

Shreyas Teegala

Medicine, Health, and Society and Neuroscience

shreyas.teegala@vanderbilt.edu

Exploring the Relation Between Sociodemographic Factors and Language Skills in American Sign Language and Spoken English for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children



Introduction: Language development in children is critically related to their social environment and is often modulated by sociodemographic factors (e.g., race and socioeconomic status). For deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) children, existing gaps between their language skills and those of their typical hearing peers may be exacerbated by various aspects of their social identity. For this study, we investigate how attainment of language skills varies by race and county population density for DHH children.

Methods: Eighty-one children who use English (mean age = 43 months) and 42 who use ASL (mean age = 55 months) from a larger population-based study of young DHH children who use English and/or ASL were included. In this analysis, we evaluate the relation between two sociodemographic factors, race and county population density, on language skills, which were quantified by the American Sign Language (ASL)/English Language Milestones measure. Race and population density were classified dichotomously (white children versus children of color and urban versus non-urban children).

Results: The findings indicate that when participants with secondary diagnoses were excluded, white DHH children significantly outperformed DHH children of color in spoken English skills. However, we found no statistically significant difference in language skills between DHH children from urban and non-urban backgrounds.

Conclusions: These results demonstrate some social stratification in language outcomes for DHH children, most notably based on race. Importantly, these differences cannot merely be attributed to economic disparities or community resources, as the data suggests. This underscores the importance of assessing the influence of sociodemographic factors on language outcomes to facilitate more holistically equitable intervention practices.