The Special Problems of Adolescents

Audiologists tend to interact most frequently with two particular populations, young children and elderly persons. The problems typically faced by the very young and the very old tend to shape our perceptions of how hearing loss affects the individual. But in this issue of JAAA the unique problems of another group, adolescents, are highlighted. In the paper “Counseling Adolescents with Hearing Loss with the Use of Self-Assessment/Significant Other Questionnaires,” authors Judy Elkayam and Kris English describe how they administered a 12-item questionnaire to 15 adolescents with hearing loss and 15 peers selected as significant others. Comparison of the two sets of answers illuminates at least some of the special problems of hearing impairment in this often-neglected population.

There were, to be sure, many problems shared by virtually all hearing-impaired individuals: the feeling that others do not understand the experience of hearing loss, feelings of isolation, reluctance to participate in conversations or other activities involving several individuals, problems if someone speaks too rapidly or if many individuals are speaking at the same time. But they also noted reactions with particular impact on the adolescent age group—how, for example, the hearing loss impacted identity and self-acceptance, the “need to learn who they are and where they belong.” Additionally, the investigators noted some seriously conflicting beliefs. On the one hand, adolescents felt that no one really understood the problems they face on a daily basis. On the other hand, however, they were generally unwilling, or unable, to discuss their hearing loss, and their feelings about it, even with peers they thought of as friends.

In subsequent counseling sessions, the investigators noted a number of problems unique to this age group. Anyone who deals with hearing-impaired adolescents will find useful information in this interesting study.

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