

Living with combined vision and hearing loss: what difference does the hearing make?

Background: People with Usher type 2 have congenital hearing loss and acquired progressive visual impairment which usually appears in adolescence. Previous studies have shown that *information retrieval, communication, orientation, mobility, and psychosocial well-being* are affected in people living with combined vision and hearing impairment. However, there is a lack of studies focusing on how deafblind people use and experience their hearing, hearing aids, and other assistive devices.

Method and materials: In this qualitative study, eight persons with Usher type 2, with an average age of 57 years participated. The data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews. The material was analysed according to qualitative content analysis with an inductive approach, addressing information, communication, orientation and mobility, and the psychosocial perspective.

Results



Uncertainty in spoken *communication* increases, making hearing aids essential.



Addressing *orientation and mobility* reveals that hearing and hearing aids can enhance the sense of environmental control and safety.



Hearing aids play a significant role in daily life from a *psychosocial* perspective.



Technology and assistive devices enable opportunities to acquire *information* through hearing when vision is insufficient.



Lighting and sound environment are crucial for communication and information retrieval.



Actively using one's hearing is energy-intensive necessitating breaks and communication strategies to endure a whole day.



Conclusion: Hearing and assistive devices are essential for people with Usher Type 2, but the participants' dependence on these technologies introduces vulnerability, where environmental factors and energy-saving strategies are crucial for effective daily living.

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“ Nowadays, my hearing aids are the only thing I have. Earlier in my life I used to lip-read, and then I had two systems I could rely on. I can't use lipreading any longer, now I only have the hearing aids...”



“ My hearing aids have a fundamental significance in everything I do.”