

Introduction

- Communication is the process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a shared system of symbols, signs, or behaviors¹.
- Speech is a primary mode of communication used extensively in daily life; however, effective communication relies on an individual's ability to receive and process information. This can present challenges for individuals who are hard of hearing².
- In healthcare settings, effective communication between clinicians and patients is critical for accurate history taking, patient education, and shared decision-making. For patients with hearing impairment, barriers to communication may affect both the patient experience and the quality of care received.
- This study investigates the effectiveness of communication between otolaryngologists and hard-of-hearing patients in a clinical office setting, particularly in the context of care for hearing impairment.

Methods

- An anonymous, cross-sectional survey was developed using Microsoft Forms to evaluate the clinical experiences of individuals with hearing loss interacting with otolaryngologists.
- The survey consisted of 18 questions, including 12 items using a 5-point Likert scale, designed to assess multiple aspects of the patient experience, such as communication effectiveness, accessibility of care, and satisfaction with clinical interactions.
- The survey was distributed electronically to members of the hard-of-hearing community via email and social media platforms.
- Data collection occurred between June 1, 2024, and June 30, 2024, and all responses were voluntary and anonymous. Responses were collected only from individuals who self-identified as hard of hearing.

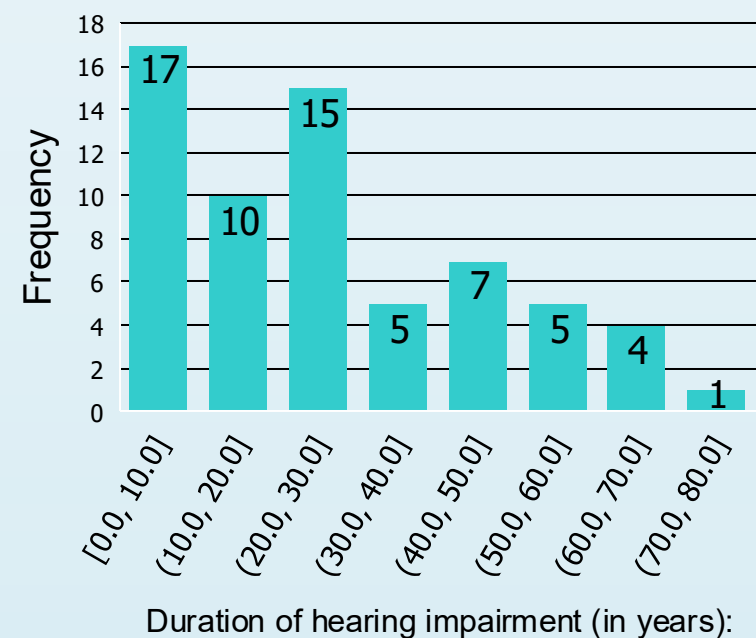
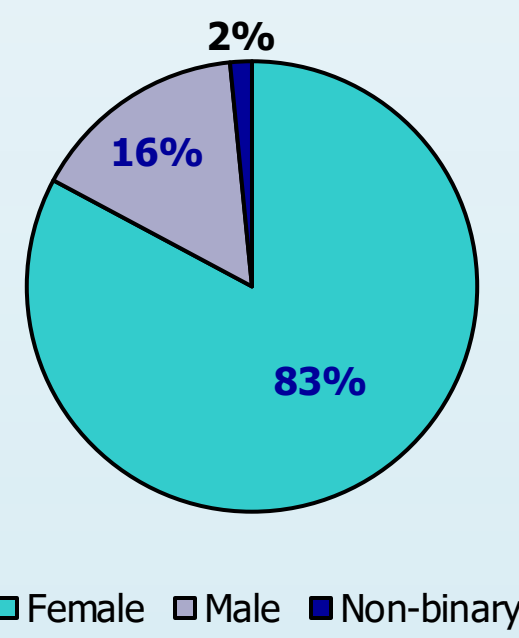
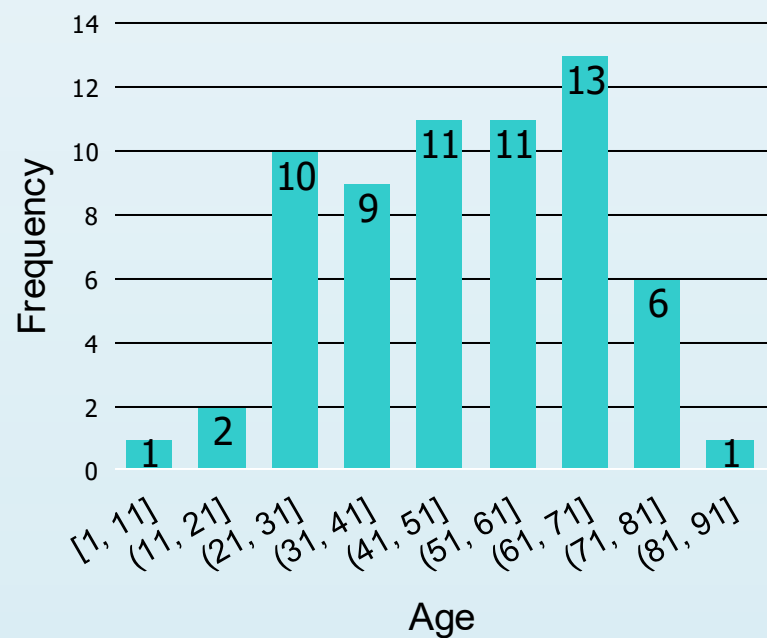
Limitations

- Key limitations of this study include its reliance on a convenience, self-selected sample of survey respondents, a moderate sample size (n = 64), and its cross-sectional design. These factors may limit the generalizability of the findings and preclude causal inference.

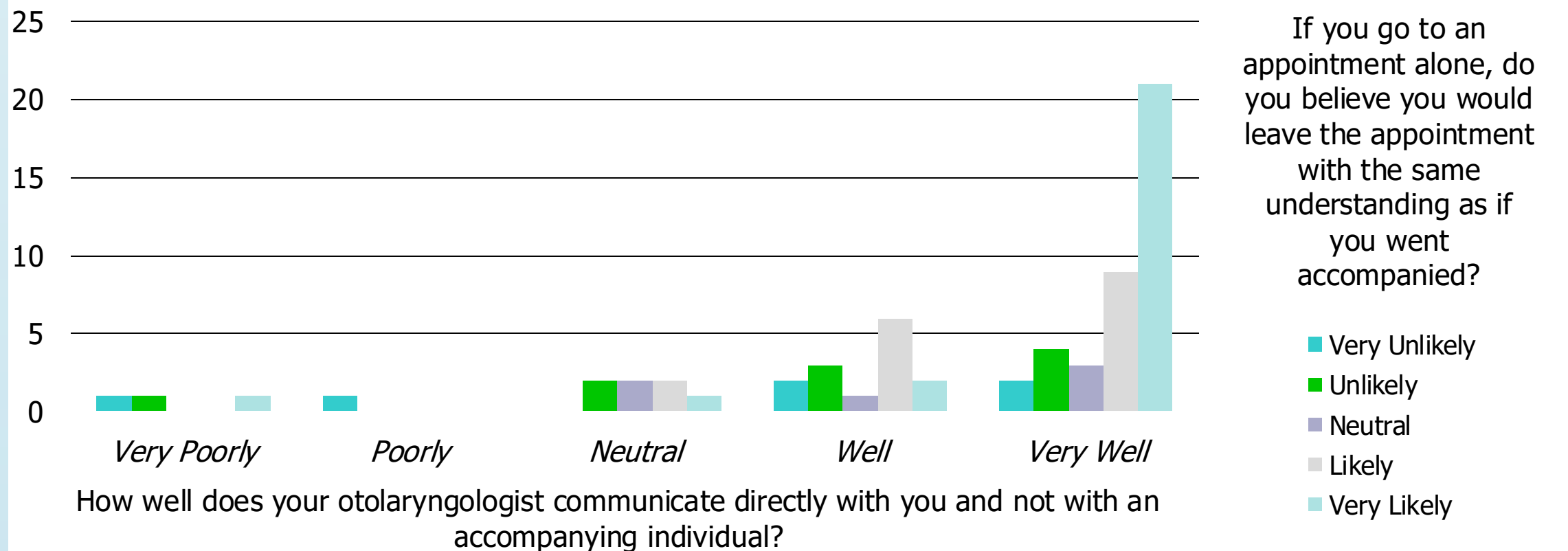
RESULTS

- Overall, most respondents report good communication and trust in their otolaryngologist: >75% rated explanation and clinician listening as "Well" or "Very Well," and ~80% reported being "Very Confident/Confident" in their clinician's ability to manage their hearing condition.
- Face-to-face communication is overwhelmingly preferred (97%), though nearly half (45%) also value digital follow-up (email/portal). Visual aids and written notes are used by a substantial minority.
- Relative weaknesses: office environment and support/resources show lower "Very Good/Very Satisfied" ratings (15–25%); technology integration also has room for improvement (only ~30% rated it "Very Well").

DEMOGRAPHICS



THE VERDICT: GAPS EXIST IN OUR PRESENT COMMUNICATION



Do you feel like your otolaryngologist has a good understanding of what it is like to experience hearing loss?

Excellent	23%
Good	25%
Neutral	33%
Poor	5%
Very Poor	14%

How satisfied are you with the support and resources provided by your otolaryngologist's office (e.g., hearing aid maintenance, information on support groups)?

Very Satisfied	25%
Satisfied	30%
Neutral	22%
Dissatisfied	16%
Very Dissatisfied	8%

How conducive is the office environment of your otolaryngologist to accommodating your hearing impairment (e.g., quiet spaces, appropriate lighting)?

Very Conducive	38%
Conducive	31%
Neutral	19%
Not Conducive	8%
Not at All Conducive	5%

What is going well?

- On the following aspects, >= 70% of the patient population responded positively:
 - How well does your ENT explain your hearing condition and treatment options?
 - How satisfied are you with the treatments and interventions provided by your ENT
 - Overall, how would you rate your relationship with your ENT?

Conclusion

- Most respondents reported positive interactions with their otolaryngologists, particularly in direct communication, explanation of treatment options, and overall confidence in care. However, opportunities remain to improve the clinical environment, integration of technology, and availability of supportive resources for patients with hearing loss. These findings highlight the importance of patient-centered communication and tailored support to optimize the clinical experience of individuals who are hard of hearing.

Next Steps for Improvement

- Audit Clinical Spaces with the following questions:
 - Is my clinical space conducive to face to face contact?
 - If I use a computer during a visit, is it obstructing my face from the patient?
 - If masks need to be utilized, are alternate means available to help patients hear (i.e., clear masks)?
- Increase technology utilization:
 - AI Captioning Services
 - Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs):
 - Improved utilization of EMR for patient communication
- Increase understanding:
 - Interact with the HOH community outside of a clinical setting to better understand their experience.
 - Increase awareness of and periodically attend local support groups
 - Join online support groups and increase familiarization with online educational resources.

References

- Reddy, C. T. (2014). Communication and its types. *International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanity (IRJMSH)*, 5, 17-24.
- Iezzoni, L. I., O'Day, B. L., Killeen, M., & Harker, H. (2004). Communicating about health care: observations from persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. *Annals of internal medicine*, 140(5), 356-362.