Understanding others’ emotions: empathy in deaf and hard of hearing (pre)adolescents

Anouk P. Netten, M.D.1, Prof. Carolien Rieffe, Ph.D.2,3, Stephanie C.P.M. Theunissen M.D., Ph.D.1, Wim Soede, M.Sc., Ph.D.1, Evelien Dirks, M.Sc.3, Jeroen J. Briaire, M.Sc., Ph.D.1, and Prof. Johan H.M. Frijns, M.D., Ph.D.1,4

1. Department of Otorhinolaryngology and Head & Neck Surgery, Leiden University Medical Center, The Netherlands
2. Department of Developmental Psychology, Leiden University, The Netherlands
3. Dutch Foundation for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Child, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
4. Leiden Institute for Brain and Cognition, The Netherlands

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) children

• Increasing speech and language abilities
• Communication problems
  - 92% born to hearing parents
  - Less able to overhear conversations
• Less incidental learning

Introduction

Methods

Results

Discussion

Empathy

- Prosocial behavior
- Understanding
- Theory of Mind
- Distress
- Contagion

Cognitive empathy

Affective empathy

Empathy - the social glue

Hypotheses
Do DHH children show less empathy than hearing peers?

1. Equal levels of affective empathy

2. Lower levels of cognitive empathy and prosocial behavior

Methods

Study group

- A = 284
- 9 - 16 years old
- No other disabilities
- IQ ≥ 80

Controls

A = 382

DHH children*

A = 222

Cochlear Implant

A = 52

Hearing Aid

A = 70

* DHH defined as: ≥ 40 dB pre- or perilingually detected
**Materials**

- Empathy Questionnaire (self-report)
  - Affective empathy: "If a friend is sad, I also feel sad"
  - Cognitive empathy: "When a friend is angry, I tend to know why"
  - Prosocial behavior: "If a friend is sad, I like to comfort him"
  - Not true - Somewhat true - True
- Observation during empathy evoking situations
  - Attention to emotions
  - Prosocial behavior
- Language skills (CELF-IV / AISL)
- Intelligence (WISC-III)

**Self-reported levels of empathy**

**Observed levels of empathy**

**Environmental influence**

- Mainstream education
  - Peers from own neighborhood
  - 'The hearing world'
  - 60% in our DHH sample
- Special education for the DHH
  - More often sign-language
  - Small classes
  - 40% in our DHH sample

**Discussion**

- Equal levels of affective empathy
- Lower levels of cognitive empathy and prosocial behavior
- Along with environmental factors, incidental learning is of major importance for socio-emotional learning

**Future studies**

- Relatively late detection and intervention
- Longitudinal data analysis
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Dutch Foundation for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Child

C. Rieffe
Dept. of Developmental Psychology

J.H.M. Frijns

J.J. Briaire

S.C.P.M. Theunissen

W. Soede
Dept. of ORL - HNS

Houbolt fonds

References


