

Understanding listening effort from the perspective of adolescents

Katie Neal

The Shepherd Centre

Individuals with hearing loss frequently describe their experience of effort in relation to listening, particularly in challenging acoustic and linguistic environments. Despite recognition of this impact on an individual's listening capacity and communication ability, an effective and meaningful clinical measurement of listening effort remains difficult. There are external indicators to the presence of listening effort that may be observed by communication partners, such as timing delays and changes in proximity to a speaker, however the consequences and perception of effort experienced by individuals with hearing loss is largely internal. This internal nature creates inherent complexities when trying to measure, understand and accurately represent the perception and impact of listening effort, particularly in adolescent and younger children. These complexities are likely to prevent accurate representation of listening effort, which may further limit clinical consideration as to its role in everyday communication.

This pilot study used an existing standardised patient reported outcome measure (PROM) of listening effort that had been validated in an adult population, in order to determine if the constructs captured from this measure were recognisable and meaningful to the experiences of listening effort and communication for adolescents. Parents also completed the PROM to explore variations in responses between external observations and the individual experience of listening effort.

Findings from this pilot indicate that adolescents easily recognise and experience listening effort in their daily lives. It also highlights that a parent's observation of effort may contrast to their child's own experience, and that our clinical understanding in this space may be lacking. Validated amendments in relation to language and context will likely enhance the utility of a PROM for this population, as validated measures are required in order to consider effort as part of ongoing clinical assessments. An increased capacity to both measure and understand listening effort within younger populations will enhance our ability to provide timely and targeted support.