

Parent Perceptions on the Effect of COVID-19 on Pediatric Speech and Hearing Services

Sarah J. Allen, Au.D., Ph.D., CCC-A¹, Charia A. Hall, Au.D., CCC-A²

1- Virginia Mason Medical Center, Seattle, WA

2- Department of Audiology and Speech Pathology, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Little Rock, AR

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine parent perception of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on their child's speech and/or hearing healthcare services. An online survey was distributed to parents with children who receive services from audiologists and/or teachers of the deaf. Findings indicate that the majority of families had access to telehealth visits. However they did not report these visits as beneficial to their child's progress.

“I felt like I bore more of the weight of her outcome than I otherwise would have. The parents are the primary teachers/models, and I don't have a problem with that. ... I worried that I would be doing something wrong or not doing something I should be doing because I didn't have as much professional input/help.”

Parent of child aged 2 years

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic caused economic, financial, and medical impacts across the globe. Businesses, including healthcare offices, were forced to close or reduce the number of patients they were seeing in an effort to slow the spread. As a result of these closures and reductions in services, access to care was impacted for individuals across the lifespan including those patients and families who needed speech and/or hearing care. Families have stated a desire for education that is comprehensive, individualized, and high quality (Bernstein & Barta, 1988). A delay in receiving these services can lead to persistent communication problems, poorer language outcomes, and poor school readiness (Roberts & Kaiser, 2015; Ching, 2015). This study aimed to examine parent perceptions of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on their child's speech and/or hearing care.

METHODS

An online survey was distributed to parents with children who receive services from speech-language pathologists (SLPs), audiologists, and/or teachers of the deaf. Questions highlighted the following topic areas: demographics, types of speech and/or hearing provider seen, access to telehealth, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on appointments with their speech and/or hearing provider(s), and the parents' perceptions on how these changes have impacted their child.

Table 1: Number of children seen by the different providers

Child sees...	SLP	Audiologist	Teacher of the Deaf	Other
Yes	34	32	19	7
No	5	7	20	32

RESULTS

Demographics:

Thirty-nine responses were obtained from twenty-three states within the United States. Respondents reported the ages of their children ranging from 1 year to 14 years with an average age of 5.2 years (SD = 3.34)

Type of Provider Seen:

See Table 1 for breakdown of providers seen by respondents' children reported. Other providers reported by participants were physical therapists, occupational therapists, and special education case managers.

Access to Telehealth:

82% of respondents reported having access to telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of those with access to telehealth 56% were able to utilize these services. However, 77% of those who utilized telehealth services reported they did not feel it was beneficial to their child.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic:

The majority (82%) of respondents reported feeling that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their child's access to speech and hearing healthcare. 72% of respondents reported having missed and rescheduled appointments with their providers. See Figures 1 and 2 for a break down of the number of appointments missed or rescheduled per provider.

Parent Perceptions:

The main theme of respondent responses was frustration. They reported frustration about telehealth visits with young children as they are less likely to attend to a screen than in person. They also reported frustrations with masks making lip reading more difficult and the limitations on visitors allowed in appointments made some parents feel out of the loop in their child's care.

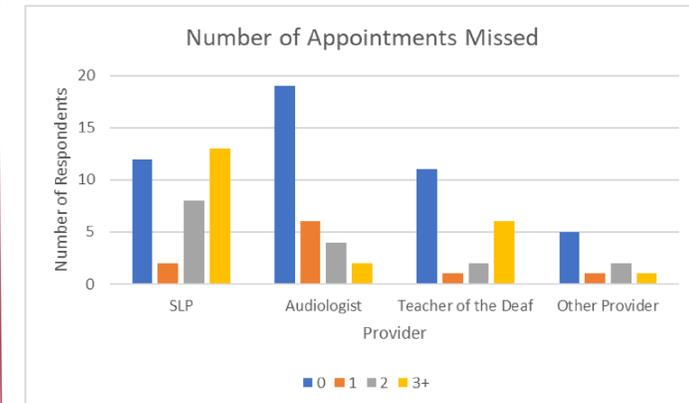


Figure 1- Number of appointments missed per provider

CONCLUSIONS

Results indicate that most parents with children who received care from a speech and/or hearing provider during the COVID-19 pandemic had access to telehealth and did not have to miss or reschedule many appointments. However, they did not feel that the telehealth visits were as beneficial to their child's care as the previous in-person visits. They reported frustrations with the telehealth visits and the visitor limitations placed on in-person appointments. These findings indicate that there could be a barrier to care for these families seeking telehealth visits.

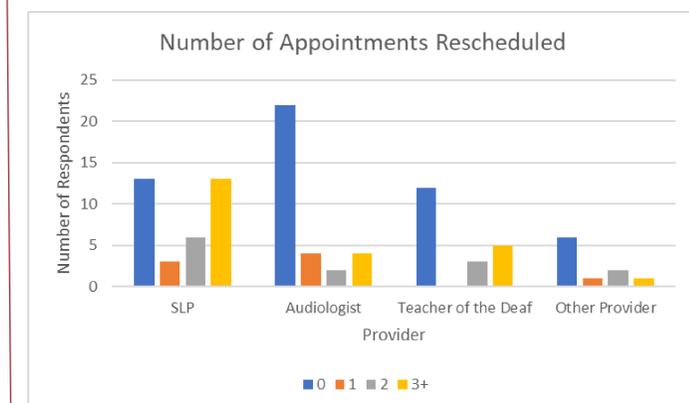


Figure 2- Number of appointments rescheduled per provider