

## **Treating Children with Hearing Loss: Assessing Comfort Levels in Tennessee State University SLP Graduate Students**

### **ABSTRACT**

Communication disorders encompass impairments in receiving, sending, processing, and comprehending verbal, nonverbal, and graphic symbol systems (ASHA, n.d.). A communication disorder may be evident in the processes of hearing, language, and/or speech. Hearing loss, categorized as sensorineural, conductive, or mixed, affects 2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children in the U.S., with over 90% born to parents with normal hearing (NIH, n.d.). The CDC highlights that childhood hearing loss can affect speech, language, and social skills development.

Currently, a scarcity of audiologists is evident, with only 13,610 certified audiologists among the 211,000 members represented by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Audiologists diagnose, manage, and treat hearing, balance, or ear problems (Mayo Clinic, n.d.). In contrast, 181,628 certified speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are represented. SLPs diagnose and treat communication and swallowing problems (WebMD, n.d.). Additionally, only 785 professionals hold dual certification as both audiologists and SLPs. Due to the disparity between the professions, there is a need to increase client access to audiological services.

There are some strategies to improve these statistics (e.g., dual certification). Many professionals may be deterred from dual certification due to the lengthy time commitment. A theoretical way would be to combine the fields of audiology and speech-language pathology into one area. However, due to ASHA standards, this would likely be a very time-consuming task. Another strategy is to ensure that SLPs have access to the curriculum that would allow them to specialize in working with the hearing loss population. This method is currently being explored via a Childhood Hearing Loss Grant between Tennessee State University (TSU) and Vanderbilt University.

The current study aims to examine the comfort levels of SLP graduate students at TSU who completed the Vanderbilt Childhood Hearing Loss Specialty Track, comparing them with non-participants through a questionnaire.

### **METHOD**

A 15-question survey will be given to current and former SLP graduate students at TSU. The survey will be distributed through Qualtrics. Participants, including current and former TSU SLP graduate students, will respond to questions measuring their comfort level in treating children who are deaf or hard of hearing.