.

The following considerations were employed to protect their rights. Prior to the collection of data, the general purpose of the study, procedures, and its benefits were communicated to the participants in a language that they understand. Moreover, a consent form was requested for the participants to sign. The participants were also informed about the confidentiality of the study. Pseudonyms were used instead of their real names. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure their privacy and confidentiality.

D. Results and Discussion

Theme 1: A Bend in the Road: Navigating the Unexpected Parental Journey

When traversing the path of parenting, one does not expect a smooth travel devoid of twists and turns. For parents with hard of hearing children, these twists, and turns often come unexpectedly shaking their emotions and beliefs. The theme *"A Bend in the Road"* captures the beginning of the unexpected bend in the parent's journey, which is the discovery of their children's hearing loss and their reaction to the diagnosis. Initial reaction of hearing parents to the diagnosis of their children with hearing loss often includes shock, concern regarding the child's future, and sadness (Dikeç et al., 2023). Similarly, the participants shared the following:

> *"When he was a baby, he was always sick, he had an infection and always suffered from UTI. What they explained to us was that the infection reached his brain. That was the cause of his bacterial meningitis, so when you always have UTI, there is a possibility that the bacteria could reach your brain. It was his hearing that was affected. We were shocked when we left the hospital since we stayed there for a month. We have been staying at the hospital for one month and when we were discharged, we were wondering why he cannot hear the door slamming, he does not respond like usual when you call him. We decided to return to the doctor and told him that we noticed our baby could not hear well. The doctor did a series of tests and told us that he may have a hearing loss. We were referred to ENT and that is when we learned." – **Anne***

Learning about Echo's bacterial meningitis and hearing loss was a process that Anne had to navigate. She shared feeling various emotions such as shock, confusion, sadness, and hopelessness which are evident in her statements:

> *We were shocked that in just one snap the future of our child was affected. You know, I delivered him normally. In six months, he fell sick. Of course, your world will fall apart. Your world will collapse and you cannot even imagine. Bacterial Meningitis is very painful and deadly. The doctor told us to relax and admitted him immediately. At that time, we observed that he was always sleeping. He had a fever and was just sleeping a lot because he was already suffering. The abscess has reached his brain. I could not accept it. We even had a new-born screening and everything was normal. However, when he had his hearing test, we learned that his hearing was affected." – **Anne***

Other participants also shared:

> *"That time her teacher recommended that we have Yen assessed. I was told that her ears may have hearing loss or may be impaired. To be certain, she needs to have a hearing test and that is when we learned that her right ear has severe hearing loss while her left ear has profound hearing loss. I started to wonder where this came and why it happened. It felt like everything happened in just a snap. You see when I gave birth to her, her new-born screening was normal. There was no indication that she had a problem. It was like in one snap this condition appeared. The child, from when she was a month old until she was 8 months old, was very responsive when you played with her. However, there came a time when she suffered from convulsion and UTI, and we stayed in a hospital for two weeks. When we were discharged, everything changed. I pondered again why this happened or why it must be her? It really pains me knowing that I never neglected her and even gave her everything I could.*" – ***Rolly***

> "*When I was pregnant with her, I had an operation on my Bartholin cyst. I had two cysts that needed to be removed before she was born. I took antibiotics prescribed by my doctor for several months, which is why the situation developed the way it did. During my operation, I was told that the cyst should have ruptured on its own, but it did not. The doctors decided that I needed surgery and explained that there were risks for Alex—she could either die or develop complications. I thought, 'Oh, this is probably my fault.' because I had undergone surgery before and I also took antibiotics. I kept thinking 'This is all my fault; this happened to her because of me.' I recalled when I had my operation the doctor had explained to me about the risks where she could either die or face complications.*" – ***Joy***

> "*Well, what happened was, we started with daycare. We were surprised because at home, he would just stay quiet. He would sleep, lie down, and he was not a crybaby. When he turned 4, we enrolled him in daycare. Because at 4, he was in the age of daycare, that is why we enrolled him there. We stayed in the barangay daycare because there was one available there. Around the middle of the class, he seemed kind of hyper. Even when called or scolded, he did not seem to listen, and Josh's behavior seemed different… he acted differently from his classmates who listened. That is when we realized that there was really something different about him. Then when we went to the public school in Street A, the teacher there referred us for a developmental evaluation. Then, during our check-up, we scheduled an appointment at a private hospital with a doctor; he was the only developmental doctor there. That is when we found out that he was hearing impaired. We were hurt, but you cannot really say that we took it deeply to heart.*" – **JL**

In a study conducted by Sealy et al. (2021), it was found that parents of Deaf children who have unresolved feelings about their children's diagnosis are likely to experience decreased parenting morale which can impact their perception towards their children, perceiving the child as more vulnerable. In this study, participants reported experiencing emotions such as shock, confusion, self-blame, and emotional distress upon learning about their children's diagnosis. If these feelings of parents are left unresolved or are not addressed, it may hinder their coping abilities and strain their relationship with their hard of hearing children. Furthermore, these findings suggest the importance of providing emotional support and counseling for parents to help process their emotions after their children's diagnosis for them to form healthy coping mechanisms and strengthen their psychological well-being and relationship with their children.

Theme 2: The Longest Ride: The Journey of Parenting a Hard of Hearing Child

Upon encountering a bend on the road, these parents do not just simply stop or give up. Their journey as caregivers of hard of hearing children has just begun. They must continue traversing the path to secure the educational, health, and social support that their children need and rightfully deserve.

The process of raising a hard of hearing child is long and oftentimes challenging. Hence, the title of this theme, The Longest Ride. This theme is divided into four subthemes: "The Rescue," "The Choice," "Message in a Bottle," and "See Me."

Subtheme 1: The Rescue: Navigating Assistive Devices

For parents and their hard of hearing children, hearing comes at a substantial cost. Parents face the financial burden in providing assistive devices for their children, while children often trade their comfort to continue using hearing aid. "The Rescue" is the title given to this subtheme – an attempt to "rescue" children from hearing loss, detailing the participants' experiences in accessing assistive devices and the cost that comes with it.

One of the most cost-effective approaches in addressing the burden of hearing loss on individuals and communities is the use of hearing aid. Nevertheless, its cost continues to be a barrier that differs globally. Although affordable alternatives are available in some parts of the world, the price of hearing aids and its maintenance, which includes batteries and repairs, remain unaffordable for many individuals (Dillard et al., 2024).

> *"He has a hearing aid. The first hearing aid we were able to afford was around Php 35,000.00. It was not easy, and did you know how many years it lasted? Three years. You cannot avoid breaking it and getting it wet when he sweats because he was very hyper. His hearing aid was broken when it got wet from his sweat. You should avoid getting it wet. After that, he did not have a hearing aid. When we were able to save up again, we were able to buy new hearing aids for him. But he is no longer using hearing aids because it was broken, and there is no one to sponsor it. Before we were able to join a group that sponsors free hearing aids. Now, there is no one to sponsor it." –* ***Anne***

> *"After his diagnosis, one of the remedies is for him to use hearing aids etc. We bought him hearing aids until we joined the Foundation 1 that partnered with Foundation 2. The Foundation 2 provides free hearing aids but before that we really bought him out of our pocket, and it was expensive. It cost almost Php 24,000.00 so we bought him. However, he was not comfortable with it. Whenever he wears it, his ears get irritated. When he grew up, he stopped using it eventually because he was uncomfortable. He used the hearing aids for how many months, but it was not every day because he removes it." –* ***Rolly***

> *"She used to have hearing aid, but it was not okay for her because she found it too loud. After wearing it a few times, the hearing aid no longer fits her. It lasted for two months because it was painful for her. Despite that, it was beneficial because she could really hear, however, after a while she did not like it because she said it was painful. It would have been better if it were adjusted according to their ears." –* ***Chris***

> *"The hearing aid… we have many at home, but he does not use them because he throws tantrums due to pain. We really bought them for him; the latest one I bought was when he was in third year, around Php 3,500, but he no longer uses them. He feels pain—sometimes it is okay, and he can wear it, but if a sound suddenly happens, like a horn—not just one horn but a continuous honking—it hurts his ears. When that happens, he cannot take it… he becomes upset and immediately throws a tantrum." –* ***Chin***

> *"We tried to use hearing aids on her when she was around three years old. She did not like it because it was painful and loud for her. However, recently she is the one asking us to buy her hearing aid, so we consulted with a doctor and found that it was*

> *extremely expensive. It costs Php 65,000 each and if you are buying two it will cost around Php 130,000. I do not have the means for that. The doctor suggested that we buy hearing aids online so that she could try it. I hesitated because I do not think it is accurate for her ears. I fear that the trial will only worsen her condition. It is not even something that can be used for a lifetime. It needs to be upgraded yearly because the battery does not last long. You still must get it checked in case there is something wrong, so you keep going back. Then you must replace it yearly. It was expensive. The expenses just keep going, but whatever it is, we just accept it. What is important is that the child is okay." –* ***Joy***

Out of all participants, only one parent shared that her child never had access to hearing aids due to its **prohibitive cost**.

> *"She is begging me 'Mama, please buy me hearing aids.' There are original pairs of hearing aids, and it is expensive. Each hearing aid costs Php 1,000 plus, and a pair would cost around Php 2,000 to Php 3,500. Let us say it is around Php 5,000.00 for children. I am also thinking that I cannot give it to her without a doctor's recommendation because the doctor would know the proper volume for her. That is why I cannot afford it." –* ***Divina***

Hearing loss is linked to decreased cognitive outcomes, mental, and physical health. The benefit of hearing aids expands beyond hearing sounds. Hearing aid users are found to have an improved cognitive function when compared to non-hearing aid users. The findings of this study highlight that despite the known benefits of hearing aids, parents' decision to obtain, and ability to sustain it are influenced by many interrelated factors, including child comfort, financial burden, device maintenance, and limited access to services.

In the context of the Philippines, there is insufficient legislation that support the use of hearing aids for individuals with hearing loss. As a result, the cost, access to assistive devices, and audiological services limit these individuals' access to hearing aids. (David and Marasigan, 2024). Therefore, the government is recommended to create programs that would subsidize the cost of hearing aids, expand access to healthcare services, and strengthen support policies on the use of assistive devices.

Subtheme 2: The Choice: Choosing the Best Option for the Child

Access to education, health programs, and community support are some of the factors that parents deem important when raising their hard of hearing children. Choosing the appropriate school and medical services for the children is a rigorous process that these parents must go through. This subtheme the common experiences of parents when searching for suitable education and health programs while raising a hard of hearing child. This further reflects the weight of making decisions that affects the development of children.

> *"We were not accepted into regular schools because of it. We were also not accepted into the Special Education School in the city because when she was asked to count, she was able to count even though her pronunciation was slang, or the words were not pronounced correctly. According to the principal, 'If you put her here, she will be grouped with the Deaf. It would be unfortunate because she knows how to count and identify colors, though it is not clear. You need to provide her with speech therapy." So, I thought, all right, I will look for options. That is when we were able to enter a private*

school because they have special children there who are similar to SNED types, and they offer a two-hour one-on-one session.

We sought other schools because the tuition fee in the private school is expensive. The tuition fee was Php 5,000 per month; this does not include the doctor's assessment and speech therapy. It ranges from Php 10,000.00 a month because she had speech therapy which is twice a week and a separate payment for the doctor's assessment. It was too heavy for us.

We ended up here in a public school, and we are grateful to be here. Someone told me that they also offer SNED program here, so they tried it with her because she is hearing impaired and children are classified by category. Thankfully, Yen was accepted here, and she has improved a lot." *–* ***Rolly***

"Of course, as a parent I have observed other children singing while my child was just creating unintelligible sounds though his gestures were right. That is what prompts me; I cannot just watch him. I wondered where I could enroll him that is fit for him. I needed to find a school that would really accommodate him.

What happened was that we inquired at a private school in the city. However, we learned that in that school the students were mixed -- those with down syndrome, hearing impairments, and others. So, I told them, 'But ma'am, my son is just hearing impaired. He is not like that.' We used to call them hearing impaired before. It was futile because they said 'We do not have what you are looking for here. Here, they are mixed.'

Someone then pointed me to a special education school, and I said 'Oh! my child will really enroll in SPED?' Before, we were not informed, and once you hear Special Education, you cannot accept that your child is special. I could not accept that my child was a special child. 'Does it really have to be a special education?' They said, 'We cannot do anything, that is what your child needs.' He deserves to find a school that is right for him. However, since he was just four then, the special education school told me, 'We do not accept toddlers because this is an elementary school.

Someone referred us here. I am grateful that we found this Educational Resource Center (ERC). This is where Echo really started, in ERC." – ***Anne***

"I also experienced this… Dot was supposed to be in grade one at the age of seven years old, but I did not send her in school. She only started school at the age of nine under Teacher C. I tried sending her to school because I saw her crying. Her best friend was already in grade one, two and until grade 5. Now her best friend is already in Grade 6, while she is still left behind in the same situation. I thought to myself that this could not continue like this, so I decided and made sacrifices. I carried my two little ones with me; they were still young and not yet in school. Rain or heat, we went there to Bago City. We would wait there until noon, enduring even though we did not have any food as long as she could continue going to school.

She was initially studying with Ma'am C, however the classes here are only held three times a week and it was what my sister wanted before she went abroad. She wanted to get Dot and enroll her in the Special Education School so that so that her child could also have someone to be with, and they would be the one to bring and fetch her. If it were up to me, she would really be studying at our school. But it is already a big privilege for me that she is there because she is watched and attended to every day." – ***Divina***

Furthermore, a study that investigated the early experiences of 13 caregivers with children who are Deaf or hard of hearing found that one of the emergent themes was the limited access to hearing loss, parents reported that there is a lack of available local hearing loss services (Reynolds, et. al., 2023). In this study, similar concerns were raised by the parents particularly on the limited access to medical services and its costs.

> *"I want Dot to be checked by a specialist, so they could check her tongue, her ears to really know but I do not know where to go. I am wondering where it is possible. I am just waiting for medical missions. I also ask for updates in our city to know if they will be checking the hearing so I can bring her, I really try to bring her to medical missions but in the end, there are no specialists for hearing there."* – ***Divina***

> *"Alex was three years old when we learned about her condition because we were still hoping that she was just late in her development. In the end, the doctor referred us to have her checked with a developmental doctor. However, we did not proceed with it because of the waiting time. The doctor only caters one to two patients per day, and it would take at least six months to a year before your schedule. That is why we did not continue it."* – ***Joy***

> *"We struggled with Audee so much. Since he was in third grade until he was second year high school, we speech therapy every week with Dr. M, she was the speech therapist, psychological development doctor. It was continuous at the expense of Php 1,800 per session for one hour. We had speech therapy every Monday, Thursday, and Saturday. From third grade to second year high school, every year before we enroll him, we had hearing tests to check."* – ***Chin***

Interview with the participants revealed that the parents' economic status and the support they receive significantly influence the quality of education and health access their children receive. There is a disparity between low-income families and higher income families in access to healthcare.

For low-income families, oftentimes, they do not have proper access to private schools and specialists, like speech therapists. While parents with higher income or those who receive financial support from their family members and others have better chances in accessing private schools and specialized medical services.

Subtheme 3: Message in a Bottle: Communication and Its Complexities

Communicating with a Hard of Hearing person can feel like sending a message in a bottle. The message may be misinterpreted; it may not be received as expected or never reach the recipient at all if one does not patiently learn how to communicate and understand them.

Mendoza et al. (2023) delved into the experiences of students with hearing loss enrolled in an inclusive education. It was revealed in their study that one of the challenges these students face is the communication barrier. They reported that communication gap exists between the students with hearing loss and the people around them making it difficult for these students to communicate with other people. As a result, this causes emotional distress among the students. This is similar to the experiences of parents in this study.

> *"He does not like it when you speak so fast and raise your voice at him. It would confuse him, and he would say 'What? Why?' Sometimes, he would not understand what*

> *you are saying when you are talking so fast because you are angry so to the child it is just 'Blee, blee.' and he responds with 'How am I supposed to understand you? You already know that I cannot hear.' When the child answers back like that, it hurts." –* ***Anne***

> *"Sometimes there are instances when his siblings get frustrated when they communicate with him because it would feel like he is not listening. I would tell them that when they speak to him, they should face him because he cannot understand them." –* ***JL***

Learning sign language early plays a critical role in establishing an accessible language environment, which is essential for hearing parents of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) children (Ritmeester et al., 2025). In the case of Rolly, she found it difficult to communicate with her daughter when she was younger. Her limited knowledge of sign language and lack of experience in dealing with hard of hearing children proved to be a challenge:

> *"It is difficult, because there are certain times when you cannot understand her, especially when she is not feeling well. She struggles expressing herself. Also, it is harder when it comes to what she wants to eat because she just signs and points. I could not understand what she really wanted to eat. Sometimes she would be the one to take the food from the refrigerator herself, and only then would I realize that that was what she wanted to eat. That is when I cook for her. But now, she is okay since she is independent.*
>
> *When she was four to ten years old, it was when I had a tough time explaining everything to her, even with her assignments, I was struggling. I do not know how to… I do know how to sign but I mean it is just the basic, I can point stuff to her. Her teacher taught me what to do and that was it. But for children like her, there are more complex signs, and they were difficult to grasp. It was hard to understand, and I would wonder, "What are you trying to say?" I learned that for parents with hard of hearing children it is particularly challenging. I was just starting to learn how to communicate. I had several nieces and nephews, but I never experienced anything like this with them; it was only with Yen that I experienced this. But now, it is okay because I can already understand her." –* ***Rolly***

> *"There are hardships. You need to study for her so that you can communicate with each other. You must learn sign language, sometimes you will not even understand each other, so you need to learn how to sign to communicate. When she was in kindergarten, there were individuals who taught us to communicate with the children. t's important that at least one member of the family knows how to sign so they can communicate." –* ***Chris***

The excessive cost of acquiring and maintaining assistive devices and speech therapy, combined with the decreased language development of children with hearing loss, contribute to the communication challenges within the families. Moreover, research has shown that parents of children with lower language skills experience elevated parental stress (Pipp-Segel et al., 2002 as cited in Chen et al., 2025).

Consistent developmental needs. Furthermore, support from organizations and teachers is essential for parents to learn sign language, highlighting the significant role of these institutions in bridging communication gaps within families.

Subtheme 4: See Me: Dealing with Unkind Treatment

For parents of children who are hard of hearing, one of the most painful challenges is confronting bullying, exclusion, and discrimination that their children receive from their peers and others. Perceived as different by an uninformed society, these children are often defined by their hearing loss rather than being seen for who they truly are. The theme "See Me" captures the parents' experiences when learning and confronting the bullying and unkind treatment their children received from their peers and others due to their hearing loss.

> *"I experienced strong emotional pain when he was three years old. I enrolled him in a day care center thinking that it is important that he goes to school. However, you cannot really stop children from bullying. They were singing and it was during that time I cried. In their class they were asked to sing Up to the Ceiling Down to the Floor *singing* 'Up to the ceiling, down to the floor' but my child he just sings like 'Ahh ahh ohh' *unintelligible sounds*. I was crying then seeing how my son was trying his best I thought 'Oh, my son he does not know how to speak but he was doing the actions to the Up to the Ceiling Down to the Floor.' His classmates were even laughing at him saying 'Ha-ha-ha! he does not know how to speak!' but he was just enjoying. He did not understand what was happening and he was just ignoring his classmates." –* ***Anne***

> *"Sometimes she gets bullied, they are being mean to her. I would tell them, 'You should befriend Alex, you just take advantage of her when she has toys or food if she has none you bully her.' It hurts me whenever she gets bullied, especially when you witness your child being treated unkindly. There are times when other people would say 'She's mute.' Or things like that? It hurts me. I would take steps to call out these people and tell them 'Do not call her mute. Yes, she cannot hear but she knows how to speak.' I would tell them that." –* ***Joy***

> *"One of her peers approached her shouted on her hearing aid. Of course, it is very painful, the sound is piercing for them. I was wondering when she went home, she told me "Mama," and I asked her, 'What happened?' She told me her ears were hurting and requested to remove the hearing aids. She did not wear hearing aids for two weeks because her ears hurt. It was late when I found out about the incident because she did not know how to express what happened to her." –* ***Rolly***

> *"There are times I get stressed whenever I see her crying because it hurts me that she chooses to cry and not fight back. What I want is for her to refrain from crying in front of her bullies. I do not want her to cry in front of them when they bully her; I want her to cry there at home instead. It is normal for children to fight. They are being mean to her because she is different, but that is normal for children." –* ***Divine***

Consistent with these experiences, a study by Bouldin and others (2021), seven out of nine studies assessed and compared peer victimization. It was found that hearing less increases the probability of victimization. However, factors such educational setting, parental and peer support contribute meaningfully to mediating the bullying in this population.

Most of the parents in this study reported that, during their child's development, their children received unkind treatment from peers and the community. These recurring experiences, including bullying, abandonment, and exclusion, reflect how uninformed society treats differences.

Further, the unkind treatment that these children experience also affects parents who often describe feelings of emotional distress. Studies have consistently shown that bullying has a profound negative impact on mental health, not only for the victims but also for the bullies, and bystanders. Moreover, bullying has both short-term and long-term consequences which includes anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicidal behaviours (Han et al., 2025; Luo et al., 2022). The emotional distress experienced by parents, reflects their empathy for their children and awareness of the societal barriers that their children must navigate.

Theme 3: The Best of Me: The Resilient Parent

The Best of Me describes the experiences of parents on how they responded to the challenges they previously encountered. This theme highlights their strengths as parents, which are detailed in the following subthemes: "The Guardian", which portrays their protective nature, "Counting Miracles" which illustrates their adaptability and acceptance, "True Believer" captures their unwavering faith, and "Safe Haven", which demonstrated the support they received that eased their journey. Thus, the title "The Best of Me" illustrates their admirable qualities embodied for their children's well-being.

Subtheme 1: The Guardian: I Protect the Family

The experiences of parents with their hard of hearing children often shape their perceived role as parents and influence their parenting practices. Most participants experienced persistent fears their children's safety and well-being, particularly when they are exposed with other people.

The fears that these parents feel in turn push them to take on a more vigilant and highly protective stance. The Guardian protects, watches over, and defends which the parents have actively done to ensure the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of their children. Kocagul & Cetinkaya (2025) studied the relationship between language development and parental attitudes in children with cochlear implants. They reported that an overprotective attitude is significantly associated with cochlear implant age and level of economic income.

Based on the interviews, parents of female children often expressed concerns related to potential abuse, sexual harassment, or exploitation. In contrast to the parents of male children which often expressed more concerns about negative peer influence and risky behaviour.

> *"I am considering leaving the children to work abroad, but I was overthinking the abuse that happened to me, wondering what if it also happens to them? When I was young, I was abused which is the reason I could not leave them easily, especially Dot who is hard of hearing. I fear leaving them, so I must sacrifice that. Also, I cannot fully trust my husband's family, yes, he is kind, but we cannot be certain because Dot is already a young lady. So, I do not want to do it, I am overthinking what could happen because I have been through it. I am normal and I could not even open about it to others, so imagine if it happens to Dot?" –* ***Divine***

> *"We are careful of her. I always remind her 'Yen, I do not want you to join the boys when they are gathering around outside.' She has voluptuous breasts and you*

never know what other people are thinking. It could be one's uncle but still. I do not think negatively about them, but I act in advance especially if others could see her weakness and think 'Oh, she does not know how to speak' so I act in advance, it would only be okay if I am always at home." – ***Rolly***

"When he was in elementary school, I always went with him. Of course, I was nervous at the thought of him commuting alone because it was jeepney. However, he is a risk-taker. He told me, 'Do not go with me, I already know how to commute' and I would respond then 'What if you fell asleep? or what if you miss your stop? What will say because you do not know how to speak?' One time, he indeed missed his stop. He mistakenly rode the wrong jeepney. The sound of his voice came out, and he said he was riding Jeepney 1. I was so nervous because of him." – ***Anne***

"There are days when he has tantrums. Earlier this morning, he had tantrums because he wanted to drive. He knows how to drive a car and a motorcycle. However, my point is that it is difficult when they drive because they cannot hear well and they will be more prone to accidents. Also, today there is an event in the city, and he has a group from the city's Deaf community. That is what concerns me because there are certain members of the Deaf community who are bad. I am not saying that I raised him perfectly, but there are Deaf people who are envious or that sort. I always remind him that if he wants to go to the city, he should only mingle with Deaf individuals who are good because you cannot be sure unless it is his classmates whom he knows very well already." – ***Chin***

"We do not usually allow him to go out, but now that he is older, we are more permissive if we know who he is with. We try to learn who he is spending time together with first. Since, right now we cannot be sure because it is not safe, especially if someone invites him that he does not know well. It would be unfortunate, especially if something terrible happened to him. As a parent, it is a default that you think in advance because you cannot predict what might happen. We are worried that he meets new people that would take advantage of him like putting drugs inside his bag or accuse him of something. Sometimes it crosses my mind because I do not know the people, he spends time with. It is all right if he is spending time together with them, his hard of hearing peers but if it is other people I tend to overthink. So far, there have been no bad incidents that have happened yet. As his mother, I just tend to overthink sometimes." – ***JL***

A study that investigated the influence of parents' overprotective parenting patterns on the formation of adolescent identity highlights the importance of striking a balance between providing adequate support and the opportunity for them to handle personal challenges independently, as overprotective parenting patterns influence the adolescent's adjustment to their identity (Sihombing & Tami Daulay, 2025).

In the present study, parents tended to adapt to a more protective stance particularly when their children were younger, while parents with older children tend to gradually become more trusting and supportive. This study further suggests that children's age and gender influence parental vigilance and parents' protective instincts. For parents with hard of hearing children, this study highlights that protectiveness is necessary during early childhood but as they grow older it is also important to provide them with the agency to handle problems and challenges independently to promote healthy identity formation.

Subtheme 2: Counting Miracles: Journey Towards Acceptance

Counting Miracles is a subtheme that captures the gradual process of parents towards resiliency, emotional adjustment, and gratitude. After facing many challenges from diagnosis, search for appropriate education and medical services, stigma, and discrimination that the parents and their children received; the parents begin their journey towards acceptance. Appreciating and recognizing the small victories and progress of their children.

> *"You know what, raising a hard of hearing child is not easy. It was only recently that I have accepted that I have a child who is a Person with Disability (PWD) or that my child has special needs. At first, I could not accept it when they called my child 'Mute,' I cry whenever they do that. That is when Ma'am A helped us understand that this is something we must learn to accept because it is part of God's plan. That is when I finally accepted it."*– ***Anne***
>
> *"We have accepted it because once you have accepted it, it no longer feels heavy in your heart. We no longer questioned God about why this happened. Even his father felt the same way. So, what if he is like that? It is not like we meant that to happen to him. There are moments when it crosses your mind and you get emotional, but we manage. We can still do it because we can see him that he is trying his best… but still there are times you will get emotional. But it is okay we never neglected him, and he is loved.*
>
> *It is fine, and his father constantly encourages us to accept it—to embrace it as it is. There is nothing else we can do but accept it. So instead, we look for ways to help him, such as using hearing aids so he can hear. Whatever he wants, we make sure to provide it. He understands now. What is nice is that he even knows how to drive a car."* – ***JL***
>
> *"We were able to cope with it. We are just grateful that he was able to finish his degree."* – ***Chin***
>
> *"For my husband and I, Yen is a blessing. That is what we consider her - a true blessing. Yen is truly a blessing to us no matter what happens. Even with her condition, she is still a blessing, because she was given to us as someone we genuinely wanted—not just something we wished for, but someone we truly, genuinely wanted. We wanted Yen to be like that, but it is not that we wanted her to end up that way.*
>
> *We accept her. It is hard to accept, but that is the reality. You must support her, accept her without the heaviness in your heart, and without hiding anything or hesitation. Do not say things like 'Oh, they're not really like that,' like you are in denial about who your child truly is. There are other parents who are denial about their children's condition. But honestly, they should not be like that, because once you let go of the denial in your heart, you feel extremely light. Accept them for who they are, support them, and give whatever you can—only what you are able to give."* – ***Rolly***
>
> *"It is difficult and distressing, but you must accept it. I must continue supporting her in whatever she needs."* – ***Chris***

> *"As she grows older, I need to accept that she is hard of hearing." –* ***Joy***

The experiences of the participants can be compared to the experiences of parents with children who are diagnosed with Intellectual Disability. In the study of Abani et al. (2023), they emphasized that the process of acceptance is complex and a gradual process starting from parents overcoming challenges, gaining insights, and adapting coping strategies to handle their situation.

Similarly, for this study parents expressed that the acceptance of their children was a process that they had to navigate. The process of acceptance is gradual, but it is an essential step that parents had to take and embrace for them to be effective in supporting their children. Furthermore, if parents fail to accept their children's situation, they may have difficulty coping with the challenges and providing the needs of their children.

Subtheme 3: True Believer: Anchored in Faith

True Believer as a subtheme details the shared experiences of parents in their faith and religiosity. Aside from the available support, it is their faith in God that allowed parents to continue the challenging road. Religiosity and spirituality are also associated with increased life satisfaction, a stronger sense of meaning in life, and overall improved psychological well-being (Coelho et al., 2022).

> *"Always pray like 'God, we offer all our problems to You. It is up to You how You will return Your blessings to us. At least we did not close our doors on you so that you could enter our lives and help us. We know that You understand us, Lord, that we have a child like this, so we offer Yen to you. If You grant her the will, or if You allow her to recover—even just a little, even gradually—we will accept it. We are not asking You to make it happen immediately, because everything happens through a process, right? If You grant her that, we will truly be happy, Lord.' My husband also prays that 'We are not asking for you to restore Yen to 100% or to make her completely normal. What is important is that she has improvements." –* ***Rolly***

> *"The most important thing is to have a strong faith in God, praying, 'I really need this, Lord. We leave it in Your hands. Only You can answer and help us overcome this.' I continue to practice this even now." –* ***Chin***

> *"I am praying that she can speak out or at least understand what she is doing or what is happening around her so that in the future she will not be deceived. Nowadays, there are a lot of young girls that are being raped. How much more for them that are hard of hearing? I needed to be tough despite all the things that are coming her way and her aunt's way. Since her father died, I had to handle everything on my own. I pray every night and every day, before I leave the house, when I wake up, and before I sleep. Whatever blessings we receive, I always say "Thank you, Lord." No matter how small they are, I always express my gratitude to Him. I am grateful that despite everything I went through since she was young, I was able to survive it. It was not easy." –* ***Joy***

> *"It is my faith in God and the support of his siblings and our family that have allowed me to handle all of this. I pray that he is always guided and away from accidents. You cannot be certain so I just trust that every time he goes biking, I pray that he will return safe." –* ***JL***

> *"God hears and knows all our prayers. Echo may have lost his hearing, but he is gifted with talent. That is what I have experienced with my son." –* ***Anne***

A study conducted by Coelho-Junior et al. (2022) revealed that older adults who report higher levels of religiosity and spirituality are less likely to experience anxiety and depressive symptoms suggest that faith and spirituality provide individuals with protective factors from long term mental health concerns.

In this study, the faith of these parents is also significant on how they positively responded to the challenges often leaning into their faith when they face unpredictable situations that are beyond their control. These findings suggest that psychologist and other mental health advocates may benefit from incorporating faith-based approach in resilience building among parents who encounter numerous stressors.

Subtheme 4: Safe Haven: Seeking and Receiving Support

"Safe Haven" is the subtheme that details the experiences of parents in seeking and receiving support from family, community, and others. Safe haven is the relief and comfort found amidst emotional distress and financial burden.

Parents with hard of hearing children also reported that they were able to cope with the challenges through praying, receiving support from others, and being available for themselves (Dikeç et al., 2023).

> *"We did not have a tough time caring for him since he was a child because it was good that everyone in our family was supportive, especially his father and his siblings, it was not difficult. In fact, we even hired a nanny for him." –* ***JL***

> *"It was my siblings who helped us. Since I did not have any income, I depended on them. They were the ones who really helped us." –* ***Chris***

> *"My younger sibling who went abroad last year is the only person who helps us, but it was only recently. When they were growing up, there were no sponsors and it was only me and my husband who sacrificed. We did everything on our own and we did not receive any help. It was only me and my husband who sent the children to school." –* ***Divina***

Aside from the support coming from their families, participants shared that they actively sought assistance from the government to provide the needs of their children. The support of government through financial assistance and scholarship program were appreciated by the participants.

> *"I registered him to be a member of the government's Persons with Disability (PWD) program. We are grateful because last year we were able to avail of the Negosyo Package which was worth Php 10,000. The Negosyo Package we received helped us to*

> *start up our small 'sari-sari' store, it was his. Whenever there are occasions or programs, we are grateful because they would always remember Echo."* – ***Anne***

> *"When we were in the City, under the PWD, we were receiving financial assistance from the mayor."* – ***Chris***

> *"What I did after he finished his senior high school was, I sought help from the province to see if they grant scholarships, and indeed, they do. The Province Scholarship Program opened for PWDs, so we took the exam. He ended up ranking 3rd out of the 60-plus PWD applicants. They were given by the province a monthly allowance of Php 3,000.00 and an additional Php 2,500.00 for the interpreter."* – ***Chin***

Participants of this study reported that the support they received from their families, community, government helped alleviate their burden in raising their hard of hearing children. This aligns with the study of Shastri et al. (2025), wherein they compared the parental stress, learned helplessness, and perceived social support among parents of children with hearing loss and hearing children.

They found that as the parents perceived social support increases, both parental helplessness and parental stress decreased. These findings highlight the importance of social and financial support for parents and their children in alleviating their challenges. Further, community, family members, and government should work hand in hand advocating for parents and their hard of hearing children given the numerous challenges that they face to promote their overall wellbeing.

Theme 4: Dreamland: Pursuit of Dreams and Aspirations

This theme captures the hopes, dreams, and future aspirations that parents hold for their hard of hearing children, despite the challenges they have encountered. Parents' aspirations are more oriented toward their children's personal growth and development, independence, and their chance to participate meaningfully and inclusively within the community.

> *"That is all I hope for—for him to have a job so that he can somehow learn to provide for himself and not depend on others. Even if the work is small, if he earns, he can help buy groceries at home. I do not ask for anything else; once he is able to do that, that is already enough for me. In the future, I also hope that he will marry someone who is kind and accepting him as he is, someone who will not mistreat or take advantage of him. One thing that I am also pursuing is for him to have regular job so he will have the security of tenure. There may be a time when I am no longer here. What is important is that he has a job.*
>
> *I hope there was a place for them where they would be recognized for who they are, because not everyone knows or understands their condition. Even just a part of the church or a public place would be enough, so that people like them would know that there is a space for them and that they are welcome to join."* – ***Chin***

> *"What we hope for him every day is for him to simply have a good health, that he will have no illnesses, and that he stays safe from accidents. That is all we want for him."* – ***JL***

> *"My dream for him is what his dreams are. When I asked him, 'What do you want in the future?' he shared that if God allows it, he wants to teach in ministry. I asked him what he wanted to teach, and he said he wanted to teach children like Deaf students. That is what he really wants, that is why Echo is very diligent. However, we cannot afford it."* ***– Anne***

> *"That she may be able to achieve her dreams. Also, that she may finish her studies and find a job that she wants."* ***– Chris***

> *"I really wanted her to go to school and become a nurse… But when I learned about her diagnosis, I was okay with it. I saw her improvement. I am okay that she has matured and that she is healthy… My only goal for her in the future, I am not expecting her to have her own family. All I want is for her to be wise since we cannot be with her all the time. I want her to know how to handle situations and recognize if someone is taking advantage of her… So, whatever God's will be for her, we will just support her. I just want her to be wise in dealing with the people she encounters. That is all—I do not want anyone to take advantage of her."* ***– Rolly***

> *"What I hope for her is that she has someone to guide her in the end so that she will not be pitiful or lost. I hope she can have a job and a meaningful life, rather than ending up being lost or marginalized. I hope in the end she has someone with her."* ***– Joy***

It has been examined that one of the factors that predicts parents' resilience is hope. It was found that an increased sense of hope among parents may often lead to better adjustment, quality of life, and personal well-being particularly for parents who are experiencing difficulties like disabilities or health concerns (Cole and Molloy, 2023).

Although these parents have encountered numerous challenges, their hope and resilience are still evident not just in their stories but also on how they continually nurture and strive to give the best to their children. Given that significance of hope in the psychological well-being of parents with hard of hearing children, schools, support institutions, psychologists and other mental professional may consider creating programs that will help further build the resilience of parents as enhancing hope may increase the parents' mental health and capacity effectively support their children's needs.

E. Conclusion

This section presents the conclusion and recommendation based on the findings of the study.

This study delved into the lived experiences of seven (7) parents with hard of hearing children. An in-depth interview with the participants was conducted to explore the experiences of parents. This study revealed that diagnosis of children evoked strong emotions from parents including shock, confusion, and emotional distress. Participants also expressed the rigorous process that they went through to seek suitable schools and medical care for their children. Limited access to hearing aids and the cost of its maintenance poses a burden for many parents resulting to eventual discontinuation of its use. Further, families of children who are hard of hearing are met with various barriers in communication including misunderstandings which causes strain in their interaction. All participants used sign language to communicate with their hard of hearing children. They also expressed that learning sign language was difficult as they had no prior experience to it. Other challenges that the participants encountered are the unkind treatment that their children receive including bullying, discrimination, and being excluded.

In turn, parents adopt a highly protective stance to deal with the challenges. Moreover, parents expressed that the process of accepting their children's condition was not easy, as it has its share of challenges. However, acceptance and their faith have helped ease their emotional burden. Support from families, communities, and government also alleviated their financial challenges. Furthermore, future aspirations of parents for their children did not center on big accomplishments instead focused more on their well-being. Moreover, parents also shared that they want whatever their children want for themselves which illustrates their respect for their children's agency.

Based on the results of this study, the following are the **recommendations**:

For the National Government Agencies, particularly the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Health, and Department of Education, that they create programs that alleviate the burden of parents with hard of hearing children. Inclusive and accessible community-based assistance programs that would support the parents and children in accessing assistive devices, speech therapists, and sign language interpreters.

For the Local Government Units (LGU), to design livelihood programs that assist hearing parents and their hard of hearing children to promote their well-being. Support should be accessible not only to the low-income families, but also the working class as they too deserve equal access to these programs.

For the Teachers, administrators, and staff, to collaborate with parents in providing them access to Filipino Sign Language interpreters, lessons, and references. They are also encouraged to further advocate for inclusive learning community where the children learn in friendly environment, where bullying, discrimination, and exclusion has no place.

For Psychologists and Other Mental Health Professionals, to learn Filipino Sign Language and actively create programs advocating for mental health, providing psychological services that are inclusive for the parents and hard of hearing individuals.

For Parents with Hard of Hearing Children, to continue advocating for the children so that they could have access to the services and education that they rightfully deserve.

For Future Researchers, to pursue studies that are relevant to this research. Hopefully, they could explore more on the experiences of hard of hearing individuals themselves, contributing to a deeper understanding of this unique community.

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