

## **THE BRIDGE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: EXPERIENCES OF GROWING UP AS HEARING CHILDREN OF DEAF PARENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

More than 90% of deaf parents have hearing children. These children are often bilingual and bicultural and they usually represent communication brokers in the situations that can be inappropriate for their age and stressful for children. These children lack the recognition as a minority group needing specific support, and due to the lack of research, the aim of this paper is to explore the experiences of hearing children raised in the families with deaf parents in Serbia. Data were collected through the focus group consisting of six young adults and analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The findings show that taking on a high level of responsibility is a key characteristic of the participants' childhood, including the early involvement in interpreting and assuming a role similar to that of a parent. The participants expressed the need to protect their parents from unpleasant situations, which often stem from stigma and discrimination related to deafness. Concerning the relationship with their parents, the participants report the attitude toward stronger mutual emotional closeness and highlight the benefits they gain through such early maturation experiences, by naming the skills which are useful for the coping with different situations in adulthood. The importance of social support during the period of growing up is emphasized, and the fact that the participants do not blame their parents' deafness for the negative aspects of growing up. The consistent finding is that the most meaningful changes would include raising awareness in the community and normalizing deafness.

### **Keywords**

*deafness, hearing children of deaf adults, CODA, sign language, interpreting.*

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## Introduction

One of the often overlooked minority groups, both in research terms (Napier, 2021) and in terms of relative invisibility in society (Bishop & Hicks, 2005), are the families with hearing children and deaf parents. The specific challenges faced by these families largely relate to the communication barriers and the limited accessibility of the environment for deaf individuals (Napier, 2021). In other words, this perspective stems from a culturally affirmative approach adopted in this work, which recognizes the particularities of the individuals who are not only functionally but they are also culturally deaf (Glickman & Hall, 2018). The term *culturally deaf* refers to a subgroup of deaf individuals who define their identity more through belonging to the minority community that shares a language, culture, history, and values, rather than focusing solely on the absence of hearing<sup>1</sup> (Glickman & Hall, 2018). Within this cultural context, sign language is considered to be the natural linguistic expression of deaf individuals (Leigh, Andrews, Miller, Wolsey, 2023), and hearing children growing up with these parents sometimes acquire sign language as their first language (Napier, 2017). They may also share certain experiences, values, and the culture of this group (Leigh et al., 2023). Considering the fact that they can hear and are exposed to the hearing culture too, they are often bilingual, but also bicultural. Accordingly, they may more frequently take on the role of brokers between their parents and the hearing environment, serving as a bridge between the deaf and hearing world (Hall & Guery, 2010; Van den Bogaerde & Baker, 2016). To some extent, these situations can make deaf parents dependent on their children and create a more specific distribution of roles within the family (Klimentová, Dočekal, Hynková, 2017).

*The parenting of deaf individuals.* The most of the deaf parents are positioned between two hearing generations: their own parents and their children (Singleton & Tittle, 2000). Some authors suggest that deaf individuals face challenges due to the lack of exposure to the effective parenting models (Hoffmeister, 1985, as cited in Filler & Filler, 2000). Many hearing parents either do not know or do not fully master sign language, which can hinder their ability to be fully sensitive to the communicative and social needs of a deaf child (Vaccari & Marschark, 1997). In families where children are deaf and the parents are hearing and do not use sign language, it may happen that the deaf child is excluded from everyday conversations. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the *dinner table syndrome* (Hauser, O’Hearn, McKee, Steider, Thew, 2010), which can serve as the metaphor for all the conversational streams in which the deaf child is not fully included, such as during mealtimes or car rides, where they may feel confused, isolated, and left out (Meek, 2020). Deaf children can also be deprived of the opportunities for incidental learning (Hauser et al., 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Note: In the literature, the word “Deaf” is often capitalized when referring to deaf individuals from this cultural-linguistic perspective (e.g., Glickman, N. S., & Hall, 2018). Since the focus of this paper is not specifically on this aspect, lowercase “d” will be used throughout the paper for clarity.

Research also shows that other family members, such as hearing grandparents, may be involved in child-rearing in ways that can undermine the authority of deaf parents (Harvey, 1989, as cited in Singleton & Tittle, 2000).

There are the findings suggesting that deaf parents can be just as successful as hearing parents (Leigh et al., 2023). In other words, there are more similarities than differences, and the differences that do exist are often attributable to cultural variations in parenting styles rather than to any limitations imposed by deafness (Jones & Dumas, 1996). For example, when comparing families with hearing and deaf parents, where both contexts exhibit a parenting style that is more authoritative (than authoritarian), deaf parents were found to be more flexible (Rienzi, 1990). Findings also show that children had a greater influence on family decision-making, with deaf fathers being less authoritarian and making greater efforts to reach compromises in response to the children's disagreement (Rienzi, 1990).

Additionally, findings indicate the more frequent reliance on logical consequences, encouragement, and rewards, and the less frequent use of punishment. Consistently, findings from research examining interactions of deaf mothers with young children and infants indicate no significant differences compared to hearing mothers (Jones, 1996). The difference could be observed in the context of the fact that deaf mothers used touch less during teaching, seemingly due to their hands being occupied while communicating with the child in sign language (Jones, 1996). Overall, findings suggest that deaf parents are generally caring and competent, with the most being loving and determined to raise their children in the best possible way (Singleton & Tittle, 2000). However, findings also indicate that deaf parents are aware of the limitations related to their own upbringing and may be concerned about access to child-rearing information that is culturally and linguistically adapted to them (Singleton & Tittle, 2000).

*The experiences of hearing children of deaf parents.* Findings indicate that more than 90% of deaf individuals have hearing children (Hadjikakou, Christodoulou, Hadjidemetri, Konidari, Nicolaou, 2009). The acronym commonly used to describe hearing children with one or both deaf parents is CODA – Children Of Deaf Adults (Bishop & Hicks, 2005). Although there are no characteristics that can be applied to all hearing children of deaf parents, there appears to be a significant number of their mutual characteristics (Filer & Filer, 2000). Hearing children of deaf parents are often the only ones who know how to use the sign language of their deaf parents, but they also know the spoken language, which allows them to communicate with hearing grandparents. This opens the possibility for deeper communication that may not have previously existed between the deaf parents and the grandparents (Filer & Filer, 2000). These children often become the communication link between their deaf parents and the wider hearing community (Filer & Filer, 2000). Literature shows that brokering is the frequent practice and an inseparable part of everyday life in these families (Napier, 2021), with children beginning this role at a very early age (Gee, Wright, Napier, Ackroyd, Phillips, Hayes, 2021). Research including the oldest

children of deaf parents shows that interpreting is the most important issue and theme in their personal experiences, and it is one of the most challenging and complex matters for both children and parents (Buchino, 1993). More recent literature also indicates that children may perceive these activities as stressful and exhausting, and that they experience a lack of choice regarding their involvement (Hadjikakou et al., 2009; Heffernan & Nixon, 2023). Children may act as brokers in contexts that are not developmentally appropriate (Napier, 2021) or in situations for which they lack sufficient skills (Filer & Filer, 2000). Contemporary literature highlights that particularly frustrating are the contexts that are inappropriate for the child's developmental age (Moroe & De Andrade, 2018; Heffernan & Nixon, 2023). For example, children may translate for their parents during medical appointments or while handling administrative tasks, such as obtaining a bank loan. Some authors also point to the phenomenon of *role reversal*, in which children begin to see themselves as responsible and behave like parents, while the parents assume the role of those who are dependent on their children (Buchino, 1990). Similarly, the concept of the *role of protector* has been observed, in which children may omit the parts of conversations during brokering in conflict situations to prevent escalation (Filer & Filer, 2000). Findings also show that children in the brokering role are sometimes aware of the stigmatized status of their deaf parents and of sign language (Napier, 2021). The desire to protect their parents often seems linked to coping with the consequences of stigma and discrimination (Heffernan & Nixon, 2023; Napier, 2021). However, unlike their parents' upbringing, these children can acquire valuable knowledge about how the adult world functions, which can contribute to their personal development (Filer & Filer, 2000).

Hearing children of deaf parents generally demonstrate positive feelings toward their parents (e.g. Napier, 2021), although some authors note that as children grow older (during adolescence), they may experience more mixed emotions (Buchino, 1990). Finally, these children are not considered to be at an increasing risk for developmental problems (Leigh et al., 2023), while the review of the previous literature suggests that they are highly resilient and resourceful and are not overrepresented as the children with socio-emotional or educational difficulties (Singleton & Tittle, 2000). Nevertheless, within the context of their peers, these children have certain experiences that distinguish them and place them into the situations where they may have more specific needs, which can remain unrecognized and unsupported (Klimentová, Dočekal, Hynková, 2017). One of the possible reasons for this is the difficulty of linking these children into the broader context of deafness, as their experiences may be less visible, particularly if their spoken language development follows the normative development.

This topic is underrepresented in the research literature, and to the authors' knowledge, there are no published studies on the experiences of hearing children of deaf parents being conducted with a Serbian sample. Accordingly, the main research question of this study concerns the experiences of hearing children of deaf parents during their upbringing. The review of the literature revealed that these children often

assume various roles from early childhood, which may differ from typical roles of children within these social frameworks. The aim of this study is to investigate the specific experiences of hearing children raised in families with deaf parents in this context, striving for the better understanding of the parent-child relationship, as perceived by young adult participants, and to explore the meaning they currently attribute to these experiences.

## Method

*Sample.* The homogeneous sample consisted of six young adults, aged 24 to 26, predominantly female (one male participant), living in Serbia. All the participants were hearing individuals who had grown up with both parents being deaf and/or hard of hearing. In addition to their age, the participants were similar in that they had either recently lived with their parents or were still living with them.

*Data Collection Procedure.* Participants were contacted through the network of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals registered with the association, as well as through the principal researcher's personal contacts. Data were collected through the focus group as the part of the master's thesis in 2022. The principal researcher is also a child of deaf parents, sharing an experiential connection with the participants and serving as the moderator of the focus group. The focus group lasted for 1 hour and 40 minutes. Prior to the focus group, the participants completed the Socio-demographic questionnaire and provided the Consent for participation in the study and audio recording, with the anonymity of participation being explained.

The questions and topics for the participants were designed to allow maximum freedom for them to discuss their experiences. Topics included questions such as: what having deaf parents means to the participants, how this affected their assumption of responsibilities including the interpreter role, and whether, and what kind of, experiences they had regarding stigma and discrimination that might arise in the society due to deafness. The participants also discussed the benefits and losses during upbringing, as well as the potential solutions for supporting children growing up in similar circumstances. Finally, the participants completed the Debriefing form, which enabled them to share their feelings and opinions about their participation and the topics discussed.

*Data Analysis.* What participants shared during the focus group was transcribed and analyzed by using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, following the recommendations for adaptation to the focus group context (see Palmer, Larkin, De Visser, Fadden, 2010). The aim of IPA is to explore experiences from the perspective of the person living them, while acknowledging that the researcher's perspective and the interaction between researcher and participants play an inseparable role in the process, making the analysis always, to some extent, the interpretation of that experience (Willig, 2008: 56–57).

This qualitative method helps us understand and interpret the ways in which individuals make sense of their experiences related to a particular phenomenon, within the specific context (Palmer et al., 2010: 99).

## Results

During the data analysis, the main theme that emerged was the assumption of a higher degree of responsibility, which accompanies and permeates the significant aspects of the upbringing of hearing children of deaf parents.

Within this theme, six subthemes are identified, which will be listed in the order presented in Table 1, while examples for each subtheme will be shown in Tables 2 through 6.

*Table 1. Subthemes within the theme: a higher degree of responsibility*

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No.	Subtheme title
1.	The early assumption of the brokering role in communication
2.	The perception of hearing children as taking on a parent-like role
3.	Maturation
4.	Mutual attachment
5.	The role of a protector
6.	Social support

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(1) Assuming the informal interpreter role and responsibility is difficult to separate, and this subtheme is experienced as ever-present in the children's lives, expressed through general terms such as *always*, *everywhere*, *non-stop*, as well as through the simultaneous accounts of all the participants about interpreting for their parents. The participants generally agree that they were drawn into the adult world too early and that they very often had no choice. The early assumption of such a role can also evoke numerous uncomfortable emotions, with the examples of vivid and detailed descriptions, as well as the illustrations of a gradual increase in frequency (Example 1).

They may feel anxious, and this role can affect their sense of self-confidence, with the awareness of the lack of the resources and preparation for managing such responsibilities (Examples 2 and 3). It was also noted that employees were sometimes kinder to children in the brokering role, but less so toward their deaf parents, which one participant described using terms like *very rude* and *disrespectful*,

while also noting that she had personally experienced the opposite. This creates a sense that it may contribute to feelings of guilt in situations when children are not there for their deaf parents.

*Table 2. The examples of the relevant participant statements for the first subtheme*

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No.	Example content
1.	And I remember, I will never forget my first time interpreting... ( <i>continued</i> )... It was when I was six years old... from that age on, it just kept happening more and more.
2.	... we were thrown into the fire and basically, you just need to figure it out...
3.	Because my biggest problem was that, you know, I had to interpret for my parents or provide some kind of support in a certain area, and I had issues with self-confidence and I wasn't, I wasn't, I wasn't fully aware... I was still a child, really. And that moment when I had to call someone and talk to them, when, in fact, I shouldn't even have had to do it, and not to mention the self-confidence part... So, those moments for me... I felt completely... I felt fear, some kind of paranoia, and literally every negative emotion... It's natural to feel some of these things because you're not really supposed to be doing that at that age...

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(2) Due to a different distribution of authority within the family dynamic, children may take on a role much closer to that of a parent than is typically the case for children of hearing parents (Example 5).

This is reflected in the expression of a higher level of independence, through formulations often used in parenting contexts, as well as the care that involves assessing the greater dependence of parents on their children (Examples 6 and 7).

The sense of fear accompanies the care and responsibility, with descriptions resembling feelings of anxiety and even rumination. It appears that children of deaf parents set themselves the task of being constantly available to their parents, which some of them explicitly express (Example 8).

If something happens to their parents, they would likely attribute it to their own unavailability at that moment, accompanied by feelings of guilt (Examples 9 and 10).

The important observation is that the participants consistently attributed their experience, of sometimes being *like a parent to their parents*, to environmental limitations.

One of the female participants did not fully agree with the statement, explaining her perspective in terms of mutual support and contribution, creating a beneficial situation for both sides.

In a school context, a child may have a dual role in front of their teacher: both the teacher's student and a sign language interpreter, creating the unclear hierarchy between the deaf parent and the hearing child.

*Table 3. The examples of the relevant participant statements for the second subtheme*

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No.	Example content
5.	... I practically had to take on the role of being my own parent, and sometimes even a parent to my parents.
6.	... I really spoiled them.
7.	... I keep wondering whether they'll manage, whether they'll be able to cope without me while I'm at work, whether I'll need to leave early and things like that.
8.	... I got used to always being available to her.
9.	Because, well, in my most recent experience, when I moved in with my boyfriend, I somehow feel that no one else would go through the kind of the psychological turmoil I did, because I kept having this constant sense in my head that I was, in some way, abandoning them...
10.	... it's easier for me to be in touch with them all the time, because my biggest fear is that something will happen to them. I mean, I think my thoughts go to the... to the point of madness.

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(3) The participants in the focus group reported more positive effects than negative ones, in terms of acquired resourcefulness, independence, increased self-confidence, and the ability to make decisions more securely and easily. These experiences are grouped under the subtheme of maturation (Examples 11 and 12).

An important aspect perceived is the gratitude to their parents for this outcome, which further emphasizes the value of such a benefit (Example 13).

*Table 4. The examples of the relevant participant statements  
for the third subtheme*

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No.	Example content
11.	Just by having that responsibility from a young age, almost all of us agree that we matured much earlier, simply because we were exposed to the topics that perhaps other children were not...
12.	I feel that, in general, we are all more independent. As she says, nothing is a problem for me now. Some decisions that are difficult for my peers are not a problem for me at all.
13.	I think, looking at myself, this is a big plus... – But, a huge plus... ( <i>laughs</i> )

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(4) The interpretation of the subtheme of mutual attachment relates to the perception that it may be a consequence of greater interdependence, where hearing children and their parents have a more egalitarian relationship and more flexible boundaries. They can experience their relationships with their parents as more open and, to a greater extent, as a friendship. It is noticeable that greater attachment is even mentioned as one of the first associations with what it means to have deaf parents. It is also observed that such a response was given at the beginning of the focus group, before the development of the group dynamics, and after responses that focused on responsibility and duties. Participants seem to particularly value the accessibility, warmth, and understanding they receive from their parents, assessing it in relation to hearing parents as an important benefit (Table 5).

*Table 5. The examples of the relevant participant statements  
for the fourth subtheme*

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No.	Example content
14.	In my view, there is greater closeness... ( <i>continued</i> )... I'm not saying that other children aren't close to their parents, but as far as I'm concerned, there is greater attachment to our parents.
15.	Overall, the connection is stronger because they depend on us just as much as we depend on them. Whereas other children rely on their mom and dad and that's it, basically, their parents don't have to rely on them, while our parents do. So, there is this mutual interdependence.

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(5) The next subtheme concerns dealing with stigma associated with deafness in the society, accompanied by unpleasant experiences and the desire to protect their parents. Overall, the entire group reported similar examples, including offensive comments, questions that were not perceived as well-intentioned, teasing, and general ignorance in the environment. The primary school years and peers at that age were perceived as particularly stressful (Examples 16–18). This subtheme contains the most emotional intensity, including responses that involved tears from a participant while recounting a situation (Example 19), as well as descriptions that still convey the strong sense of the impact and the perception of relevance for the future. Hearing children of deaf parents appear to experience the heightened sense of responsibility to protect their parents from hurtful comments and reactions, prioritizing their parents' well-being in these situations and shielding them from the unpleasant emotions that the children themselves feel (Example 20). This theme is imbued with feelings of anger and helplessness, possibly in part because they still cannot fully protect their parents in the environment that may be unfamiliar and inaccessible (Examples 21–22). It is noticeable that the negative emotional tone is not directed at the parents, and parental deafness is not perceived as the cause of this problem or frustration. There is the strong desire to change the environment so that parents can feel safe and protected even when the children are not present. There are also accounts interpreted as reflecting the need to protect younger generations of children of deaf parents who may go through similar experiences. A very important aspect highlighted is how little support could have made a significant difference, including simply being acknowledged or considered (Example 23).

*Table 6. The examples of the relevant participant statements for the fifth subtheme*

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No.	Example content
16.	... they were communicating on the bus, and it was mostly other children who would watch and mock them, make fun of them.
17.	... I never thought the problem was in them, but it was hard for me because, I don't know, other children found it funny.
18.	That's true. And for me, elementary school was the hardest...
19.	And... those kids who didn't see me, walking behind him and saying awful things... ( <i>continued</i> )... that will always be the hardest thing in the world for me; I think that will always hurt me more than anything else.
20.	... I kept that inside... not wanting my parents to feel guilty because of their deafness...
21.	I feel sorry for them, I feel sorry that I can't do anything about it, that someone is unfair to them or belittles or humiliates them in any way.

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No.	Example content
22.	That also really bothered me, that besides anger, I had this sense of helplessness, that I couldn't change the situation or the opinions of certain people, and that lack of understanding and intolerance toward someone who is "different".
23.	... if only someone could help those children understand how to cope with it, and that one day everything will be okay and normal for them... If only there had been someone to tell me that one day... that it would be completely normal for me and that I would never again feel what I felt, that alone would have been enough... and not to mention if there had been even more understanding than this.

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(6) In the context of easing a higher degree of responsibility, social support is experienced as having a truly significant role. It includes family, neighbours, and peer relationships, as well as the support from the wider system (Example 24).

There is a strong sense that systemic and societal change is seen as crucial for improving the lives of these families, aiming to raise awareness and normalize deafness, while making the environment more accessible, thus overcoming communication barriers.

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No.	Example content
24.	... my late grandfather, my mom's dad, somehow... at least for a short while, pulled me out of all of that... in the sense that he took some things upon himself, and I could, well... being with him in that environment, at least for those two months each year, I was able to develop... my speech and grow just like any other child of my age... If that hadn't happened, I probably would have needed speech therapy or something similar, but having that kind of support and luck made things a bit easier, at least for a short period of time.

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## Discussion and conclusion

Deafness can significantly affect communication and relationships within the family, with challenges impacting not only deaf parents but also other family members, requiring their adaptation. The aim of this study was to gain insight, using the qualitative methodology, into the experiences of hearing children of deaf parents in young adulthood and how they perceive those experiences. Hearing children of deaf parents often take on the interpreter role at a very early age (Napier, 2021), and the findings in this study confirm that, by identifying the starting age as six. The interpretation is not limited to translating, it encompasses facilitating overall communication between the deaf parent and the people they are talking to, which requires knowledge and understanding of various domains. All the participants in this study assumed the role of a broker and interpreter during childhood, which was a frequent part of daily life and particularly stressful and challenging during elementary school and in situations developmentally inappropriate for children. These findings align with previous literature (Buchino, 1993; Filer & Filer, 2000; Gee et al., 2021; Hadjidakou et al., 2009; Heffernan & Nixon, 2023; Moroe & De Andrade, 2018; Napier, 2021). Due to the lack of accessible information and support for deaf parents, children often experienced their role as somewhat parent-like, feeling ongoing concern and guilt when they were not there to assist. This aligns with the findings from the research with the participants in Cyprus, who reported similar feelings when leaving home (Hadjidakou et al., 2009), as well as with the authors who point to the possibility of role reversal, where parents can sometimes be more dependent on their children, and children take on more responsibility, acting in the parent-like manner (Buchino, 1990; Klimentová, Dočekal, Hynková, 2017). These children often withhold certain comments directed at themselves, at the parents, or at the way the parents communicate, in order to protect them. In the focus group, the participants most frequently reported the feelings of anger when negative comments were directed at the parents, along with helplessness, because they could not fully protect them in such situations. This is consistent with recent studies, where nearly all the participants had to protect parents from comments, stares, or other uncomfortable situations caused by hearing people (Hadjidakou et al., 2009), as well as with the research in Ireland, where protecting parents is discussed in the context of stigma and negative societal attitudes (Heffernan & Nixon, 2023). Similarly, a study in South Africa describes role reversal with parents, where children sometimes face the dilemma of whether to inform parents or to shield them from the comments made by the hearing community (Moroe & De Andrade, 2018).

Despite growing up in a more challenging context, children of deaf parents today report positive effects, as well as the close bond with their deaf parents. The most significant positive aspects are seen in earlier maturation, characterized by autonomy, self-confidence, better decision-making, and similar traits that are important for their current functioning. Findings supporting this also relate to better

preparation for adulthood, with interpreting in various contexts contributing to earlier assumption of adult responsibilities, as well as to being more responsible, mature, and independent (Gee et al., 2021; Heffernan & Nixon, 2023; Moroe & De Andrade, 2018). It is possible that, thanks to clearer responsibilities and roles, during adolescence these children develop the more stable identity, which is a developmental task associated with more favourable outcomes in terms of mental health (Arnett, 2000). Identity research consistently shows that collective identity is associated with better mental health (Dimitrova et al., 2017; Ghavami, Fingerhut, Peplau, Grant, Wittig, 2011; Nedeljković, Vukonjanski, Nikolić, Hadžić, Šljukić, 2018; Phinney, 1989), and during upbringing children of deaf parents may develop the clear awareness of belonging to the particular social community, which prioritizes collective orientation over individual orientation (Preston, 1994, as cited in Filer & Filer, 2000).

Although this study involved a very small number of participants, making it impossible to draw general conclusions about deaf parenting, any characterization of it must take into account the situational demands and available resources in the environment (Rienzi, 1990), as well as the cultural context. The cultural and linguistic community of deaf people may view interdependence as a highly important social aspect. On the other hand, the lack of professional interpreters and adapted resources for deaf parenting can make it difficult to clearly recognize the qualities that these parents may possess. The perceptions of the participants in this study, as well as the ones of the moderator of the focus group, indicate that deaf parents are caring, open, and maintain the close bond with their children. It cannot be said that hearing loss itself, as well as the use of sign language, interferes with successful parenting. The participants do not blame parental deafness for negative aspects, rather, they focus on the benefits that could arise from changing societal attitudes toward deafness. This is a consistent finding in the present study, where there is the agreement that the most significant changes would involve raising awareness in the community and normalizing deafness, which would also facilitate coping with various consequences of stigma and discrimination, experiences reported as highly emotional by the participants. This aligns with the findings from the research focusing on interpreting in interactions with healthcare professionals in Great Britain (Gee et al., 2021). Knowledge among professionals about the rights of deaf people is highlighted as crucial for improving the accessibility of the interpreter and for reducing the burden on children as brokers. Heffernan and Nixon (2023) suggest that social institutions should provide support for children in the role of communication brokers and protect them from situations that are not developmentally appropriate. In addition, the participants' expressed desire to provide support to other children, the support that they themselves did not receive, or that society provided inadequately, indicates that the participants are not trapped in the past, nor resentful of their own difficult experiences. Rather, they show empathy and think about the change which is prosocial and in the present, in other words, it is oriented toward the potential in the future.

*Limitations and recommendations for future research.* This study provides the retrospective reflection on the experiences in the childhood, so the dominant experiences and interpretations may differ from those children would report if contacted during that period. All interpretations in this work pertain to the experiences of hearing children of deaf parents from the perspective of young adults. This does not diminish the value of the findings, as they reveal how these individuals have integrated these experiences into their identity and the meaning they have attributed to them after living through them. The additional limitation concerns the issues of generalizability due to the small sample size, the absence of multiple focus groups, and the low representation of male participants.

Furthermore, the study potentially included only functional families with deaf parents. It is important to investigate the consequences in dysfunctional families and whether, and to what extent, they differ from similar hearing families, particularly considering the significance of extended family and/or other forms of social support for the speech development of these children. It would also be valuable to examine the immediate experiences of children during their upbringing. Given that participants in this study noted changes in societal perceptions of deafness during their childhood, future research could benefit from including the studies across different generations to mitigate potential cohort effects.

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