

Neither hearing nor deaf.

Psychosocial functioning in hard of hearing preschool children



NTNU – Trondheim
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Nina Jakhelln Laugen^{1,2}, Karl Jacobsen², Lars Wichstrøm², Carolien Rieffe³

1) Statped, 2) Department of Psychology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology 3) department of Psychology, University of Leiden

Abstract

This study investigated psychosocial functioning in hard of hearing 4-5-year olds, and tried to identify factors associated with psychosocial problems. 36 hard of hearing children and 180 normal hearing children aged 4-5 years participated in the study. Data on psychosocial functioning, social skills, language skills, and demographic information were obtained.

Hard of hearing boys evidenced more psychosocial problems than hearing peers. Early diagnosis was associated with better psychosocial functioning for the hard of hearing children. Degree of hearing loss did not predict psychosocial functioning. The results underscore the importance of early detection and intervention even for mild hearing losses, and the need to address not only language, but also psychosocial development.

Introduction

Deaf children are at risk for developing psychosocial problems. This increased risk has commonly been linked to deaf children's less advanced language development. Children with milder hearing loss have less problems with language acquisition than children with profound and severe hearing loss, although they still show a significant delay. Possibly because hard of hearing children often "speak well", their psychosocial functioning has received comparatively less attention than among deaf children. However, hard to hear children are still prevented from participating in many social situations due to adverse listening conditions, and this may cause psychosocial problems, not yet identified.

The present study therefore investigated psychosocial functioning in children with hearing aids as well as a control group of normal hearing children. Because language, social skills and age at detection of hearing loss are known to be associated with psychosocial functioning in other populations, these were included as covariates.

Method

36 hard of hearing children (17 boys, 19 girls) aged 4-5 years were included. Degree of hearing loss ranged from unilateral loss to severe, 29 of the children had mild or moderate loss in the best ear. Language ability was measured by means of PPVT-III, and parents reported on the child's mental health (SDQ) and social skills (SSRS), as well as provided demographic data. A gender and age matched, but otherwise representative, control group of 180 normal hearing children from the city of Trondheim completed the same measurements.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dukmaniquis/>

	Mean (SD)		t	p
	NH	HH		
SDQ total	5,7 (4,1)	9,4 (5,9)	3,768	.000***
PPVT-III	63,6 (19,9)	54,1 (22,3)	-2,445	.016*
SSRS	49,6 (8,4)	46,4 (10,5)	-1,832	.069

Independent samples t-test between normal hearing (NH) and hard of hearing (HH) group

Instruments

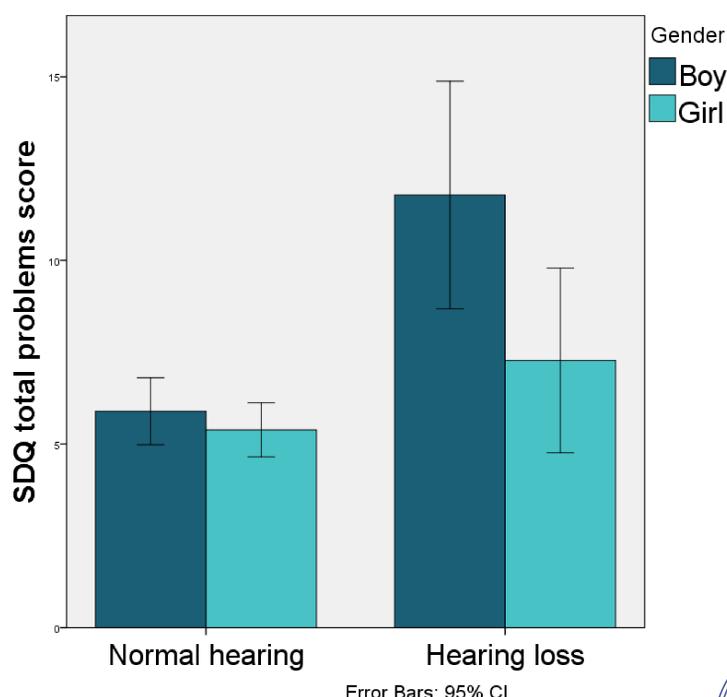
SDQ: Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, Ford, Simmons, Gatward, & Meltzer, 2000)

SSRS: Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990)

PPVT-III: Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn & Dunn, 1997)

	β	p
Gender	-.401	.004**
PPVT	-.571	.009**
SSRS	-.468	.002**
Age at detection	.393	.007**
Degree of HL	.129	.342

Linear regression analysis predicting SDQ score in hard of hearing children.
R² = .614



Major Findings

- Parents of boys with hearing loss report significantly more difficulties than parents of boys with normal hearing, and parents of girls (with and without hearing loss).
- Social skills, language and early detection of hearing loss predict better psychosocial functioning at age 4-5.
- Degree of hearing loss does not predict psychosocial functioning, suggesting that even mild hearing loss is a significant risk factor for psychosocial problems

