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Introduction

Deaf persons, who prefer sign language use to communicate, represent a cultural minority and form a sociolinguistic sub-group of the population¹. Unfortunately, the health care system is organised by and based on the needs and worldview of the majority culture of the population². Deaf individuals regularly face disparities in health and even **iniquity in health care services access** due to the communication barriers and to the **cultural mismatch** of the health care services provided to them³. The use of sign language or interpreters services is insufficient to insure accessibility to health care services. Deaf cultural competency of the health care professionals is necessary². In the province of Quebec, Canada, rehabilitation services to Deaf people are provided by multidisciplinary teams (audiologist, speech-language pathologist, psychologist, social worker, special educator) in rehabilitation centers⁴.

confidentiality
being literacy
stress
lack access information communication
mistrust
as fear of dumb
judgement
perceived
5, 6, 7

- Deaf adults collectively express their dissatisfaction towards rehabilitation services, which they perceive as culturally inadequate.
- Deaf cultural competency of rehabilitation health care professionals is unknown.

As cultural competency is a prerequisite to health services equity, it is essential to develop a better understanding of the Deaf cultural competency of the professionals working in rehabilitation services in Quebec.

Research objectives

Describe Deaf cultural competency of the health care professionals working in rehabilitation services dedicated to Deaf adults, as seen by the professionals themselves. Specifically, the aims of this research project were to: **1)** describe the viewpoint of those professionals about the way they adapt interventions for Deaf clients, **2)** describe their viewpoint about the barriers and facilitators to the optimal quality of rehabilitation services to Deaf adults, and **3)** characterise Deaf cultural competency of those professionals.

Methods

- ▶ Semi-structured interviews are currently conducted individually with the various professionals (audiologists, speech and language pathologists, specialized educators, social workers and psychologists) composing the rehabilitation teams (n=15)
- ▶ Online Deaf cultural competency questionnaire, which consisted in an adaptation (in Canadian French) of an existing questionnaire (n=30)

Preliminary results from qualitative data collection

Sociodemographic data: The 3 health care professionals interviewed were Hearing. They had different job titles. Their highest degree ranged from technical formation to professional master degree. Their experience working with Deaf users ranged from 4 months to 20 years. Their knowledge of Quebec's sign language also varied greatly, from attending the first course to being bilingual.



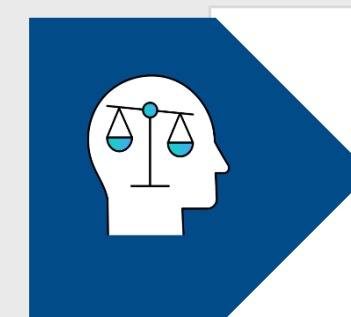
A different way to establish trust

Hearing health care professionals need to know how to develop and maintain therapeutic trust with Deaf clients, which is different than with hearing impaired clients

- Take time and explain everything, every basic concept related to health (ex.: stress, depression, child development); show that you care for them to understand and to be able to choose for themselves.
- Give some personal information. They build trust on a personal level.
- « Love Deaf » : Trust is not when they perceive you as qualified. It's when they feel welcomed and accepted.
- Don't explain your academic background or expose your knowledge: it emphasizes your hierarchic position or superiority as a Hearing person who knows more.
- Even in presence of interpreter, your non-verbal counts! Be warm, make visual contact, look at the Deaf when you speak to them, be expressive. Otherwise, you could be perceived as cold and judging.
- Professional limit of intervention can easily be received as a personal rejection; listen and be delicate when explaining your therapeutic role.

« They build a relationship with me on a personal level [not as a professional]. They wanna know who you are. »
(translated from original transcription in french, P3)

« [...]to feel accepted as we are, welcomed, loved for who we are, really, this is the criteria, you know. She is good because she loves Deaf (imitates the Deaf's words) » (translated from original transcription in french, P3)



Cultural knowledge and clinical judgment

Hearing health care professionals need to know what are the common behaviours, values and beliefs of the Deaf community in order to avoid misinterpretation

- Touch, physical contact is the norm. Giving kisses or a hug when leaving can be typical and mean that the Deaf person trusts you.
- Experience is considered more important than qualification and degree.
- The literacy level is low. Take more time to explain basic health concepts. Choose different words (even in the presence of an interpreter).

« They will show they know because they don't wanna look dumb, but, you know, it doesn't mean they know », (translated from original transcript in french, P2)

« Does it translate well, what I said? » (translated from original transcription in french, P1)

Discussion

- 1 The process of obtaining informed consent for health care services should be unique with Deaf users and require more time than in other populations⁸.
- 2 As a result of the repetitive oppressions experienced endured by Deaf⁹⁻¹⁰, the professionals have to pay particular attention to attitudes to establish trust.
- 3 The preliminary results suggest that the structure of the rehabilitation services in Québec, Canada, is not well suited for Deaf users. The health care professionals have to constantly advocate to their superiors to keep bypassing some structural procedures when they are judged as detrimental for Deaf users².
- 4 As expected, no inadequate adaptation strategy was reported, as opposed to what has been documented in emergency department in other study (refusing to provide an interpreter, the use of written communication or relying on lip reading)¹¹

What's next?

- ▶ Interview more professionals reporting varied experiences about Deaf cultural competency in Quebec's rehabilitation services.
- ▶ Collect and analyse data from the Deaf cultural competency questionnaire.
- ▶ In collaboration with Deaf partners, document Deaf adult's perspective about the rehabilitation services.

References

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