

# Psychological Distress among Hearing Impaired Students

Greena John<sup>1</sup>; Jesline Maria Martin Mamen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Intern, Ministry of Women and Child Development, New Delhi

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences, Thiruvananthapuram

**Corresponding Author Email:** jeslinemamen@loyolacollegekerala.edu.in

**Abstract**—Every human being in this world faces difficulties and obstacles in their own way. In the case of hearing-impaired students, they generally come to face many challenges and stressors in their lives and academic periods, like challenges in the academic environment, socializing with other peer groups, communication barriers, financial constraints for their studies, lack of opportunities, fear of making mistakes, fear of failures, and being unable to get proper educational resources. Sometimes, these challenges may result in negative responses, like severe mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and social isolation. Psychological distress refers to the unpleasant sensations or negative emotions that can arise when an individual experiences a sense of being inundated. These emotional responses and sensations can hinder their daily functioning and influence their interactions with others. This quantitative study examined psychological distress among hearing-impaired students. For the study, 120 hearing-impaired students (60 males and 60 females) were selected from the Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, and Kottayam districts of Kerala. The age range of the sample was from 13 to 20 years. The participants completed the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) by Kessler (2003). Major findings concluded that although psychological distress varied among participants individually, as a whole, they had a mild level of psychological distress and found a significant difference in psychological distress among hearing-impaired students based on their gender and educational category.

**Keywords:** psychological distress, hearing impaired students

## I. INTRODUCTION

India is an ethnically and linguistically diverse nation; making educating the hearing impaired a constant challenge. After independence, there were many legal initiatives to safeguard the rights of disabled people, but the rapidly growing population made it difficult to meet the demand. More research is being done in this area, and several previously taboo communication and instruction strategies have been brought to light, such as sign language and bilingualism.

Hearing impairment is described as the partial or total loss of hearing ability, and based on severity; it can be classified as mild, moderate, severe, or profound. Hearing loss can happen at any time during life, from birth to adulthood. In 2018, the WHO estimated that 466 million (6.12% of the world's population) were affected by Disabling Hearing Loss (DHL). The National Program for Prevention and Control of Deafness (NPPCD) was launched in 2008. Its goal is to eliminate preventable deafness, reduce the burden of deafness to < 1%, and empower the hearing-impaired to lead an economically and socially productive life by 2030. Hearing loss prevalence among children was between 6.62% and 16.47% (Verma et al., 2022).

Adolescence is a critical transition period as young students pursue personal growth, independence, and identity formation. However, the challenges of navigating this transition are compounded for hearing-impaired adolescents with chronic illnesses and disabilities who must manage their conditions while confronting the biological, psychological, and social role changes associated with transitioning through salient developmental periods. Hearing-impaired children participating in hearing societies may experience significant social, emotional, and psychological challenges (Antia et al., 2011; Kouwenberg et al., 2012).

Adolescent students who are hearing impaired have special difficulties in their everyday lives, especially regarding their mental health. The inability to converse with peers due to hearing loss affects one's capacity to engage in social and professional activities (Snoddon & Underwood, 2014). These obstacles may include a lack of understanding and support from their hearing peers, problems with social contact, and communication impediments. Adolescent pupils who are hearing impaired experience higher levels of psychological discomfort due to these issues. However, it is crucial to understand that not all hearing-impaired adolescent students pass through psychological anguish in the same manner. Understanding hearing-impaired adolescent students' challenges can help educators and healthcare professionals develop effective interventions to support their needs.

As per the study of Blom et al. (2014), hearing-impaired adolescent students' psychological discomfort and capacity for resiliency are significantly influenced by their level of social and community participation. Adolescent hearing-impaired students who participate in their community and have social contact opportunities typically suffer reduced levels of psychological discomfort. According to Brown and Cornes (2015), students with hearing impairments may endure more psychological anguish than their hearing classmates. Communication issues, lack of social support, and an increased likelihood of negative events are all potential causes of this difference. Psychological suffering can greatly impact an individual's well-being, such as anxiety, depression, and traumatic stress.

Adolescents who are hearing impaired may encounter obstacles while receiving mental health care, such as a dearth of culturally and linguistically suitable programs and practitioners. Delays in assistance and intervention may occur as a result, worsening the psychological anguish. Lack of communication and language skills can also result in social exclusion, low self-esteem, and restricted access to help and resources.

## II. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Hearing loss can prevent individuals from being exposed to socially challenging circumstances, resulting in isolation that significantly impinges on their quality of life and mental health. Humans encounter challenges and setbacks, but their capacity to resume normal life affects how well they recover. In that instance, hearing-impaired adolescent students face numerous challenges and stressors in their academic and social lives, including the academic environment, peer group socialization, communication barriers, financial constraints, lack of opportunities, and inadequate educational resources. These conditions may contribute to high levels of distress, depression, anxiety, and social isolation. Sometimes, these challenges may end up in negative responses like severe mental health issues or distress. People may experience psychological distress while coping with the stressful, disturbing, or harmful circumstances in their daily lives. Especially for hearing-impaired children, socializing with other peer groups and communication with others become more difficult, and it may increase their anxiety and frustration and affect their mental health.

Adeniyi et al. (2018) investigated the predictive strength of gender, onset and degree of hearing loss, school type, and parents' communication competence on the psychological distress of adolescents with hearing impairment. A total of 63 distressed adolescents with hearing-impairment participated in the study. The results showed that gender, degree of hearing impairment, school type, and parents' communication competence were significantly predictive of psychological distress among adolescents with hearing impairment. Gender had a significant effect on psychological distress in the population. In particular, adolescents with hearing impairment, regardless of their degree of hearing loss, suffer psychological distress.

Schools play a vital role in fostering resilience by providing an inclusive learning environment, high teacher expectations, and resources tailored to hearing-impaired students' unique needs. This promotes essential skill development, self-esteem building, and increased resilience in adversity. The present study examines the psychological distress of hearing-impaired students. Reviewing existing literature, it was found that, at present, research explicitly examining psychological distress among hearing-impaired students, especially in Kerala, is limited. Hence, this study, 'Psychological Distress among Hearing Impaired Students', is relevant in this context.

## III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of the present study has been stated as "Psychological Distress among Hearing Impaired Students".

## IV. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF THE VARIABLES

### IV.I. PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

In this study, psychological distress refers to the failure of people to respond adequately to mental, emotional, or physical demands.

### IV.II. HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS

In this study, hearing-impaired students refer to the students with partial or total hearing impairment studying in high school and higher secondary classes from various schools for the hearing impaired in Kerala.

## V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the psychological distress among hearing-impaired students.
- To examine the gender difference in psychological distress among hearing-impaired students.
- To examine the educational category difference in psychological distress among hearing-impaired students.

## VI. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- There is no significant difference in psychological distress among hearing impaired students based on gender.
- There is no significant difference in psychological distress among hearing impaired students based on educational category.

## VII. METHOD

### VII.I. RESEARCH DESIGN

For this study, a descriptive research design seems appropriate. A survey method using questionnaires was used to collect data about the variables.

### VII.II. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 120 hearing-impaired students were selected as a sample using the convenience sampling method. The sample comprises 60 male and 60 female participants aged 13 to 20 years. The sample consisted of participants belonging to five schools for hearing-impaired students in the Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, and Kottayam districts of Kerala. Data was collected from the Government Vocational Higher Secondary School for the Deaf, Jagathy; CSI Vocational Higher Secondary School for the Deaf, Valakom; CSI Vocational Higher Secondary School for the Deaf, Thiruvalla; CSI Higher Secondary School for the Partially Hearing, Adoor; and Assisi Higher Secondary School for the Deaf, Neerpara.

### VII.III. TOOLS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

Variable: The variable in the current study is psychological distress.

### VII.IV. KESSLER PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS SCALE (K10)

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) was developed by Kessler (2003) to identify individuals with significant levels of psychological distress. It involves ten questions about emotional states, each with a five-level response scale. The 2000 Collaborative Health and Well-Being Survey was used to test the reliability of the K10. The ending and weighted scores ranged from 0.42 to 0.74, indicating that the K10 is a moderately reliable instrument. Scores are calculated by adding the values corresponding to each item's response, thus enabling scores to range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating a higher severity of psychological distress.

### VII.V. PERSONAL DATA SHEET

A personal data sheet was provided to collect the sociodemographic details of the participants, which included variables such as name, age, gender, school name, district, religion, contact number, level of hearing impairment, and assistive devices they are using (if any).

### VII.VI. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The participants were provided with an informed consent form outlining the research purpose and confidentiality policies to ensure their voluntary participation.

### VII.VII. STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The statistical techniques used for analyzing the data are frequency distribution, percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test. The statistical data analysis was done using the SPSS-22 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version.

## VIII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The obtained results have been presented in tables, and the results are discussed in terms of objectives and hypotheses.

**Table 1**

*Frequency distribution of psychological distress among hearing impaired students*

Variable	Level	Hearing Impaired Students (N-120)
Psychological Distress	Psychologically Well	63
	Mild Psychological Distress	30
	Moderate Psychological Distress	12
	Severe Psychological Distress	15

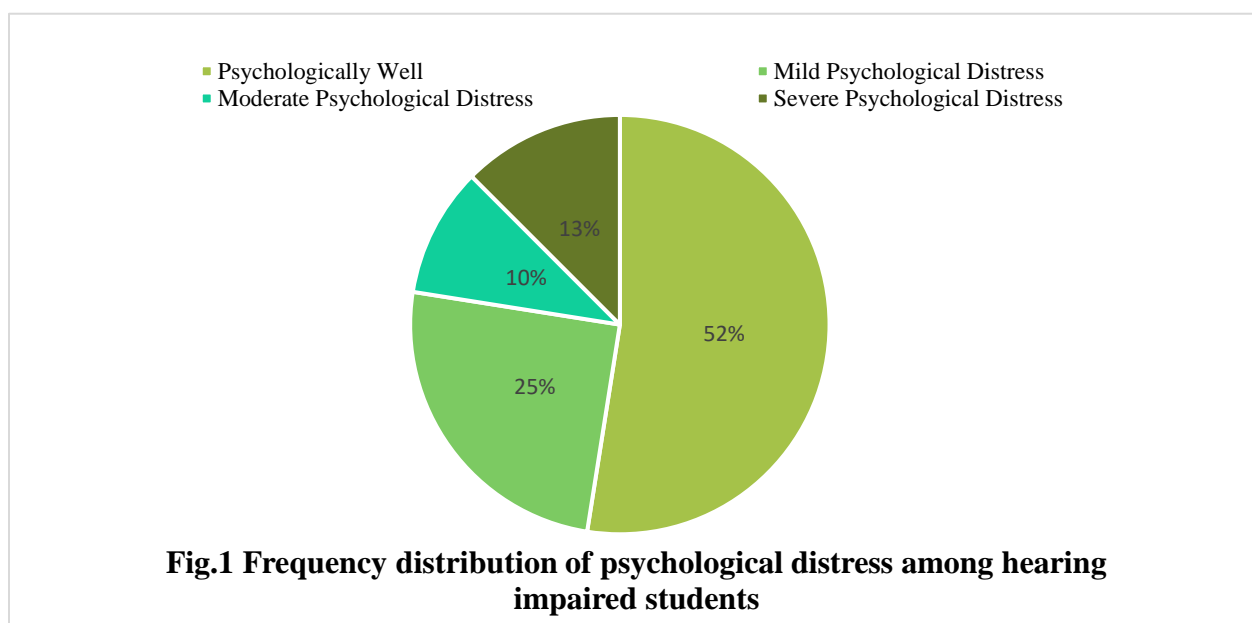


Table 1 and Figure 1 present the frequency distribution of psychological distress among hearing-impaired students (N=120). Both the table and the pie chart show that among 120 hearing-impaired students, 13% (15) of students have severe psychological distress, 10% (12) of students have moderate psychological distress, 25% (30) of students have mild psychological distress, and 52% (63) of students are psychologically well.

**Table 2**

*Psychological distress among hearing impaired students*

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.
Psychological Distress	120	20.450	6.881

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of psychological distress among hearing-impaired students. The mean value of psychological distress among hearing-impaired students (N=120) is found to be 20.450 (S.D. = 6.881). Thus, the result indicates that hearing-impaired students in the present study as a whole have a mild level of psychological distress.

**Table 3**

*Psychological distress among hearing impaired students based on gender*

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	t value	Sig.
Psychological Distress	Male	60	23.200	7.373	4.759	0.000
	Female	60	17.700	5.076		

Table 3 shows the scores of psychological distress among hearing-impaired students based on gender. The mean value of psychological distress among male students (N=60) is 23.200 (S.D. = 7.373), and for female students (N=60), it is 17.700 (S.D. = 5.076). Thus, the result demonstrates that there is a difference in the mean values of psychological distress between male and female students. The obtained t-value is 4.759, and the p-value is 0.000 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The t-value is significant at 0.01 level. Hence, the null hypothesis that states 'there is no significant difference in psychological distress among hearing impaired students based on gender' is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that female students have a lower distress level than male students.

**Table 4**

*Psychological distress among hearing impaired students based on educational category*

Variable	Educational Category	N	Mean	SD	t value	Sig.
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Psychological Distress	High School Students	67	21.925	7.485	2.804	0.006
	Higher Secondary Students	53	18.584	5.558		

Table 4 shows the scores of psychological distress among hearing-impaired students based on their educational category. The mean value of psychological distress among high school students (N=67) is 21.925 (S.D. = 7.485) and for higher secondary students (N=53) is 18.584 (S.D. = 5.558). Thus, the result demonstrates that there is a difference in the mean values of psychological distress between high school and higher secondary school students. The obtained t-value is 2.804, and the p-value is 0.006 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The t-value is significant at 0.01 level. Hence, the null hypothesis that states 'there is no significant difference in psychological distress among hearing impaired students based on their educational category' is rejected. Based on these findings, high school students who are younger are more distressed than higher secondary school students who are older.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The current study suggests guidelines for future exploration and research. The study's major findings indicated that the participants in the present study had a mild level of psychological distress. Moreover, it was found that there is a significant difference in psychological distress among hearing-impaired students based on gender and educational category. Depending on the results, following structured teaching methods in schools, promoting inclusivity, providing opportunities to challenge and compete with other students, educating life skills, various coping strategies, yoga, and different meditation techniques can reduce the distress levels of hearing-impaired students. Likewise, providing training and education regarding sign language to parents, caregivers, relatives, and friends is recommended to minimise communication barriers. In the same way, as an individual becomes older, their ability to cope with challenging circumstances will advance.

## NOTE

This article is based on an unpublished dissertation done by Greena John (for the award of the degree of MSc Counselling Psychology) under the supervision of Assistant Professor Jesline Maria Martin Mamen.

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