

Abstract EFAS/DGA 2007

Older people with hearing impairment: Examining the variations in the use of health services and maintenance of autonomy and independence. A prospective study

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Background:

Hearing impairment is common in older people. It affects at least 37% of people under the age of 60 and 60% of those aged between 70 and 80, and it is one of the most common three conditions affecting the elderly. The effect on the quality of life of the individuals and their families and quality of life as a result of hearing related disabilities can be marked. Several studies showed that only 1.4 million people actually use hearing aids out of the 2 million people who have acquired them, and in the age group above 75, only 50% of individuals experiencing hearing loss own a hearing aid.

Aims:

We aim to investigate the mechanisms by which hearing loss affects uptake of services, the sense of independence and the quality of life of elderly individuals. We will explore the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of elderly people with hearing impairment in relation to maintaining the delicate balance between growing old with disabilities, seeking help and maintaining autonomy.

Methodology:

The study will be carried out in two phases using mixed methods.

The first phase comprises a qualitative interview-based study, using a semi-structured, open-ended format, to identify the experiences of suffering from hearing loss and seeking help. These findings will be used to develop a questionnaire, which is designed to reveal the prevalence and quantify pattern of the identified barriers to the uptake of professional help with hearing disability. Obtaining information from a wider population sample will add weight to the findings and enable the development of evidence-based recommendations. We aim to develop the questionnaire as a standardised instrument to reflect older people views on hearing services

I intend to present an outline of this Prospective study, some background information and explore avenues for European collaboration on similar studies.

