

Identifying The Need For Counseling Support For Hearing Siblings Of Deaf Individuals: Evidence From A Case Study

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Abstract: This study addresses the limited attention given to hearing siblings of individuals with deafness, a group that often remains overlooked within family support structures despite their critical roles. These siblings frequently experience emotional and social challenges as a result of the disproportionate focus placed on the needs of their deaf sibling, potentially impacting their well-being. This research aims to explore the lived experiences of hearing siblings and identify their specific needs for guidance and counseling support. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study involved four participants selected through purposive sampling, all of whom were actively engaged in their deaf sibling's daily life. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analytical stages included verbatim transcription, open coding, theme categorization, and validation through member checking. The findings revealed five major themes: emotional burden, social challenges, diminished well-being, the urgent need for support, and perception of counseling. Participants described increased responsibility, feelings of neglect, stigma, and social isolation, all contributing to low self-esteem and psychological stress. Importantly, counseling was perceived positively as a "safe space," but participants emphasized the need for counselors who are knowledgeable about deafness and sibling dynamics. The study recommends the development of tailored guidance and counseling programs that address the specific emotional, educational, and interpersonal needs of hearing siblings of deaf individuals. Additionally, it calls for greater public awareness and further longitudinal research to inform sustainable and inclusive support systems.

Keywords: Guidance; Counseling; Disability; Deaf; Siblings; Well-being

INTRODUCTION

The birth of a child brings joy, but when that child is diagnosed with a disability such as deafness, family dynamics undergo a significant change. Attention and resources are often redirected to meet the specific needs of that child, which can lead to the needs of other siblings being overlooked (Zukow-Goldring & Bornstein, 2002). Siblings of individuals who are deaf face a unique set of challenges, stemming from the complexities of growing up with someone who has different communication and developmental needs (Ray, 2014). These challenges

frequently manifest as heightened emotional distress, increased caregiving responsibilities, and potential academic or social difficulties. Consequently, the long-term psychological well-being and developmental trajectories of these siblings can be profoundly impacted, thereby necessitating targeted support interventions (Royall, 2019)

Deafness as a sensory disability not only affects the individual experiencing it but also impacts all family members, including siblings. The family environment has a significant influence on a child's personality development. (Mayfani et al., 2022). In many cases, primary attention is given to the individual with deafness and their parents, while siblings often become a neglected group. (Marschark, 1993). This imbalance in attention and emotional investment may lead to siblings of the deaf experiencing feelings of isolation, jealousy, or guilt, which can impact their psychosocial adjustment. (Friedner & Kusters, 2020). Siblings often require greater support and resources if they choose to have a future caregiver for their sibling with a disability, but the age and readiness of the siblings to step into this role need to be considered when providing resources. (Nguyen, 2022). Despite these potential challenges, siblings of children with deafness also demonstrate increased empathy, resilience, and maturity. (Yuen et al., 2022).

However, they play a crucial role in family dynamics and the social development of their deaf sibling. Literature indicates that siblings of individuals with disabilities may experience emotional distress, feelings of neglect, and a disproportionate burden of responsibility. (Burke, 2004). Nonetheless, the corpus of dedicated research concerning the phenomenological experiences of siblings of persons with deafness is demonstrably finite. Accordingly, this study aims to fill this void by exploring the experiences of four adolescents with deaf siblings, to underscore their need for adequate guidance and counseling services.

Deafness, as an invisible disability in its initial stages, can present a unique set of challenges within the family system. (Mackenzie & Smith, 2009). The nuances of communication, the potential for social isolation, and the demands of navigating a hearing-centric world can create distinct experiences for all family members, including siblings. Unlike some visible disabilities, the initial lack of overt physical markers might delay diagnosis, leading to periods of uncertainty and frustration within the family. Once identified, the need for specialized communication strategies, educational support, and potential assistive technologies often shifts parental focus and resources, inadvertently impacting the experiences of siblings. (Terry & Rance, 2023).

Siblings may feel overshadowed or emotionally sidelined as parents devote significant time and energy to supporting the child with deafness (Ray, 2014). This dynamic can influence sibling relationships, sometimes fostering resentment or emotional distance, but in other cases, it can cultivate empathy and a heightened sense of responsibility. Moreover, the absence of open family dialogue about these shifting dynamics may further complicate the siblings' emotional adjustment (Milevsky, 2020). Research suggests that these siblings may experience internalized pressure to minimize their own needs to reduce the burden on their parents (Ngangana et al., 2016)

Sibling experiences can vary greatly. Some report increased empathy, patience, and a sense of responsibility, while others struggle with feelings of neglect, jealousy, and heightened pressure (McHale & Gamble, 1989; Orsmond & Seltzer, 2007). These contrasting experiences indicate that hearing siblings of individuals with disabilities, including deafness, are not a

homogenous group and often carry complex emotional burdens. Despite their significant role within the family – serving as playmates, informal caregivers, and emotional buffers – their psychological well-being is often overlooked. Hearing siblings of individuals with disabilities, including deafness, are not a monolithic group, but rather individuals navigating complex and often conflicting emotional landscapes (Wimberly, 2023). Guidance and counseling studies have primarily centered on individuals with disabilities and their parents, unintentionally sidelining siblings whose well-being is also essential to the overall family system (Moiz, 2024).

Siblings, as integral members of the family system, also experience emotional, social, and developmental challenges that warrant professional attention. (Kramer et al., 2019). Ignoring their needs not only diminishes their well-being but may also disrupt the overall balance and functioning of the family unit. Guidance and counseling, by its very nature, is meant to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of all individuals affected by developmental, emotional, or relational difficulties. (Sue et al., 2022). Notably, prior studies in guidance and counseling have primarily focused on the needs of children with disabilities and their parents, leaving a gap in addressing the specific support needs of siblings. (Gauthier-Boudreault et al., 2017; Tudor & Lerner, 2015). This absence of attention in existing guidance and counseling frameworks underscores a critical shortcoming. Family counseling programs that aim to support families of children who are deaf have typically centered on strengthening parent-child communication, developing parental coping strategies, and enhancing the child's social-emotional development. (Day et al., 2018). These interventions rarely consider the perspectives and needs of hearing siblings, who are also profoundly impacted by the presence of deafness in the family. As a result, siblings remain an underserved population within family guidance services, despite their vital role in maintaining family cohesion and emotional resilience. (Sohn Annemarie et al., 2024).

By highlighting the unmet needs of siblings of individuals who are deaf, this article aims to encourage professionals, policymakers, and families to prioritize the well-being of this vulnerable group by utilizing a guidance and counseling framework. Research on families with children who are deaf generally focuses on the individual with the disability or their parents. (Feher-Prout, 1996). Meanwhile, siblings, who are also a crucial part of the family dynamic, are often overlooked. Their role is critical as playmates, informal caregivers, and even interpreters in many situations. Because the emotional needs of siblings are often overlooked, this can affect their social and emotional development (Bat-Chava & Martin, 2002; Calderon & Greenberg, 2010). To address these challenges, guidance and counseling services are essential in helping person process their emotions, build healthy coping strategies, and develop a strong sense of identity (Frey et al., 2019; Weare, 2015). Through structured counseling interventions, siblings can gain a safe space to express feelings of confusion, isolation, or pressure that may otherwise go unspoken. Furthermore, counseling programs can educate siblings about deafness, reduce misconceptions, and strengthen empathy and family communication (Bahiru, 2024; Moeller et al., 2024). Including siblings in psychoeducational and therapeutic efforts also reinforces their sense of belonging and significance within the family system (Allen et al., 2022). As such, incorporating sibling-specific support within guidance and counseling frameworks is a necessary step toward inclusive and comprehensive family care (Zagacki, 2023). Consequently, the present study

undertakes an in-depth examination of the experiences of four siblings of individuals with deafness through a qualitative case study approach.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the lived experiences of hearing siblings of individuals with deafness. A total of four participants were selected using purposive sampling. The selection criteria included: (1) being a hearing sibling of a person with deafness, (2) aged between 17 and 25 years, and (3) actively involved in the daily life and communication of their deaf sibling. Potential participants were identified through referrals from special education teachers and school counselors, who had prior Knowledge of families with deaf children. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, providing participants with the opportunity to express their narratives in their own words. Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The analytical procedure involved several stages: identifying recurring patterns in the data, coding relevant segments, categorizing codes into broader themes, and validating the findings through participant confirmation. (Hanurawan, 2007, 2012) This approach ensured the credibility and relevance of the themes about the research objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal the multifaceted experiences of hearing siblings of individuals with deafness, categorized into five major themes: emotional burden, social challenges, impact on well-being, need for support, and perceptions of counseling. These themes reflect not only the psychological and social strains encountered but also the aspirations for support and understanding.

1. Emotional Burden:

Participants described heightened responsibilities, often assuming caregiving roles at a young age. This aligns with family role theory, which suggests that children in such contexts may internalize parental expectations, affecting their identity development (Pattison et al., 2022). Feelings of neglect and forced independence were commonly reported, indicating emotional needs that remain unacknowledged by their family environment.

2. Social Challenges

Siblings experienced social stigma and discomfort in public settings, particularly when having to explain their sibling's condition. These findings align with prior literature that highlights the role of social misunderstanding in perpetuating isolation (Krueger et al., 2019). The need to constantly explain or defend their sibling's condition contributed to emotional fatigue.

3. Impact on Well-being

Low self-esteem and a sense of inadequacy were evident across participants. These outcomes are consistent with Abdel-Khalek's (2016) findings, which suggest that sustained emotional pressure and a lack of validation can erode self-worth. The emotional toll appears to limit not only self-perception but also academic and social functioning (Calero et al., 2018). The lack of supportive spaces to express their concerns compounds these effects, as siblings

may suppress emotions in an attempt to avoid burdening their parents. In this context, guidance and counseling can serve as a preventive intervention by helping siblings build emotional awareness, resilience, and self-acceptance (Martinez & Opalinski, 2019; Matsuno & Israel, 2018). Addressing these psychological dimensions early is critical to fostering both individual well-being and healthier family dynamics.

4. Need for Support

Participants expressed a strong need for structured support in the form of counseling, education about deafness, and development of interpersonal skills. This reinforces the argument that siblings must be included as beneficiaries in family-based intervention programs, not merely as bystanders. Their involvement is crucial not only for their psychosocial well-being but also for fostering a more cohesive and resilient family system. Without adequate support, siblings may develop misconceptions about deafness, internalize emotional distress, or struggle with social interactions both within and outside the family. (Lone, 2025).

5. Perceptions of Counseling

Counseling was perceived as a valuable resource, but only if delivered by professionals who understand the unique dynamics of deaf families. The desire for both individual and peer-group counseling emerged as a central theme. As one participant stated: "Meeting others with Deaf siblings would be helpful..." – suggesting a sense of belonging and shared empathy as healing mechanisms. Structured counseling can help them navigate their roles, articulate their feelings, and form healthier relationships with their deaf sibling. In addition, equipping siblings with appropriate Knowledge and communication strategies enhances their capacity to contribute positively to the development of the deaf family member.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Sibling Experiences

	Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Code	Example Quote
1	Emotional Burden	Increased sense of responsibility	Caregiver role	"I always felt like I had to take care of them. Like I was a second parent."
		Increased sense of responsibility	Pressure to succeed	"I have to succeed because I need to support my Deaf sibling."
		Feeling neglected	Feeling unimportant	"Sometimes I feel like I do not matter. Like they are the only one who does."
		Feeling neglected	Forced independence	"I had to do everything on my own because my parents focused more on my Deaf sibling."
		Anxiety and worry	Future concerns	"I always worry about what will happen to them when our parents are gone."
		Anxiety and worry	Limited independence	"They still cannot use public transportation independently."
		Sadness and loss	Missing 'normal' experiences	"I feel sad that they cannot hear music – music is my hobby."

	Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Code	Example Quote
2	Social Challenges	Stigma	Avoiding pity	"I do not always tell people my brother is Deaf. Sometimes people pity us, and it is uncomfortable."
		Stigma	Judgmental stares	"When my brother screamed in public, people stared. It felt uncomfortable."
		Difficulty explaining disability	Misunderstood condition	"People think my sibling is mute. It is tiring to explain the difference, but I have to."
		Difficulty explaining disability	Genetic misconceptions	"I had a failed relationship because they thought Deafness is inherited."
		Social isolation	Not feeling understood	"Sometimes I feel like no one understands what it is like to have a Deaf sibling."
		Social isolation	Wanting empathy	"Try living as I do for just one day, maybe then they will understand."
3	Impact on Wellbeing	Low self-esteem	Feeling inadequate	"I do not feel good enough. I always feel like I am lacking."
		Low self-esteem	No sense of achievement	"There is nothing in my life that I feel proud of."
4	Need for Support	Emotional support	Needing to be heard	"I just need someone to talk to. Someone who understands."
		Emotional support	Feeling overlooked	"Why does no one ask if <i>I am</i> okay?"
		Education and information	Learning sign language	"I took a sign language course even though it was expensive."
		Education and information	Attending Deaf awareness events	"I like going to events that focus on Deaf issues."
		Skill development	Better communication	"I need to learn how to communicate better with my Deaf sibling."
		Skill development	Conflict resolution	"We fight a lot due to miscommunication. I think I need to be more patient."
5	Perceptions of Counseling	Valuable resource	Counseling as a safe space	"I think counseling can help; it is a place to share and learn to cope."
	Perceptions of Counseling	Need for knowledgeable professionals	Counselors who understand Deafness	"It is important to have someone who understands Deafness, not just telling me to 'be patient'."
	Perceptions of Counseling	Service format	Individual & group support	Meeting others with Deaf siblings would be helpful. However, individual counseling is good too."

(2022) findings suggest greater support for siblings is required, with a focus on addressing negative feelings and the availability of social support from people with similar experiences. These findings corroborate previous research emphasizing the importance of emotional and community support for families of children with disabilities, while specifically extending our understanding by highlighting the particular needs and distinct perspectives of siblings

(Múries-Cantán et al., 2023). Unlike much of the existing literature, which primarily focuses on parental roles and needs, this study explicitly draws attention to the specific experiences and support requirements of siblings.

Furthermore, it is crucial to increase public awareness regarding the roles and challenges faced by siblings of deaf individuals. This will help reduce stigma and foster a more empathetic and supportive social environment. Future research, utilizing larger sample sizes and longitudinal studies, is necessary to understand the long-term effects of these experiences and the efficacy of proposed interventions.

CONCLUSION

Siblings of individuals who are deaf face emotional, social, and psychological challenges that are often overlooked. Feelings of neglect, anxiety, stigma, and low self-esteem commonly emerge, especially in the absence of appropriate support systems. To support their well-being, guidance services should provide emotional validation, basic knowledge about deafness, and skills to improve family communication. Group counseling can also help reduce isolation by connecting siblings who share similar experiences. These services must be tailored to their specific roles and challenges within the family. This study highlights the need to include siblings in family-centered support programs and calls for greater awareness and policy efforts to address their needs. Further research is needed to develop scalable and inclusive interventions that address these challenges.

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