

https://dspace.org/

An investigation into hearing aid trials: audiologist practices and adult patient experiences

Heliopoulos, Angie Argypo

2021

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/33486

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

ABSTRACT

Background: The process of adjusting and becoming accustomed to hearing aids may be best facilitated by providing a hearing aid trial period. A trial period allows the user time to adjust to the hearing aid in terms of fit and perception of sound. Globally, hearing aid trials are often perceived as an 'up-in-the-air' process in that, there are no standardised frameworks or regulations on the recommended hearing aid trial period. Additionally, there is a dearth of knowledge on hearing aid trials within the South African population. The practices of audiologists in fitting and possibly trialing of hearing aids have not been explored in the local context, thus bringing about the purpose of the current study. **Objective:** The main purpose of this study was to explore audiologists' hearing aid trialing practices and describe hearing aid users' experiences from these hearing aid trials. The secondary objectives looked at determining a suitable number of hearing aids to test per trial period as well as the most preferred duration of a trial period. It also looked at comparing patient satisfaction with hearing aid trials, and lastly, exploring the hearing aid users' decisions in choosing hearing aids. **Method:** A sequential, explanatory, mixed method approach was chosen to formulate the study. A purposive sampling strategy in conjunction with snowball sampling was used to identify and recruit participants. 95 audiologists and eight hearing aid users in South Africa were recruited for this study. Data were collected through the use of an online survey via Google forms, as well as semi-structured online or telephonic interviews. A pilot study was conducted prior to the commencement of the main study in order to ensure reliability of the main study. Quantitative analysis included both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis (Chi-square method of analysis). The qualitative aspect of data analysis incorporated thematic analysis where five themes were identified. **Results:** The results indicated that two weeks was the most recommended duration of a trial period from audiologists. The duration of hearing aid trials by the hearing aid users varied with one-week, two-weeks, three weeks and two-month trials. However, a one-to-three-week trial period was recommended by participants. Furthermore, participants felt that one month was too long. Only 72.63% of audiologists offer hearing aid trials to their patients. Most audiologists who offer hearing aid trials choose to trial their patients with 2 different hearing aids. The majority of participants' trialed one set of hearing aids during their trial period. One half of the hearing aid

users felt like trialing only one set of hearing aids is enough while the second half felt like they would like to trial two pairs to compare. Hearing aid trials are most commonly only provided if requested by the hearing aid user. The first hearing aid(s) trialed are the ones the users usually choose if more than one pair is trialed. Hearing aid users all felt that trialing hearing aids first before purchasing them should be mandatory practice. All participants reported a good and positive experience whilst using hearing aids during the hearing aid trial. **Conclusion:** Findings revealed a need for trialing periods to become standard practice by audiologists when fitting hearing aids. Not enough audiologists are providing this service even though the users reported only benefits and positive experiences from these trials.

Keywords: *Hearing aid trials, trial period, hearing aids, audiologist, counselling, aural rehabilitation*