

COMMUNICATION ABILITIES IN EVERYDAY LIFE: What is “Normal”?

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BACKGROUND

Audiologists are often faced with the question: How much difficulty is “normal” in the challenges of communicating in everyday life?

This issue is especially important when counseling people about the benefits that be achieved with hearing rehabilitation. This can be within the context of

- * setting realistic communication goals using hearing devices, or
- * the effectiveness of behavioural strategies to improve communication.

This study was designed to establish age-related “norms” for self-rated communication abilities in everyday life.

METHOD

People attending for initial hearing assessment at a private audiology clinic rated their communication abilities in a wide range of listening environments, using the Personal Assessment of Communication Abilities (PACA) tool (Figure 1). The survey was completed prior to the hearing assessment. The study analysed the results for people (N = 309) with verified normal hearing thresholds (-10 – +20dB HL) across the frequency range (0.25 – 8kHz). The communication ratings data were segmented by decade age range, from 20-29 years – 50-59 years.

Personal Assessment of Communication Abilities

Name:

Date:

How much difficulty do you have hearing in the following situations?

	No difficulty	Slight difficulty	Moderate difficulty	Quite a lot of difficulty	Very much difficulty	Not relevant
One to one conversation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversation in small groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversation in large groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outdoors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Concert/movie	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Place of worship/lectures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Watching TV	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In a car	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workplace	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Landline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Mobile	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restaurant/café	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 1. PACA survey form.

RESULTS

20-29 years N = 74

%	No difficulty	Slight difficulty	Moderate difficulty	Quite a lot of difficulty	Very much difficulty	Not relevant
One-to-one	74.32	21.62	2.70	1.35	0.00	0.00
Small groups	59.46	31.08	5.41	1.35	1.35	1.35
Large groups	45.95	32.43	14.86	5.41	1.35	0.00
Outdoors	66.22	21.62	9.46	1.35	0.00	1.35
Concert/movie	67.57	21.62	6.76	2.70	0.00	1.35
Place of worship/lectures	74.32	12.16	1.35	1.35	0.00	10.81
TV	71.62	21.62	5.41	1.35	0.00	0.00
Car	71.62	22.97	2.70	1.35	0.00	1.35
Workplace	56.76	27.03	12.16	1.35	1.35	1.35
Phone-landline	66.22	20.27	8.11	1.35	0.00	4.05
Phone-mobile	68.92	21.62	8.11	1.35	0.00	0.00
Restaurant/café	54.05	36.49	5.41	2.70	1.35	0.00

30-39 years N = 85

	No difficulty	Slight difficulty	Moderate difficulty	Quite a lot of difficulty	Very much difficulty	Not relevant
One-to-one	69.41	22.35	8.24	0.00	0.00	0.00
Small groups	50.59	27.06	20.00	2.35	0.00	0.00
Large groups	32.94	29.41	15.29	15.29	5.88	1.18
Outdoors	56.47	25.88	15.29	0.00	1.18	1.18
Concert/movie	58.82	20.00	10.59	7.06	0.00	3.53
Place of worship/lectures	55.29	11.76	10.59	0.00	0.00	22.35
TV	62.35	22.35	12.94	2.35	0.00	0.00
Car	49.41	29.41	16.47	3.53	1.18	0.00
Workplace	47.06	23.53	16.47	3.53	1.18	8.24
Phone-landline	57.65	24.71	12.94	2.35	0.00	2.35
Phone-mobile	51.76	28.24	17.65	1.18	0.00	1.18
Restaurant/café	36.47	37.65	20.00	3.53	2.35	0.00

RESULTS

40-49 years N= 77

	No difficulty	Slight difficulty	Moderate difficulty	Quite a lot of difficulty	Very much difficulty	Not relevant
One-to-one	68.83	27.27	2.60	1.30	0.00	0.00
Small groups	55.84	31.17	9.09	2.60	1.30	0.00
Large groups	33.77	35.06	15.58	11.69	3.90	0.00
Outdoors	67.53	20.78	2.60	5.19	0.00	3.90
Concert/movie	59.74	22.08	6.49	5.19	0.00	6.49
Place of worship/lectures	63.64	12.99	3.90	1.30	0.00	18.18
TV	61.04	28.57	9.09	0.00	0.00	1.30
Car	66.23	27.27	6.49	0.00	0.00	0.00
Workplace	54.55	28.57	5.19	2.60	1.30	7.79
Phone-landline	67.53	27.27	2.60	1.30	0.00	1.30
Phone-mobile	63.64	23.38	6.49	3.90	1.30	1.30
Restaurant/café	37.66	37.66	18.18	3.90	1.30	1.30

50-59 years N= 73

	No difficulty	Slight difficulty	Moderate difficulty	Quite a lot of difficulty	Very much difficulty	Not relevant
One-to-one	72.60	23.29	1.37	1.37	0.00	1.37
Small groups	52.05	30.14	15.07	1.37	0.00	1.37
Large groups	30.14	32.88	20.55	12.33	2.74	1.37
Outdoors	60.27	26.03	8.22	0.00	1.37	4.11
Concert/movie	54.79	26.03	6.85	2.74	1.37	8.22
Place of worship/lectures	61.64	13.70	1.37	0.00	0.00	23.29
TV	58.90	31.51	4.11	2.74	1.37	1.37
Car	60.27	28.77	5.48	1.37	1.37	2.74
Workplace	53.42	21.92	9.59	0.00	0.00	15.07
Phone-landline	63.01	20.55	6.85	1.37	1.37	6.85
Phone-mobile	52.05	27.40	9.59	2.74	2.74	5.48
Restaurant/café	34.25	42.47	13.70	2.74	2.74	4.11

RESULTS

- * For every age group, the percentage of people reporting “No difficulty” communicating decreases as the complexity of the listening environment increases.
- * As people age, the percentage of people reporting “No difficulty” decreases in most situations .
- * Even people in their 20’s report significant difficulty communicating in large groups and restaurant/café situations.

Discussion

The results show interesting ratings of communication abilities for different environmental situations, both within each age group and across the range of age groups, for those with normal hearing.

For example, the percentage of those in the youngest age group (20-29 years) who report “No difficulty” communicating in Large Groups is 45.95%, which declines to 30.14% for those in the 50-59 year age group. A similar trend is seen with the Restaurant/café situation.

In the clinical setting, when patients report continuing difficulty communicating in large groups and/or restaurant/café situations, it is useful to use this information to highlight that it is relatively common for those with normal hearing to experience significant difficulty when trying to communicate in those environments.

CONCLUSIONS

These results add significant information to the evidence-base for what are “normal” abilities in a variety of everyday communication situations for different age groups.

These “norms” are a valuable tool for audiologists in setting a framework for working towards realistic communication goals for their patients.