

Empowerment along the hearing patient journey: the multifaceted role of participation

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Background

The intersection of hearing loss and empowerment from the hearing-aid users’ perspective has received little research attention. Zimmerman’s (1995) oft-cited theoretical empowerment framework suggests that empowerment takes on different forms in different contexts, and therefore a context-specific definition is necessary. This highlights the need for an empirically driven definition of empowerment tailored to the hearing patient journey.

Methods

In-depth semi structured interview study at two research sites (ORCA Europe in Stockholm, Sweden and National Acoustic Laboratories in Sydney, Australia)

18 adult hearing aid users who recently (6 to 36 months ago) experienced their first hearing aid fitting

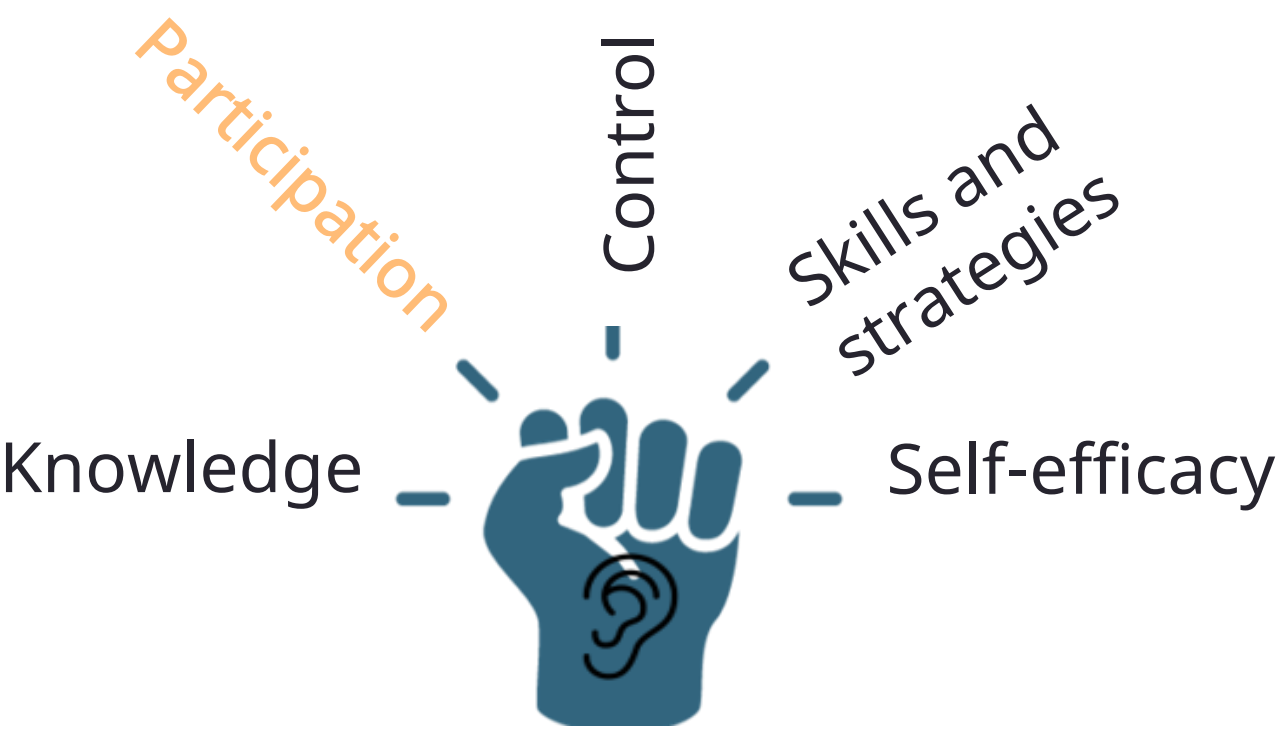
Eight (two female) participants in Sweden, ten (five female) in Australia

Demographic	Mean	Range
Age, years (SD)	72.44 (7.56)	56-85
Better-ear average _(0.25-4 kHz) , dB HL (SD)	36.13 (16.21)	5-56.25
Length of HA experience, months (SD)	20.56 (10.76)	6-36

Template analysis (Brooks and King, 2014) was used to analyze the data. This type of analysis allows for the comparison of observed data to an a-priori template of theoretically driven themes

Results

Our findings suggest that, aligned with Zimmerman’s theory of psychological empowerment, *knowledge, skills and strategies, participation, self-efficacy, and control* are dimensions of empowerment on the hearing patient journey. Each participant talked about all five dimensions, with individual variation in which dimensions were most emphasized.



We conceptualized the empowerment process along the hearing health journey as follows:

Empowerment along the hearing health journey is the process through which individuals with hearing-related challenges acquire and use knowledge, skills, and strategies, and increase self-efficacy, participation, and the feeling of control of their hearing health care, hearing solutions, and everyday lives.

Spotlight: the multifaceted role of participation

Theme 1:
Lacking participation/
involvement

No, [I did not feel involved], I presumed the results from the test made it possible to adjust [my hearing aids] correctly.

Theme 2:
Actively participating

I don't feel I'm left outside. And I dare to ask, if I don't hear I can say "what, what was that you said?" I can ask when I don't hear, and I'm no longer ashamed of that, now I want to participate.

Theme 3:
Lacking action

There was an inhibition and horror stories that I had heard about cost and commercial operators who were selling the equipment, giving tests and advice.

Theme 4:
Making the decision to get help

I said I've got glasses whatever, I'm not having a hearing aid. But you really have to, in the end, you really have to do it.

Participation

Participants shared about *participation in both hearing rehabilitation and aspects of their social lives*, including family and informal social relationships.

They enjoyed participating in clinical decision making and being involved in the adjustments during their audiological visits.

At times they also felt that they *lacked participation* in their clinical visits, however, this was not always framed negatively. Instead, it was framed as letting the expert professional do their job.

Regarding participation and lack of participation in *social life*, many felt isolated when their hearing challenges began, and shared that being fitted with hearing aids allowed them to re-join their own lives.

Regaining the ability to participate in their life was reported as one of the main sources of satisfaction after getting hearing aids.

Conclusions

The findings and insights from this research can be used to finetune person-centered hearing rehabilitation, be applied to future studies exploring the roles of hearing care professionals and communication partners in the empowerment process, and to future quantitative investigations of the empowerment dimensions.

References:
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Zimmerman, B. J. (1995). Self-regulation involves more than metacognition: A social cognitive perspective. *Educational psychologist*, 30(4), 217-221