



Factors Affecting the Hearing Care of Hispanic/Latinx Families

Note: This fact sheet will use the general term Deaf or Hard of Hearing, abbreviated as DHOH. DHOH is used to include all individuals with a range of deafness or hearing loss and who may have differing cultural beliefs.

Overview

Identifying deafness or differences in hearing early is essential for children to meet developmental goals. In the United States, 98% of newborns receive a hearing screening and early hearing detection and intervention programs can be found in every state.⁴ Yet, Hispanic/Latinx (H/L) children are at risk for delayed services.³ Even mild, unaddressed differences in hearing can affect a child's social development and make it more difficult to learn.⁹ In adults, age-related hearing loss can negatively affect mental health. Studies have found that older adults with hearing loss are more likely to experience symptoms of depression. Contributing factors for this increased risk include social isolation and disengaging in activities due to communication difficulties.⁶ Symptoms of depression can worsen if an individual does not receive or seek help for communication barriers. When compared to the general population, older H/L adults use hearing aids at lower rates.¹ This fact sheet will discuss factors affecting culturally and linguistically diverse families' hearing care as well as recommendations for providers.

Cultural Differences

In the United States, there are many individuals who identify with Deaf culture. Deaf culture emphasizes DHOH individuals as "a unique cultural and linguistic minority who use sign language as their primary language." It also rejects terms that imply that DHOH individuals are broken or less than (i.e., hearing impaired).¹⁰ Deaf culture aligns with the social model perspective, viewing deafness as a difference rather than as an impairment.¹¹ As

opposed to the medical model which views deafness as something to be cured or fixed such as through technology for restoring hearing.⁵ DHOH individuals may identify with parts of Deaf culture, none at all, or embrace it wholly. As people have experiences, the way they view themselves can change over time. Many people are not aware of Deaf culture and the Deaf community until they are adolescents or adults.¹⁰ This can occur when DHOH individuals are born to non-DHOH parents.

A national study found that H/L parents had more positive attitudes towards restorative hearing technology and educational approaches that prioritize speech than non-H/L parents. Some explanations for this are wanting their children to be similar to hearing children, parents respecting the authority of doctors who recommend speech over sign, and lacking information about other options. Also, for many people, language is an important part of their culture and identity. H/L parents, who value strong cultural identification and want their children to learn about H/L culture, showed a preference for speaking Spanish instead of or in addition to Sign Language. However, there is limited research examining whether H/L parents of DHOH children generally align more closely with the social or medical model.¹¹

Another consideration is how parents' current stressors influence their decisions. First-generation parents with limited-English proficiency may feel overwhelmed by the need to learn American Sign Language and English. Parents who have moved to the United States maybe also be trying to figure out an unfamiliar healthcare system. Sometimes H/L parents choose to prioritize learning English, because they feel it will help them the most with advocating for their child and securing supports they need.⁷ In some cases, there are families who have very limited communication with their DHOH child.¹¹

A person's family can have a significant role in how a person views themselves, especially when they are young. In H/L families, when an adolescent and their parent have different cultural values and expectations, it can increase stress and affect mental health outcomes. This phenomenon has been observed in first generation parents and second-generation children.⁸

Limited Information and Communication

When parents learn their child is DHOH, they may experience a range of emotions while needing to navigate new responsibilities. For example, parents might be learning about what hearing aids do, how to check them, and making sure their child wears them enough- along with other recommendations from their audiologist.² Parents may experience challenges that makes implementing these changes more difficult. H/L parents have reported difficulty with knowing if their child's hearing aids were helping them and wanting more access to information to help them understand what caused a difference in their child's hearing. In particular, many parents want concrete resources.^{3, 12} The emphasis on concrete resources may be due to how individuals are sometimes given online resources that are not available in other languages, and some people may have difficulty navigating online resources. H/L families do not always have easy access to information discussing the use of sign language and/or spoken language, and what options can look like based on English, Spanish, or Sign Language preferences.¹²

Difficulties accessing information can help explain why many parents wanted more training from audiologists. Individuals affected by limited access to resources and information may be having trouble communicating with their doctor too. When communication with doctors is compromised, it can affect how parents follow recommendations. In a study where half of H/L parents said they needed help communicating with their audiologist and many required an interpreter, parents reported problems affecting how much their children used their hearing aids.³ Also, language access, along with other access factors like health insurance access, were found to significantly affect older H/L adults' use of hearing aids.¹

Connection and Rapport

H/L parents have expressed a desire for more support and check-ins from their audiologists. A possible reason for this feedback is the significance of *personalismo*, an integral cultural value for many H/L individuals. *Personalismo* refers to valuing interpersonal connection and is seen as important in professional and formal relationships too. H/L parents of DHOH children shared that they wanted providers to be more validating of their feelings and more patient.^{2, 3} Developing rapport can be necessary for parents to trust providers and can affect how quality of care is perceived. Interviews with H/L parents of children with disabilities, from various countries, show how *personalismo* is important in interactions with medical professionals, school faculty, and direct service professionals. In [Lizette's digital storytelling episode](#), she discusses having to change her son's doctor and the powerful effect another doctor's validation had.

Recommendations

Recommendations to improve the hearing care of the H/L community include:^{2, 11}

- Provide information in individuals' preferred language.
- Provide easy-to-understand information that considers individuals' different levels of familiarity with DHOH diagnoses and the healthcare system.
- Provide training/education on hearing care to families, including family members other than the parents who are involved in care.
- Check-in with parents more frequently.
- Inform individuals of their various options so they can decide what works best for them.
- Connect individuals and families with support groups and educational groups.

Providers can also familiarize themselves with Deaf culture because it may help them understand some individuals' perspectives better. Also, by connecting families and individuals with support groups they may become aware of Deaf culture and can decide if they identify with it.

Resources

The National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management (NCHAM) serves as the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) National Technical Resource Center website. On NCHAM's website, there is an [EHDI directory](#). The EHDI directory gives contact information for each state's EHDI and helpful links for providers. You can also find [resources for parents and professionals in English and Spanish](#) through NCHAM. These resources include webinars, tutorials, materials, and research.

Also, some helpful information for parents is provided by Kids Health from Nemours. At their website you can find [basic information in English and Spanish on symptoms and causes, and about hearing evaluations](#).

Lastly, the National Hearing Aid Project (NHAP) can be a good resource for those interested in hearing aids but who need financial help. NHAP provides help with financing for some low-income individuals but also lists [state and national resources that help with financing for hearing aids](#).

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