

SUDDENLY, IT’S GONE: AN EVALUATION OF CLINICAL AUDIOLOGISTS AND AUDIOLOGY DOCTORAL STUDENTS ON COUNSELING ADULT PATIENTS DIAGNOSED WITH UNILATERAL SUDDEN SENSORINEURAL HEARING LOSS

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Purpose Statement:

This investigation addressed four areas concerning Clinical Audiologists and Audiology Doctoral Students (Au.D. Students). First, the study assessed their self-evaluated degree of knowledge and comfort in counseling adult patients diagnosed with unilateral sudden sensorineural hearing loss (SSNHL). Second, their level of comfort in identifying and evaluating patients’ degree of emotional distress was studied. Third, this investigation examined both Clinical Audiologists and Au.D. Students’ knowledge of referring for further counseling to increase their patients’ quality of life and their comfort in referring patients with unilateral SSNHL for additional counseling services. Finally, the study sought commonalities in counseling skill coursework in graduate training programs and how this may relate to their perceptions of knowledge and comfort regarding the participants’ counseling skills.

Method:

- Researcher used an electronic survey to complete this as a quantitative study.
- Clinical Audiologists were recruited through ASHA Special Interest Groups (7 and 9), ASHA Community Boards, the advisor’s colleagues at the Cleveland Clinic, and Facebook support groups, where patients with unilateral SSNHL were encouraged to send the survey to their audiologists.
- Survey was sent to all 80 of the Au.D. Program Directors in the U.S. requesting their assistance in forwarding the survey link to 2nd year, 3rd year, and Au.D. Students in their clinical externship experience.

Degree of Comfort in Discussing Seven Counseling Topics with Patients with Unilateral SSNHL

Topics	Group	Not Comfortable 1	Slightly Comfortable 2	Moderately Comfortable 3	Very Comfortable 4	Extremely Comfortable 5	n	M	SD
Diagnosis	C.A.	0 (0%)	1 (2.7%)	4 (10.8%)	6 (16.2%)	26 (70.3%)	37	4.5	.80
	Au.D.	0 (0%)	1 (7.7%)	5 (38.5%)	4 (30.8%)	3 (23.1%)	13	3.7	.95
Emotional Distress	C.A.	1 (2.6%)	4 (10.5%)	9 (23.7%)	18 (47.4%)	6 (15.8%)	38	3.6	.97
	Au.D.	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)	4 (30.8%)	6 (46.2%)	1 (7.7%)	13	3.4	1.04
Understanding Cause	C.A.	0 (0%)	4 (10.5%)	8 (21.1%)	20 (52.6%)	6 (15.8%)	38	3.7	.86
	Au.D.	1 (7.7%)	2 (15.4%)	3 (23.1%)	4 (30.8%)	3 (23.1%)	13	3.5	1.27
Network of Support Available	C.A.	3 (7.9%)	6 (15.8%)	11 (28.9%)	14 (36.8%)	4 (10.5%)	38	3.2	1.11
	Au.D.	0 (0%)	2 (15.4%)	4 (30.8%)	6 (46.2%)	1 (7.7%)	13	3.5	.88
Treatment Options	C.A.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (18.4%)	13 (34.2%)	18 (47.4%)	38	4.3	.77
	Au.D.	0 (0%)	2 (15.4%)	4 (30.8%)	5 (38.5%)	2 (15.4%)	13	3.5	.97
Expectations	C.A.	1 (2.6%)	2 (5.3%)	2 (5.3%)	20 (52.6%)	13 (34.2%)	38	4.1	.92
	Au.D.	0 (0%)	3 (23.1%)	4 (30.8%)	3 (23.1%)	3 (23.1%)	13	3.5	1.13
Grieving Process	C.A.	3 (7.9%)	6 (15.8%)	8 (21.1%)	13 (34.2%)	8 (21.1%)	38	3.5	1.22
	Au.D.	1 (7.7%)	1 (7.7%)	6 (46.2%)	4 (30.8%)	1 (7.7%)	13	3.2	1.01

Note. C.A. refers to Clinical Audiologists; Au.D. refers to Au.D. Students.

Preparedness to Address Emotional/ Psychosocial Needs of Unilateral SSNHL Patients

	Group	Not Prepared 1	Slightly Prepared 2	Moderately Prepared 3	Very Prepared 4	Extremely Prepared 5	n	M	SD
Clinical Experiences	C.A.	2 (5.1%)	10 (25.6%)	13 (33.3%)	10 (25.6%)	4 (10.3%)	39	3.1	1.07
Graduate Training	Au.D.	0 (0%)	2 (15.4%)	2 (15.4%)	6 (46.2%)	3 (23.1%)	13	3.7	1.01

Note. C.A. refers to Clinical Audiologists; Au.D. refers to Au.D. Students.

Difference in Frequency of Providing Informational and Personal Adjustment/ Psychosocial Counseling

Counseling Type	Informational Counseling		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	M	SD			
Personal Adjustment/ Psychosocial	-1.14	1.23	-5.26	36	<.001*

Note. * Indicates a statistically significant relationship (p <.05).

Major Conclusions:

- Au.D. Students felt more prepared to counsel patients with unilateral SSNHL based on their graduate training than the Clinical Audiologists.
- While required counseling coursework is in place for all current Au.D. Students, there appears to still be more room for growth to fully close the knowledge gap and establish a more structured framework in their counseling curriculum.
- Both participant groups rated their knowledge and comfort in addressing emotional distress at similar levels, indicating that while both groups recognized the importance of emotional support, they may not have felt fully prepared to provide emotional support to their patients.
- Both Clinical Audiologists and Au.D. Students had limited experience in referring patients with unilateral SSNHL for further counseling support.
- Clinical Audiologists utilized Informational Counseling more frequently than Personal Adjustment/ Psychosocial Counseling in their clinical practice.

Implications of the Study:

- Audiology graduate training programs appear to be better preparing their current Au.D. Students than they did when many Clinical Audiologists were in graduate school. Over the years, there has been a shift in counseling coursework, with more schools now requiring this in their curriculum.
- Even though graduate training programs are better preparing their Au.D. Students, a knowledge gap still exists and needs to be addressed with a more structured framework for counseling coursework.
- While Clinical Audiologists are generally more confident, they still experience gaps in some areas. Au.D. Students reported greater confidence and were more involved in processes like patient referrals.