

Editorial

Advancing work participation for persons with hearing loss

Mary Beth Jennings^{a,*}, Sophia E. Kramer^b and Lynn Shaw^c

^a*School of Communication Sciences and Disorders, National Centre for Audiology, Western University, Elborn College, London, ON, Canada*

^b*Department of ENT/Audiology, EMGO+ Institute, VU University Medical Center, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

^c*Occupational Science, School of Occupational Therapy, Elborn College, London, ON, Canada*

This special issue was envisioned to provide international perspectives on research and viewpoints on work rehabilitation relevant to the work participation of persons with hearing loss. Papers in this special issue engaged the voices of persons with hearing loss who are active in creating awareness about the work potential of persons with hearing loss as well as advocating for systemic change, use of technology and the reduction of hearing stigma (Kooser from the US, Hannan from Canada, and Nealon from Australia). Consistent with WORK's aim to support scholarship of graduate students we invited graduate students to submit papers and have a systematic review by Gussenhoven et al. that includes students and researchers from the Netherlands. Three research papers (Jennings, et al., Stam et al., Cheesman et al.) explore hearing and work in this issue. We (the three guest editors) drew on the current knowledge from the articles in this special issue to develop a 'Pay it Forward' knowledge transfer document on Tips for Work Rehabilitation Professionals and service providers in enabling hearing solutions at work.

This issue begins with two Sounding Board articles. Nealon shares viewpoints relevant to hearing, rehabilitation and policy from Australia. Kooser calls for a renewed focus on comprehensive approaches to address

the access to services and supports that persons with hearing needs have in the United States. These sounding boards draw attention to key areas that are essential for advancing the inclusion of and rights of persons with hearing loss to citizenship through productive work. While there are contextual differences in each country in terms of anti-discrimination legislation and disability support policies, one thing in common that these articles share is that hearing loss must be viewed as a complex work rehabilitation practice problem. Solutions are needed that bridge evidence, the expert knowledge of persons with hearing loss, knowledge on accessibility and health professional experience.

The next section of the special issue presents some of the current evidence on hearing loss and work. An article by Gussenhoven et al. reports on a systematic review of the literature on existing vocational rehabilitation services for workers with hearing difficulties. The paper describes the characteristics of these programs, such as content, setting and duration, and also points to the fact that very few studies have examined the effectiveness of AR services so far. Empirical evidence for the effectiveness and efficiency of these programs, especially in terms of cost, is largely lacking. The authors argue that knowledge about and experience with existing VR programs for adults with hearing disability help us in further development, refinement and optimization of (effective) vocational rehabilitation programs for persons with hearing loss.

*Corresponding author: Mary Beth Jennings, School of Communication Sciences and Disorders, National Centre for Audiology, Western University, Elborn College, 1201 Western Road, London, ON, N6G 1H1, Canada. E-mail: jennings@nca.uwo.ca.

Cheesman and colleagues compared two approaches to measuring hearing accessibility using case studies that examined the education sector and the accessibility of hearing in the classroom. Results indicate that use of Universal Design for Hearing Principles provides additional useful information in addition to traditional physical-based measures when assessing and addressing communication environments in post-secondary classrooms.

Stam et al. used a cross sectional study to examine relationships of hearing ability, socioeconomic status and employment. The results point to potential inherent work disparities for persons with poor hearing ability. Adults with hearing disability were less likely to be found in the upper categories of educational level and income and were less likely to have paid work than their peers without hearing disability.

Jennings et al. conducted a secondary analysis of data on social identity management strategies used by persons with hearing loss in the workplace. Insights underscore the complexity of the process of social identity management for persons with acquired hearing loss and the similarities in the range of strategies employed to those used by persons with other invisible stigmas. Findings highlight the relevance of the social cognitive learning model of disclosure to the experiences of persons with acquired hearing loss and emphasize a collaborative approach to addressing the needs of this growing population of workers.

Hannon's article presents a poignant narrative that captures the resilience needed to address problems in the lived context to navigate, system issues, negative attitudes, stigma, and everyday life obstacles including performing work. Readers with hearing loss are encouraged to reflect on their strengths and resources that can assist them in moving forward. Others may draw on Hannon's experiences to see new ways to prevent obstacles and promote work opportunities and participation for people with hearing loss.

Both the world of work and the characteristics of workers are transforming immensely [1] and thus this special issue offers a knowledge transfer tip for Work rehabilitation professionals: Enabling 'hearing' at work. This can be used by educators in health education (nursing, audiology, human factors, vocational rehabilitation, occupational therapy, psychology, health science, social medicine) as well as employers and policy makers to prompt the development of programs that offer more collaborative solutions to the complex problem of 'hearing' at work.

Reference

- [1] Shaw, L. (2013). Are we ready to address the new expectations of work and workers in the transforming world of work? *WORK* 44, 2-9. DOI 10.3233/WOR-2012-1582.