Communication Disorders and Stigmas
A study commissioned by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

May 2024
Objectives & Methodology

Research Objectives:
This survey aims to profile the stigmas experienced by American adults (ages 18+) with communication disorders.

Research objectives include determining…
- Impact of hearing and/or speech-language difficulties or differences on personal life, work/school, and interpersonal relationships.
- Attitudes toward difficulties.
- Others’ perceptions toward people with difficulties, and the stigmas that persist in life.
- What could improve daily life for people with hearing and/or speech-language difficulties.
- Understanding attitudes toward—and experiences with—treatment.

Methodology:
Method: 10-minute online survey
Sample size: n=1,004 Adults 18+ with hearing and/or speech-language difficulties
Fieldwork: February 21 – 26, 2024

- A census-clicks approach to sampling and weighting was used. This methodology is often used to ensure a representative sample of hard-to-reach groups and involves sampling and weighting to the closest known population; in this case US adults ages 18+.
- Unless otherwise specified, data is presented on total (hearing and/or speech-language difficulties).
- Subgroups:
  - Have only hearing difficulties (n=784)
  - Have only speech-language difficulties (n=153)
  - Have both hearing and speech-language difficulties (n=67)
Key Findings: Impact of Hearing, Speech or Language Difficulties

Many people experienced stigmas, as well as feelings of inadequacy and isolation. Sixty-five percent reported they experienced at least one of the following forms of stigma at least sometimes: feeling like an outcast, feeling less than, feeling judged, being seen as less intelligent, not having achievements recognized, being labeled, being bullied or being talked down to.

• Those with speech-language difficulties were more likely to report they experienced stigmas – 88% vs. 58%.

A vast majority of adults with hearing and/or speech-language difficulties (83%) indicated that their communication difficulties have impacted their lives, and nearly half (49%) stated that important relationships have been affected.

• The impact varied among those with hearing difficulties vs. speech-language difficulties, with individuals experiencing speech-language difficulties reporting greater effects on their lives and relationships.

These difficulties caused increased stress and frustration for nearly one-third (31%) and stress and anxiety related to communication difficulties (28%). Outside of important relationships, nearly 60% are stressed during social gatherings or events, and an equivalent number wished other people were more willing to accommodate individuals with difficulties.

• Those with speech-language difficulties more commonly reported negative effects, compared to those with hearing difficulties.
Key Findings: Impact of Hearing, Speech or Language Difficulties (Continued)

Nearly three-quarters indicated that they are able to communicate effectively – and more than 4-in-10 didn’t view their issues as something that needed to be “fixed.” A similar number also indicated that they had become more empathetic and kind as a result of their difficulties.

When asked what could improve living with their hearing and/or speech-language difficulties, the top items were (each reported by about 3-in-10):

• Being given adequate time to communicate
• More knowledge of communication tips among the general public
• People not making assumptions about them based on their difficulties

Additionally, having more information on treatment options may prove beneficial, as about half say they did not have enough information about treatment.

• Those with speech-language difficulties more commonly report that many of the strategies listed could help improve their lives, and they also reported a larger gap in information around treatment.
Impact of Hearing and/or Speech-Language Difficulties
More than 8-in-10 acknowledged the impact of their hearing or speech-language difficulties on their lives, and over a third (35%) have faced discrimination due to communication challenges.
A large majority (80%+) of both groups indicated that communication difficulties have had some level of impact on their lives. However, individuals with speech-language difficulties reported experiencing greater effects compared to their counterparts with hearing difficulties. Additionally, those with speech-language difficulties alone reported more instances of discrimination.

**Impact of Difficulties on Life**

- Hearing
  - A great deal: 14%
  - A good amount: 24%
  - Some: 29%
  - Very little: 16%
  - None: 1%

- Speech
  - A great deal: 24%
  - A good amount: 34%
  - Some: 45%
  - Very little: 11%
  - None: 3%

Net: Great/Good/Some
- Hearing: 82%
- Speech: 86%

**Frequency of Discrimination Due to Difficulties**

- Hearing
  - All the time: 2%
  - Often: 6%
  - Sometimes: 8%
  - Rarely: 19%
  - Never: 34%

- Speech
  - All the time: 6%
  - Often: 11%
  - Sometimes: 17%
  - Rarely: 27%
  - Never: 40%

Net: All/Often/Sometimes
- Hearing: 26%
- Speech: 62%

* = Significantly higher at the 95% C.L.
When considering the impact on school or work, those with hearing or speech-language difficulties highlighted a lack of opportunity, challenges in obtaining workplace accommodations, and facing general discrimination as the top challenges.

**Impact on School/Work**

- Lack of opportunities due to your difficulties: 12%
- Difficulties in obtaining workplace accommodations or equal employment opportunities: 11%
- Being discriminated against due to your difficulties: 11%
- Limited availability of educational programs: 9%
- Insufficient access to vocational training or career development resources: 8%
- None: 71%

Total n=1,004
Q15. Thinking about school and work, have any of the following happened to you as a result of your [insert difficulties]?
Individuals with speech-language difficulties reported experiencing more issues at school or work compared to their counterparts with hearing difficulties. Notably, more than a quarter (26%) of those with speech-language difficulties alone felt that there are limited opportunities available to them due to their communication challenges.

**Impact on School/Work**

![Diagram showing the impact of speech-language difficulties on school/work compared to hearing difficulties.]

- **Lack of opportunities due to your difficulties**: 8% (Hearing), 26% (Speech)
- **Difficulties in obtaining workplace accommodations or equal employment opportunities**: 7% (Hearing), 23% (Speech)
- **Being discriminated against due to your difficulties**: 7% (Hearing), 18% (Speech)
- **Limited availability of educational programs**: 6% (Hearing), 19% (Speech)
- **Insufficient access to vocational training or career development resources**: 5% (Hearing), 16% (Speech)
- **None**: 41% (Hearing), 80% (Speech)

*Significantly higher at the 95% C.L.*
Nearly half stated their hearing or speech-language difficulties have impacted important relationships in their lives.

The primary effects included increased overall stress and frustration, as well as stress and anxiety related to communication difficulties. Additionally, individuals reported dealing with feelings of isolation, social withdrawal, and strained relationships.

**Impact of Difficulties on Important Relationships**

A great deal/A good amount/Some

- A great deal: 7%
- A good amount: 18%
- Some: 24%
- Very little: 31%
- None: 20%

**How Life Has Been Affected**

- Increased stress and frustration: 31%
- Stress and anxiety related to communication difficulties: 28%
- Feelings of isolation or social withdrawal: 22%
- Strained relationships and misunderstandings: 22%
- Challenges maintaining a sense of connectedness with others: 18%
- I’ve found that I have a good support system: 18%
- Difficulty in effectively communicating my emotions: 17%
- Struggles with empathy and understanding: 13%
- Financial burdens due to treatment costs: 9%
- My relationships with loved ones have gotten stronger: 8%
- Financial burdens due to difficulty finding or staying employed in a job with adequate salary: 7%
- None: 28%
Those with speech-language difficulties were more likely to indicate that their difficulties have had at least some impact on important relationships compared to those with hearing difficulties (64% vs. 43%). Additionally, those with speech-language difficulties more frequently reported experiencing each of the areas listed.

### Impact of Difficulties on Important Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hearing</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good amount</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Net: Great/Good/Some</th>
<th>Hearing</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How Life Has Been Affected

- Increased stress and frustration
- Stress and anxiety related to communication difficulties
- Strained relationships and misunderstandings
- Feelings of isolation or social withdrawal
- I’ve found that I have a good support system
- Challenges maintaining a sense of connectedness with others
- Difficulty in effectively communicating my emotions
- Struggles with empathy and understanding
- Financial burdens due to treatment costs
- My relationships with loved ones have gotten stronger
- Financial burdens due to difficulty finding or staying employed in a job with adequate salary
- None of these

*Significantly higher at the 95% C.L.*
Daily interactions with people outside of their family and friends was the area most affected by hearing and speech-language difficulties, with two-thirds (67%) stating at least some impact. Approximately half stated that their difficulties impacted their healthcare interactions and daily work tasks to at least some degree.

**Impact of Difficulties on…**

- **Daily interactions with people outside of their family/friends**: 17% A lot, 50% Some, 33% Never
- **Dating life/Romantic relationships**: 14% A lot, 26% Some, 61% Never
- **Friendships (making and keeping friends)**: 12% A lot, 29% Some, 59% Never
- **Healthcare interactions (e.g., conversations with doctors or nurses)**: 12% A lot, 37% Some, 50% Never
- **Ability to navigate healthcare tasks (e.g., resolving insurance issues, setting up appointments, etc.)**: 11% A lot, 29% Some, 61% Never
- **Daily work tasks**: 10% A lot, 34% Some, 56% Never
While individual occurrences of stigmatization were relatively low, nearly two-thirds (65%) experienced at least one form of stigma at least sometimes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stigmatization</th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling like an outcast</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling less than</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling judged</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having people see me as less intelligent</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having my achievements recognized</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being labeled</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being bullied</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being talked down to</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total n=1,004
Q19. We’re going to show you a series of statements. Please indicate how often you feel like each of the following happens as a result of your [insert difficulties].
Though both groups experienced stigmas, the speech-language only group (88%) faced challenges far more frequently than the hearing only group (58%).

**Frequency of Being Stigmatized Due to Difficulties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Hearing</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling like an outcast</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling less than</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having people see me as less smart</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling judged</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having my achievements recognized</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being labeled</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being talked down to</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being bullied</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **All the time**
  - Hearing: 5% Speech: 16%
  - Hearing: 14% Speech: 14%
  - Hearing: 4% Speech: 8%
  - Hearing: 1% Speech: 7%
  - Hearing: 4% Speech: 8%
  - Hearing: 3% Speech: 8%
  - Hearing: 3% Speech: 8%
  - Hearing: 4% Speech: 10%

- **Often**
  - Hearing: 10% Speech: 24%
  - Hearing: 23% Speech: 21%
  - Hearing: 22% Speech: 22%
  - Hearing: 24% Speech: 40%
  - Hearing: 22% Speech: 24%
  - Hearing: 19% Speech: 46%
  - Hearing: 22% Speech: 42%

- **Sometimes**
  - Hearing: 23% Speech: 24%
  - Hearing: 24% Speech: 49%
  - Hearing: 22% Speech: 17%
  - Hearing: 24% Speech: 24%
  - Hearing: 21% Speech: 22%
  - Hearing: 21% Speech: 27%
  - Hearing: 21% Speech: 21%

- **Rarely**
  - Hearing: 20% Speech: 16%
  - Hearing: 23% Speech: 20%
  - Hearing: 22% Speech: 23%
  - Hearing: 24% Speech: 22%
  - Hearing: 22% Speech: 24%

- **Never**
  - Hearing: 20% Speech: 16%
  - Hearing: 23% Speech: 20%
  - Hearing: 22% Speech: 23%

*Significantly higher at the 95% C.L.*
Nearly three-quarters (73%) stated they are able to communicate effectively, and more than half (58%) mentioned that people are generally understanding and patient. However, nearly 60% expressed feeling stressed in social gatherings and wished people were more willing to accommodate individuals with difficulties.

Feelings of inadequacy and isolation were each reported by 38%. Nearly 3-in-10 felt judged, and about a quarter said they are viewed as less capable or labeled.

### Attitudes Regarding Difficulties (Strongly/Somewhat Agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am able to communicate effectively</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social gatherings or events can be stressful for me due to my difficulties</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish there was more awareness about [hearing/speech/language] difficulties</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People around me are generally understanding of my difficulties</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are generally patient when interacting with me</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish people were more willing to make accommodations for people with difficulties</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t view my difficulties as something to be “fixed”</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I am more empathetic or kind because of my difficulties</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel inadequate when my difficulties are brought up</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have experienced feelings of isolation or exclusion due to my difficulties</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel judged when people learn I have difficulties</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People try to be helpful, but end up making things worse</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People view me as less capable because of my difficulties</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am labeled by others as a result of my difficulties</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both groups felt their difficulties were not something that needed to be “fixed” and that people were generally patient with them. Those in the hearing only group were more likely to indicate they could communicate effectively (80%) compared to those in the speech-language only group (49%). Speech-language only individuals were more likely to agree with many statements around the negative effects of their difficulties.

### Attitudes Regarding Difficulties (Strongly/Somewhat Agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Hearing %</th>
<th>Speech %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am able to communicate effectively</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social gatherings or events can be stressful for me due to my difficulties</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish there was more awareness about [hearing/speech/language] difficulties</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People around me are generally understanding of my difficulties</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are generally patient when interacting with me</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish people were more willing to make accommodations for people with difficulties</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t view my difficulties as something to be “fixed”</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe I am more empathetic or kind because of my difficulties</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel inadequate when my difficulties are brought up</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have experienced feelings of isolation or exclusion due to my difficulties</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel judged when people learn I have difficulties</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People try to be helpful, but end up making things worse</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People view me as less capable because of my difficulties</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am labeled by others as a result of my difficulties</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only Hearing Difficulties n=784; Only Speech-Language Difficulties n=153

Q13. We’re going to show you a series of statements. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each. Once you’ve selected your response, the screen will auto advance.
The most desired improvements were to have adequate time to communicate, more widespread knowledge on communication tips, and people not making assumptions about intelligence or skills.

**What Could Improve Life For People With Hearing and/or Speech-Language Difficulties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People giving you adequate time to communicate</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More widespread knowledge on communication tips (e.g., facing the person you are talking with)</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People not making assumptions about your intelligence or particular skills</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People not making assumptions about activities you may or may not wish to participate in</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities being more proactive in providing things that support general communication access</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being provided with opportunities to proactively share when you need an accommodation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The speech-language only group was more likely to acknowledge that many of the suggested improvements could improve their lives as compared to the hearing only group.

**What Could Improve Life For People With Hearing and/or Speech-Language Difficulties**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hearing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More widespread knowledge on communication tips (e.g., facing the person you are talking with)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People giving you adequate time to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People not making assumptions about your intelligence or particular skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People not making assumptions about activities you may or may not wish to participate in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities being more proactive in providing things that support general communication access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being provided with opportunities to proactively share when you need an accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More widespread knowledge on communication tips (e.g., facing the person you are talking with)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People giving you adequate time to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People not making assumptions about your intelligence or particular skills</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Communities being more proactive in providing things that support general communication access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being provided with opportunities to proactively share when you need an accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only Hearing Difficulties n=784; Only Speech-Language Difficulties n=153*

Q21. Thinking about your lived experiences with your [insert difficulties], which of the following, if any, would help improve your life? Please select your top 3.
Appendix: Hearing and/or Speech-Language Difficulties
Key Findings: Experiences With Communication Challenges

- Hearing difficulties were reported by more than 80% of individuals, while speech-language difficulties affected nearly a quarter. The most common diagnoses are hearing loss and tinnitus, with speech-language diagnoses being much less common. A quarter of individuals had not been diagnosed with any disorders related to their difficulties.

- Two-thirds of individuals with communication difficulties stated they have trouble hearing in a noisy environment, and about half have trouble understanding what others say. Other top challenges are difficulties following/engaging in conversations and distinguishing sounds.

- Nearly a fifth first noticed their difficulties when they were less than 18 years old, with the remainder emerging over time. Nearly half stated that their difficulties have gradually worsened over time, with about one-in-five indicating things have remained stable.
  - The hearing only group tended to have a later age of onset than the speech-language only group and were more likely to have stable or worsening symptoms.
Key Findings: Experiences with Treatment

- 57% have previously received treatment, with 26% in total currently in treatment. The most common providers are audiologists and ENTs. Treatment timing varied widely.
  - Those in the hearing group were more likely to have sought treatment (58%) compared to those in the speech-language only group (52%). Treatment length and provider type varied across groups.
- More than one-third of those treated sought out treatment within 6 months of noticing difficulties. Anticipated cost, feeling the issue would resolve on its own, or not being sure where to seek treatment were the top reasons for delaying treatment.
  - The speech-language group was much more likely to seek treatment immediately vs. the hearing group (21% vs. 12%). Cost of treatment was the key inhibitor for the hearing group (41%), while for the speech-language group, feeling the issue would resolve on its own was the main reason for delaying treatment (38%).
- Overall, nearly two-thirds of respondents were satisfied with their treatment.
- For those who stopped treatment, key reasons were not thinking it was helping, or conversely, feeling that the problem had improved enough that treatment wasn't necessary.
Hearing difficulties were reported by more than 80% of individuals, while speech-language difficulties affected nearly a quarter.

**TYPE OF DIFFICULTY**

- Only Hearing Difficulties, 76%
- Only Speech-Language Difficulties, 17%
- Both Hearing & Speech-Language Difficulties, 7%

Total n=1,004

S6. Which, if any, of the following do you consider yourself to have? As a reminder, all information you share will never be associated with you personally. Please select all that apply.
The most common diagnoses were hearing loss and tinnitus, with speech-language diagnoses being much less common. A quarter (25%) of individuals have not been diagnosed with any disorder.
Difficulty hearing in a noisy environment was the most common symptom for those in the hearing alone group (76%). Alternatively, those with speech-language difficulties alone most commonly reported difficulty speaking smoothly (46%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms Regularly Experienced (Among Each Group)</th>
<th>Hearing diagnosis</th>
<th>Speech-Language diagnosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty hearing in a noisy environment</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not understanding what other people say</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty following or engaging in conversations</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty distinguishing sounds</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to certain sounds</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty concentrating</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrupted sleep</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble organizing thoughts or finding the right words to express myself</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty speaking smoothly</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges with pronouncing words correctly/speech being understood by others</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty understanding non-verbal cues (body language or facial expressions)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing issues with hoarseness or raspy voice</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech is slurred</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty using non-verbal cues, such as body language or facial expressions</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nearly a fifth first noticed their difficulties when they were less than 18 years old, with the remainder emerging over time. Nearly half stated that their difficulties have gradually worsened over time, with about one-in-five indicating things have remained stable.

**Age of Onset**

- > 18 years old: 19%
- 18-24 years old: 13%
- 25-34 years old: 12%
- 35-44 years old: 11%
- 45-54 years old: 14%
- 55-64 years old: 15%
- 65+ years old: 12%
- Prefer not to say: 3%

**Progression**

- Remained stable: 21%
- Improved: 13%
- Gradually worsened: 47%
- Fluctuates between better and worse: 13%
- I’m not sure: 6%
More than half (57%) have received treatment and 26% reported to be currently in treatment. The most common providers were audiologists and ENTs.

### Precediously Received Treatment

- **Yes**: 57%
- **No**: 43%
- **Currently in treatment**: 26%

### Treatment Providers

(Among those who sought treatment)

- **Audiologist**: 61%
- **Ear, nose, throat doctor**: 40%
- **Family doctor**: 29%
- **Speech-language pathologist**: 15%
- **Physical therapist**: 9%
- **Occupational therapist**: 7%
- **Other**: 3%

*Total n=1,004; Sought treatment n=575
Q6: Have you sought any professional treatment or interventions for your [insert difficulties]? 
Q6New. Are you currently in treatment for your [insert difficulties]? 
Q6a. And what type of professional(s) did you see for your [insert difficulties]?
Those in the hearing group were more likely to have sought treatment (58%) compared to those in the speech-language only group (52%).

### Previously Received Treatment

- **Hearing**
  - Currently in treatment: Yes 52%, No 48%
  - Currently in treatment: 25%
- **Speech**
  - Currently in treatment: Yes 58%, No 42%
  - Currently in treatment: 26%

### Treatment Providers

(Among those who sought treatment)

- **Audiologist**
  - Yes: 8%, No: 74%
- **Ear, nose, throat doctor**
  - Yes: 19%, No: 43%
- **Family doctor**
  - Yes: 24%, No: 42%
- **Speech-language pathologist**
  - Yes: 6%, No: 45%
- **Physical therapist**
  - Yes: 4%, No: 20%
- **Occupational therapist**
  - Yes: 4%, No: 10%
- **Other**
  - Yes: 1%, No: 6%

*Significantly higher at the 95% C.L.*

---

Q6. Have you sought any professional treatment or interventions for your [insert difficulties]?
Q6New. Are you currently in treatment for your [insert difficulties]?
Q6a. And what type of professional(s) did you see for your [insert difficulties]?
More than one-third of those treated sought out treatment within 6 months of noticing difficulties.

The anticipated cost, feeling the issue would resolve on its own, or not being sure where to seek treatment were the top reasons for delaying treatment.

**Time Before Seeking Treatment**

(Among those who sought treatment)

- Immediately: 15%
- 3-6 months: 23%
- 1-2 years: 20%
- 2 years+: 26%
- Do not recall: 15%

**Reasons for Delaying Treatment**

(Among those who waited 3+ months)

- Anticipated cost of treatment: 39%
- Felt the issue would resolve on its own: 26%
- I wasn’t sure where/what type of provider to seek treatment from: 25%
- Anxiety relating to treatment: 16%
- Didn’t think treatment would help: 16%
- Stigma associated with seeking treatment: 14%
- Lack of access to healthcare facilities: 11%
- Other: 10%
- None of the above: 8%

Sought treatment n=575; Delayed Treatment n=402
Q7. How long after noticing your [insert difficulties] did you seek treatment?
Q8. Which, if any, of the below were reasons you delayed treatment?
The speech-language group was much more likely to seek treatment immediately after noticing difficulty than the hearing only group (21% vs. 12%).

Cost of treatment was the key inhibitor for the hearing only group (41%), while for the speech-language group, feeling the issue would resolve on its own was the main reason for delaying treatment (38%).

**Time Before Seeking Treatment**
(Among those who sought treatment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hearing</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediately</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 months</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years+</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not recall</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reasons for Delaying Treatment**
(Among those who waited 3+ months)

- Anticipated cost of treatment: 41% Hearing, 29% Speech
- Felt the issue would resolve on its own: 22% Hearing, 38% Speech
- I wasn’t sure where/what type of provider to seek treatment from: 24% Hearing, 23% Speech
- Anxiety relating to treatment: 13% Hearing, 28% Speech
- Didn’t think treatment would help: 14% Hearing, 22% Speech
- Stigma associated with seeking treatment: 13% Hearing, 19% Speech
- Lack of access to healthcare facilities: 7% Hearing, 31% Speech
- Other: 11% Hearing, 10% Speech
- None of the above: 9% Hearing, 2% Speech

*Significantly higher at the 95% C.L.*
There were gaps in information availability, with just over half (52%) feeling they did not have enough information about treatment.

Information about Treatment

- **48%** had enough information
- **29%** had some information, but not enough
- **23%** didn’t have enough information

Total n=1,004

Q9. Did you feel like you had enough information about treatment options for your [insert difficulties]?
While information availability was an issue for both groups, it was a larger issue for the speech-language group: 60% indicate they did not have sufficient information about treatment options, compared to 50% of the hearing group.

Information about Treatment

- **I had enough information**
  - Hearing: 50%
  - Speech: 40%
- **I had some information, but not enough**
  - Hearing: 29%
  - Speech: 32%
- **I didn’t have enough information**
  - Hearing: 21%
  - Speech: 28%

*Significantly higher at the 95% C.L.*
Overall, nearly two-thirds (63%) of individuals with difficulties were satisfied with their treatment.
The most common treatments reported were hearing aids and reducing competing noise.

**Types of Treatments/Interventions (Among Treatment Seekers)**

- Hearing aids: 50%
- Turning off competing noises while talking: 31%
- Medications: 17%
- Speech-language therapy: 14%
- Assistive listening devices: 11%
- Using augmentative/alternative communication methods: 9%
- Complementary/alternative treatments: 9%
- Auditory training: 8%
- Learning and using sign language: 8%
- Surgery: 7%
- Joining support groups or seeking peer support: 6%
- Cochlear implants: 5%
- Other: 11%
Treatments varied by type of difficulties faced.

Types of Treatments/Interventions

- Hearing aids: Hearing (58%), Speech (33%)
- Turning off competing noises while talking: Hearing (17%), Speech (17%)
- Medications: Hearing (12%), Speech (31%)
- Speech-language therapy: Hearing (5%), Speech (51%)
- Assistive listening devices: Hearing (5%), Speech (11%)
- Using augmentative/alternative communication methods: Hearing (7%), Speech (14%)
- Complementary/alternative treatments: Hearing (6%), Speech (9%)
- Auditory training: Hearing (6%), Speech (14%)
- Learning and using sign language: Hearing (5%), Speech (13%)
- Surgery: Hearing (6%), Speech (7%)
- Joining support groups or seeking peer support: Hearing (4%), Speech (13%)
- Cochlear implants: Hearing (3%), Speech (8%)
- Other: Hearing (3%), Speech (14%)

* Significantly higher at the 95% C.L.

Q10. Which of the following types of treatment or interventions have you used/received?
While a small group, individuals that have tried complementary/alternative medicine for their difficulties tend to explore multiple methods. Among those that have used complementary/alternative approaches, about half have used meditation, herbal medicines, or dietary supplements, respectively. Acupuncture was another commonly used alternative.

Types of Complementary and/or Alternative Medicine Used/Received

- Meditation: 53%
- Herbal medicines: 51%
- Dietary supplements: 49%
- Acupuncture: 46%
- Homeopathy: 36%
- Biofeedback: 23%
- Other: 9%

Respondents who have used complementary and/or alternative medicine for their difficulties n=51

Q10a. Which of the following types of complementary and/or alternative medicines and approaches have you used/received for your [insert difficulties]?
Among those with speech-language difficulties, about one-third used writing/typing as an alternative way of communicating. Other top methods were gestures and facial expressions, as well as pointing to photos, pictures, or written words.

Types of Augmentative/Alternative Communication Methods

- Writing or typing: 32%
- Gestures and facial expressions: 25%
- Pointing to photos, pictures, or written words: 22%
- Using an app on mobile phone/tablet to communicate: 19%
- Spelling words by pointing to letters: 16%
- Using a speech-generating device: 13%
- Drawing: 12%
- Other: 1%
- None: 40%
Appendix: General
### Demographic Profile – Total Sample

**Total n=1,004**

#### Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Non-binary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-70</th>
<th>70+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>Midwest</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>West</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&lt;$50K</th>
<th>$50-100K</th>
<th>$100K+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No HS, High school grad</th>
<th>Some college, 2-year</th>
<th>4-year</th>
<th>Post-grad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the challenges that many people with hearing and/or speech-language difficulties face, they reported being generally happy.

**Overall Happiness**

- Very happy: 27%
- Somewhat happy: 44%
- Neither happy nor unhappy: 13%
- Somewhat unhappy: 11%
- Very unhappy: 5%

Net Happy: 71%

Total n=1,004

Q1. Overall, how happy are you in your life?
Six in ten individuals who have dealt with hearing and/or speech-language difficulties believe that they are successful, and a similar number believe others also perceive them as successful.

**Self-Perceived Success**

- Very successful: 18%
- Somewhat successful: 42%
- Neither successful nor unsuccessful: 22%
- Somewhat unsuccessful: 10%
- Very unsuccessful: 8%

**Perceived Success To Others**

- Very/Somewhat successful: 60%
- Very/Somewhat successful: 59%

Q2. Now thinking about accomplishments, how successful do you feel you are?
Q3. Thinking again about those same accomplishments, how successful do you believe other people feel you are?
The hearing only group tended to have a later age of onset than the speech-language only group and was more likely to have stable or worsening symptoms. In comparison, the speech-language only group’s age of onset was most commonly under 24, and more improvements were seen.
Individuals in the speech-language only group were more satisfied with their treatment compared to their hearing only counterparts (79% vs. 59%).

Satisfaction with Treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Hearing</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat dissatisfied</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Net: Satisfied 59% 79%

* Significantly higher at the 95% C.L.
Ways to Improve Interactions (Open End): Themes and Examples from Respondents

**Communication: Slow down, speak clearly, face the listener**

If they would only speak slower and a little louder and look me in my face, I could understand better. – Female, age 56

To slow down and speak clearly. To accept that they share some of the responsibility, i.e., if they want me to understand their message, they might have to adjust their delivery. – Female, age 69

**Impact of environment**

Wish they knew how noisy environments impact my hearing and communication. – Male, age 77

**Recognition and legitimacy of hearing loss**

That it's not a facade or something I can easily change. – Male, age 20
Even though you cannot see my disability, I do have problems. – Female, age 62
Every little bit of acknowledgment goes a long way. – Male, age 61
Ways to Improve Interactions (Open End): Themes and Examples from Respondents (Continued)

**Patience**

I wish people knew that, in moments when my speech or language difficulties become apparent, understanding and patience mean a lot. Taking the time to listen without making assumptions and fostering open communication can enhance our interactions and make them more inclusive. – Female, age 21

**Frustration from others**

I often experience anger from others for not being able to hear and understand them. I feel they believe I am being difficult on purpose. I wish people would not react with so much anger due to my hearing impairment. – Male, age 50

**Misconceptions around intelligence and interest**

Needing a statement repeated or a conversation clarified is not a sign of low intelligence or lack of interest. – Non-Binary, age 30

I wish people understood that I'm not stupid, I just have trouble hearing if more than one person is talking at the same time…I wish there was more information out there for them to understand that if I'm asking them to speak up, it's NOT because I'm not listening. – Female, age 53

**Empathy**

That at some point in their life, they may be impacted by hearing loss. – Male, age 65

I wish they could experience hearing difficulties for one entire day. Just one day. – Male, age 68