

# **Lived Experiences of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Young People in New Zealand**

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## **Introduction:**

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) young people face a number of challenges to their growth and development. Early identification and intervention can produce favourable outcomes for these individuals. Most DHH students in NZ attend education using primarily oral-aural communication. This brings unique challenges, but individuals may find support or coping mechanisms to help overcome them. Previous qualitative research showed higher rates of peer relationship problems at school, and 'social deafness' in noisy environments. DHH Māori, who face higher rates of hearing loss than Pākehā, may face isolation from their cultural heritage, experiencing feelings of isolation and disconnect.

## **Aims:**

To explore the lived experiences of DHH children and whānau, considering challenges and successes with hearing, and their socio-emotional, cultural and educational development.

## **Methods:**

We conducted semi-structured interviews, in English, with the participant and whānau. Inclusion criteria were DHH children in the Wellington region, aged 8-13, whose primary communication method is oral-aural. Participants used cochlear implants or hearing aids. Data was transcribed and coded, with themes recorded using NVivo.

## **Results:**

The results are presented through rich narratives. Themes that emerged described initial experiences with hearing loss and the health system, hearing technology, social deafness, education and culture. Assistive listening devices improved functioning, but also brought challenges in terms of pragmatics, effectiveness, and self-acceptance. Relationships with individual clinicians along with system interactions played a key role in participant's experiences. Analysis showed a strong common theme of self/whānau acceptance of hearing loss which may reflect selection bias.

## **Conclusions:**

The lived experiences of DHH children and whānau are rich and diverse, serving to inform clinicians' understanding and service provision. Children who are not using hearing aids/cochlear implants and less confident children or whānau who are using assistive listening devices may have different experiences, future study into this area would provide a broader perspective.