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Prevalence of hearing impairment and auditory pathology in the Limpopo Province, South Africa

Pullen, Donna L

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Abstract

***Background**:* The lack of prevalence data for hearing impairment (HI) in South Africa may negatively impact on the type of audiological services currently available to individuals residing in the rural areas of South Africa. Without relevant prevalence data, the government is unable to plan and budget for appropriate, comprehensive ear and hearing health services.

Objective: The aim of this study was therefore to obtain epidemiological data on the prevalence and distribution of auditory pathology and HI in the Elias Motsoaledi Local Municipality of the Limpopo Province.

Method: A quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design was used for this study. Using a random multi-stage cluster sampling strategy, 357 households were selected in seven wards using the probability proportional to size method. The Ear and Hearing Disorders Survey developed by the World Health Organisation was used to gather information.

Participants: All individuals living in the households selected who gave consent and/or assent to participate in the study were included in the study. In total the hearing of 850 individuals from 357 households were tested. The mean age of participants was 27.9 years (range: 1 month to 94.5 years; *SD* – 22.08).

Results: The overall prevalence of disabling HI (> 40 dB) in this rural population is 8.9% (95% CI: 0.08 - 0.12). The age group 65 years and older presented with the highest prevalence of disabling HI at 74.65% (95% CI: 0.62 - 0.83). The prevalence of auditory pathology is 27.53% (95% CI: 0.26 - 0.32) with undetermined causes, impacted cerumen and otitis media occurring most often.

Conclusion: The study provided evidence-based data on the prevalence on HI and auditory pathology in the rural context in South Africa. This information will assist all stakeholders in the ear and hearing health care sector to plan for, prioritize, allocate adequate resources and initiate programmes to ameliorate the impact of HI and auditory pathology in the EMLM of the Limpopo Province.

Keywords: prevalence; hearing impairment, auditory pathology; Ear and Hearing Disorders Survey, rural, South Africa