

Conceptualising empowerment for hearing health care

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Background

There are many definitions of empowerment but common to these are that they describe empowerment as a process of enabling patients to gain mastery over an issue of concern to them (Johnsen et al., 2017; Zimmerman, 1995).

The WHO's World Report on Hearing envisions a world in which no individual experiences hearing loss due to preventable causes, and those with hearing loss can achieve their full potential through rehabilitation, education and empowerment.

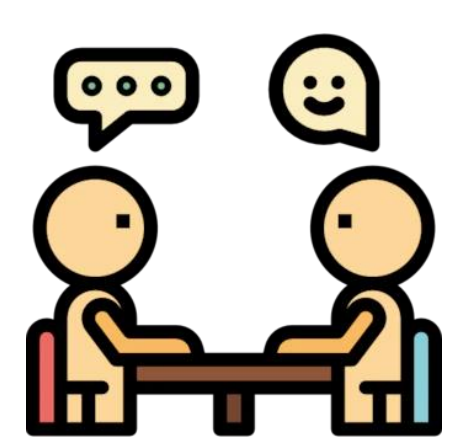


Only a handful of studies have previously explored hearing loss and empowerment.

Aims

1. Explore empowerment from a hearing perspective.
2. Investigate how empowerment manifests itself for individuals on their journey from first awareness of hearing challenges to becoming active hearing aid users.
3. Create a conceptualisation for empowerment within an audiological context.

Methods



- Semi-structured interviews with hearing aid users from Sweden (n=8) and Australia (n=10)
 - Age: mean = 77.5 (SD 7.6, range 56 – 85) years
 - Better-ear average: mean = 36.1 (SD 16.2, range 5-56.2) dB HL
 - Hearing aid experience duration: mean = 20.6 (SD 10.7, range 6-36) years



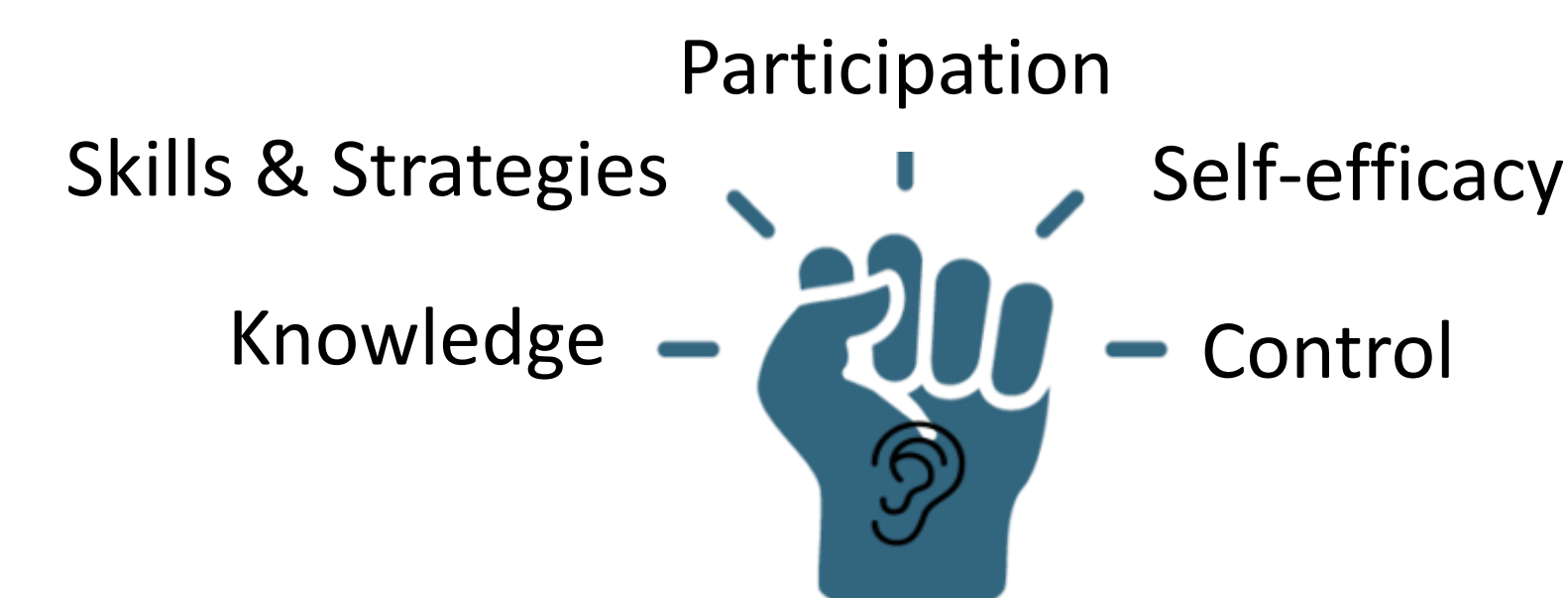
- Open-ended questions on experiences about empowerment dimensions (Zimmerman, 1995): knowledge, skills, participation, self-efficacy and control
- during participants' hearing journey, at pre-fitting, fitting, post-fitting



- Deductive thematic template analysis, using NVivo13.

Results: empowerment dimensions

- Participants shared insights from all five *a priori* dimensions
- Five key dimensions and twenty sub-themes were created



Both **knowledge** about hearing and hearing aids as well as knowing about myself was a central part of the hearing journey.

The **skills** dimension was expanded to include both skills and **strategies**. During the pre-fitting stage participants often relied on themselves learning strategies. This occurred both unconsciously and consciously, resulting in both adaptive and maladaptive strategies.

Social **participation** was as important as participating in hearing health care.

Participants gained greater **self-efficacy** in communicating when they started to use hearing aids. Some also said that they had the same sense of self-efficacy before and after hearing aids.

Hearing aids helped feelings of being in **control**, for communication and everyday life.

	Pre-fitting	Fitting	Post-fitting
Knowledge	Lacking knowledge	Lacking knowledge	Wishing I had known Lacking knowledge Knowing where to turn to
Skills & strategies		Developing strategies	Using skills
Participation	Lacking social participation	Lacking action Making the decision to get help	Participating in my hearing health care Participating socially Participating socially
Self-efficacy	Feeling confident	Feeling confident	Gaining confidence Feeling confident
Control	Hearing challenges not affecting feeling of control		Using hearing aids is related to feeling in control

- No one dimension was more dominant or uniquely relevant than any other across the hearing health journey
- Each dimension is a dynamic component at all stages

Results: what the patients said

"It was so good to be able to hear. To be able to use hearing aids and use assistive devices to hear. Actually, I wish that I learned this already earlier on." (P4)

"No more than the habitual things like taking them out every night, giving them a bit of a clean and putting them in a charger and back out in the morning and in the ear." (P18)

"I've got the hearing aids in, so I am in control." (P13)

"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." (P8)

"I feel confident when I sit and talk and I hear what people say, most of them." (P6)

Conclusions

- Empowerment in hearing health care was conceptualised as:
"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".
- All dimensions of empowerment were shown to be important parts throughout the patient journey with some temporal variations for the different dimensions.
- These findings may benefit people with hearing loss and enable the fine-tuning of patient-centered care.

Next Steps

- We have created two open access measures, Empowerment Audiology Questionnaire (EmpAQ-5 and EmpAQ-15). The 5-item version is for clinical use, and the 15-item version is for research of in-depth clinical use. Scan the QR code for access.
- We are due to start a new study that aims to identify how best to implement EmpAQ measures into clinical practice based on implementation science theory and principles.



References

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