

# “I Need to Love and to Be Loved”: Perspective of Young Adults with Hearing Loss in Kabul-Afghanistan

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** *This research aimed to explore love and belonging or social needs, of young adults with hearing loss in Kabul, Afghanistan.*

**Method:** *A qualitative research method specifically, the phenomenological approach, was adopted to conduct this research. An in-depth semi-structured interview was used to interview ten participants.*

**Conclusion:** *Overall, two themes and four sub-themes were derived from thematic analysis. The finding indicates that social support from family members and people in the surrounding, and a sense of belonging are fundamental social needs of people with hearing loss. Further research is needed to investigate the reasons behind the unmet social needs of people with hearing loss.*

**Limitation:** *The major limitations of the study were - lack of official data regarding people with hearing disability in Afghanistan, non-availability of sign language interpreters, and cultural constraints faced by female study participants.*

**Key words:** *Love and belonging needs; social needs; young adults; hearing loss; Kabul*

## INTRODUCTION

Love and belonging is the central level of the human motivations theory which is called social need as well (Maslow's hierarchy of needs). Fulfilment of this need requires the ability to consistently receive love from others, give love to others, and being accepted by members of a group like family, friends, colleagues, religious communities, and so on (Cleary, 1996). Hammell (2014) also mentioned

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that love and belonging needs could be fulfilled in different environments like in the vocational environment, in religious communities, within the family, and in other groups as well. In the author's view, love and belonging is a meaningful accomplishment, and a motivation factor in achieving additional needs.

Most studies have shown that the need to be a part of a group such as family, a group of colleagues in a workplace, a group of friends, or other social groups relates to love and belonging (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017). The most vital point to be made here is the importance of family and friends in fulfilling the love and belonging needs. The family plays an important role in lives of people, which is clearly visible in most circumstances of people's lives, for example during the time of birth, adoption, marriage or death. Having good friends and family is a big support in the fulfilment of love and belonging needs (McAbee, Dragow, & Lowrey, 2017). People with hearing disabilities have a desire to be a part of group of people with hearing disabilities and receive support from friends with hearing disabilities. The reasons behind this are a deeper level of mutual trust and understanding, sharing a similar culture, having the same language and communication, learning from and with each other, and making them feel that they are not alone (Nikolarazi & Hadjikakou, 2006).

Another part of the love and belonging needs is marriage. Individuals with hearing loss not just regularly choose their friends from people who have a hearing disability too; they also usually marry in the same community (De Veirman, Haage, & Vikström, 2016). Married people may establish a great relationship and they believe that they will gain more independence and freedom, happiness, and peace of mind with each other (De Veirman, Haage, & Vikström, 2016). However, a hearing loss could have a huge impact on a person's marriage opportunities for different reasons. People with hearing loss may face obstacles in communication with the majority of hearing people that they encounter, and they may face difficulties in establishing personal relationships with future spouses

However, the importance of love and belonging and paying attention to the love and belonging needs of people with hearing disability are largely being ignored in Afghanistan. For example, there is evidence about people with hearing disability who have been humiliated and beaten up by the local people. People with hearing disability are at times prevented from going to relatives' houses and denied from attending public events. Disabilities, in general, are considered a shame to the family, and such families may face a lack of access to public buildings, and

the participation of people with hearing disabilities in Afghanistan is the same (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2014).

## **METHOD**

### *Research Design*

This study used a qualitative research approach specifically, the phenomenological method. Given that the study focused on love and belonging needs of young adults with hearing loss it was apparent that the phenomenological research method had to be used.

### *Participants*

Overall, 10 participants - 5 young adult males and 5 young adult females with hearing loss - were involved in present study. Participants were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria of the participants were: being amale or female with hearing loss, age between 20 to 40 years old. Participants that were excluded are those who are having some degree of hearing through hearing aids, and those who acquired hearing loss later in their life. The number of participants depended on data saturation which was reached with 10 participants. Data saturation refers to the quality and quantity of information. Data saturation is usually defined at the point when no new information or themes emerge from the collected data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

### *Data Collection Procedures*

This study has been conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants. The in-depth semi-structured interview is one of the most appropriate ways for data collection in qualitative research to find out answers to the research questions from the participants. An interview guide with two parts was used. Part one consisted of demographic information of the participants which include age, gender, educational background, occupation and marital status. Part two of the interview was divided into three questions, and the aim of this part was to explore love and belonging needs of young adults with a hearing loss.

Interviews were conducted in two phases. First, a pilot interview was conducted. The pilot interview was conducted “to allow researchers to practice and to

assess the effectiveness of their planned data collection and analysis techniques” (Engström, Leksell, Johansson & Gudbjörnsdottir, 2016, p. 1074). In this study, the pilot helped to find out the exact length of the interview time, as well as making a decision about final questions for the interview and to understand easiness and difficulty level of the interview questions. Participants were interviewed using sign language and the interview session was video recorded after consent was obtained from the participants. In addition, each interview took a minimum of 25 minutes and a maximum of 45 minutes. For the present study, ethical issues were taken into consideration, because ethical principles can be utilized to direct the research intending to the important and ongoing issues emerging from qualitative research to keep up the rights of the respondent (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

Regarding the ethical procedures informed consent was asked from the participants after they were debriefed about the purpose of the study. The participants were assured about anonymity as well as confidentiality. They could withdraw from the current research at any moment without giving reasons. In addition, the interviews were video recorded after written consent was obtained from the participants .

### *Data Analysis*

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). These six steps are: familiarization with data, generation of the initial code, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and production of the report.

## **FINDINGS**

The aim of this part is to report the findings of love and belonging needs of young adults with hearing loss in Kabul-Afghanistan.

### *Social Support from Family Members and People in The Surroundings*

Social support from family members and people in the surroundings was identified as the first theme for love and belonging or social needs. Based on the information given by participants, there are two sub-themes i.e. ‘positive society attitude’ and ‘social support’.

- ***Positive society attitude***

The majority of the participants emphasized that the positive attitude of society generally appears in the form of respect, encouragement, support, and a sense of security, which plays an important role in the social life of people with hearing disabilities. The majority of participants reported that society's attitude towards them is different. Family members, friends, classmates, and their colleagues (who have a hearing disability) are respecting them, supporting them, encouraging them, and accepting them as they are. Some of the participants shared their experiences as bellow:

*"It is clear that my parents and family members have a good behaviour toward me. They love me, respect me, and always support me. Actually, my hearing loss has never been a problem for them, I always feel they treat me the same as my other siblings, I have been given the right of education, and the right to get married by my choice". [Key respondent]*

Another participant who was satisfied with his life due to having the greatest friends who has hearing loss stated:

*"All of my friends are hearing disabled, and I feel proud and happy whenever they are with me. Besides that, their feelings are the same toward me because we can understand each other easily. To be honest, I have some hearing friends. We also meet each other but we cannot communicate properly, therefore, sometimes they feel bored with me, because they do not want to explain everything they discuss. I also do not feel comfortable with them". [Key respondent]*

Some other participants stated that friends, classmates, and their colleagues - people with hearing disability and without - both have a positive attitude toward them. For example, one participant stated:

*"I am a social person and I try to make a lot of friends. It never mattered to me that my friends must be hearing or hearing disabled people. I have studied in the same classroom with hearing classmates, and I have found them very good and helpful because their behavior and attitude was positive and friendly. In fact, most of my friends and colleagues are also hearing people and I have very good relationships with them. Previously, because they were less familiar with people with hearing disability, their attitudes were not so positive, but after they met me, their attitudes changed completely. Now, they have a very positive attitude towards me and everyone with a hearing disability" [Key respondent].*

Conversely there are some other participants who blamed society for not accepting them as 'normal' or equal members of society, not believing in their abilities and their sympathetic and inappropriate behavior toward them. One female participant described her experiences:

*"People in society have a negative attitude toward people with hearing loss. As a hearing, disabled lady, I do not dare to talk to my friends when I am on the way to school. Because we use sign language for our communications, and everyone who sees us will definitely either laugh or ask, why are you moving your hands? Are you crazy? I really feel embarrassed even sometimes, they make me scared".*  
[Key respondent]

Another participant revealed:

*"As far as I have experienced, the attitudes and behaviors of people in society towards people with hearing loss are negative. They are not aware of our needs, our abilities and talents, even they do not know how to deal with a person with a hearing loss. Once I went to a wedding party with my mother, where everybody who met me, they asked my mother about me when my mother explained, and they got to know that I am a hearing disabled lady. Their facial expressions were totally changed, seemingly they were so sad like they had heard the news of someone very dear death. They said to my mom "Ohhh poor she is deaf". It was my first and last time to join a party".* [Key respondent]

- ***Social support***

"Social support is defined as the perception or experience that one is loved and cared by others, esteemed and valued, and part of a social network of mutual assistance and obligations" (Wills, 1991, P. 267). In this study, social support is about receiving love, feeling valued, sense of security, respected and accepted by others, feeling encouraged, and feeling of mutual trust, which could be received from family members, teachers, friends, team members, colleagues, and society. The majority of participants were dissatisfied with the level of social support received from society. According to them, social support is one of the most important love and belonging needs of people with hearing loss, but unfortunately, society is not aware of this need. One participant stated:

*"I am not satisfied with the behavior of society at all. Because they do not respect me, and they have never supported me. In addition, they have been laughing at me, making fun of me, calling me crazy, and even avoiding collaborating with me".* [Key respondent]

Another female participant mentioned that:

*“In our society, people with hearing loss are not supported. I am not happy with the behavior of people in society, towards us, especially their behavior with women. Women are very sensitive, and they need to be respected, safe, and valued. For being engaged in social activities I am expecting to be supported. but society is not aware of these all”*. [Key respondent]

Another female participant said:

*“You will not believe it, from childhood until now, I have no friends. from my classmates, in my relatives, and in our neighbours, I did not make any kind of friendship. Because I was a deaf girl and whenever I was playing with children, for not hearing their voices, they made fun of me. Since then, I have no confidence to make friends. I always try to stay away from everyone in my surroundings”*. [Key respondent]

In brief, the first extracted theme about love and belonging needs was social support from family members and people in the surroundings. Receiving support was reported as one of the basic love and belonging needs of people with hearing loss, which appears in the form of a positive attitude, respect, encouragement, support, giving love, value, and a sense of security. Fulfilment of these needs gives them the feeling of self-respect, self-esteem, completeness, and giving them energy in achieving their goals.

### ***Sense of Belonging***

The second theme revealed for love and belonging needs is a sense of belonging. According to the findings, a sense of belonging indicates the need for human beings to be a part of a group such as the family, group of friends, and classmates, a group of colleagues in a workplace, social groups. There are two sub-themes that include to love and to be loved on one hand, and building a healthy relationship on the other hand.

- ***To love and to be loved***

According to the participants, to love and to be loved is the basic love and belonging need of all human beings. All human beings may love others and may have the desire to be loved by others. The majority of the participants revealed that people with hearing loss are generally less confident, and therefore they may

need more love and need to receiving more love from family members especially from spouses, colleagues, peers, and friends. This is because receiving love may have a huge impact on their personality, and satisfaction with life, and it gives them a sense of closeness, peace of mind, security, importance, and respect. Besides, it helps to reduce possible fear of failure and motivates people to work hard and achieve their life goals. As one of the male participants said:

*“All my family members really love me, respect me and trust me which are valuable for me and my future. When I was a kid, my father died, but my brothers and my mother have always kept loving me since childhood. If I had problems in my studies, if I needed financial support, if I had problems with someone in the community, my family would solve it. All my achievements are just because of my family and their love”*. [Key respondent]

Another male participant expressed:

*“I am blessed that I have the greatest family, beloved friends, and respectful colleagues. My family loves me, I feel secure and strong, my friends love me, it gives me the feeling of importance and peace of mind, my colleagues love me, and I feel respectful”*. [Key respondent]

- ***Building a healthy relationship***

According to the findings, all human beings need to have healthy relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and society because this is an innate need that must be met. People with a hearing loss face many difficulties in building healthy relationships, due to their limited communication. But they need to be part of social groups and to fully participate in social activities. Besides, they may need or want to be member of some organizations such as clubs, religious groups or sports teams.

Some participants provided information regarding their experiences in building healthy relationships. People with hearing disabilities are keen to have a wide range of connections. They do not face major obstacles in building relationships with their family because of their disability (De Veirman, Haage, & Vikström, 2016). However, our findings have shown that some of them especially females face a variety of difficulties in building healthy relationships with friends, colleagues, and society, especially with the hearing population.

Despite this fact, people with hearing disabilities are trying to reduce these problems, making more friends from hearing people, and be involved in social



activities. It is reported by some participants that building a healthy relationship is one of the love and belonging needs. As one of them stated:

*“Having good relationship with family, friends, and community is a social need. In my opinion, patience is needed to meet this need. I have been frustrated many times by friends, colleagues, and people in the community, but since I need to have a relationship with them, I go back and talk to them more lovingly, trying different ways to talk to them and to build a strong relationship”*. [Key respondent]

Based on some other participant’s responses, building healthy relationships between hearing and people with hearing disabilities is not like relationships among those who don’t have hearing disabilities because their language, their communication and understanding of each other, and their social needs may be almost the same. As one of them stated:

*“I have the experiences of being a part of social groups. As group members, all of us were working together in one place on one project, but I always realized that their relationship was too strong among them while their relationship with me was normal even with some of them I have just hi, and bye. In short, the majority of hearing people are not interested in having relationship with hearing disabled people”*. [Key respondent]

Regarding some difficulties in building healthy relationships faced by females, one of the female participants mentioned:

*“I have a good relationship with my family, friends, and colleagues who are hearing disabled. But for having good relationships with friends, and colleagues without hearing loss and people in society I have tried a lot to be connected, but in society, I am still alone. The reason is that I am a female who has been always told by her mother to keep away from society. This is not because she may feel the shame of having a daughter with disability but maybe she was afraid of any bad event to happen to me as a mute and hearing disabled child. Maybe because of such thoughts of my mother I am still scared and cannot trust anyone apart from my relatives and colleagues”*. [Key respondent]

Thus, the second identified theme for love and belonging needs was a sense of belonging. According to the findings, this population need more love from family members especially spouses, colleagues, peers, and friends. It has been noted that the fulfilment of this need gives them a sense of closeness, peace of mind, security, importance, and respect.

## DISCUSSION

This part of the study discusses the findings of this research guided by the themes mentioned by the study group.

### *Social Support from Family Members and People in The Surroundings*

Positive society attitudes and social support are two sub-themes under this theme. The study found that there are participants who have received commendable support from society while some have been neglected and discouraged. Social support is essential for every individual in the society including people with hearing loss. They highlighted that social support creates a positive role in the minds and behavior of people with hearing loss. Brewer et. al. (2011) has mentioned that people with hearing loss normally depend on their family support and that is crucial to them.

Support from family and friends is very much significant in the development of people with disabilities (Mill, Mayes & McConnell, 2010; Jackson & Turnbull, 2004; Schalock, Verdugo, & Braddock, 2002) and these people are able to provide them with strength and power to go ahead.

However, in Afghan society, people with hearing disabilities are may be mocked and banned from attending public events. The reason is that they do not receive support, love, value, respect, and encouragement from society, sometimes even not from friends, and colleagues. They usually have the feeling of not being accepted by people in the surrounding (Pajhwok, 2012). Such negative thinking could have influenced their parents as well, or they may lack sufficient information in this regard. Besides, some parents in Afghanistan have the opinion that they do not need to invest in people with hearing loss because they could not yield a better fortune for them in future. Beazley and Moore (2013) have commented that one of the common issues for parents with children who were born with hearing loss or having children who at an early age acquired hearing loss is the poor development of language and communication. Although hearing aids do much for some of these groups to make spoken language accessible, while for others access to spoken language becomes or remain difficult. The degree of hearing loss and communication ability of a child requires special efforts by the family members to communicate with the infant.

Parents are the most encouraging factors in improving learning in their children, because they are familiar with sign language, and they know how to

communicate with their children, and they are well aware of their child needs, and characteristics. Family activities that encourage early learning, homework supervision and reading assistance have a positive effect on the academic success of the learners with hearing disabilities.

Enabling Education Network, an NGO has shared a story of a father in Afghanistan. This story also show that having good friends is the biggest support for becoming and being confident and for having a good quality of life. This finding is in line with studies carried out by McAbee, Drasgow, and Lowrey (2017) and Moreno and Mari-Klose (2013). According to them, having good friends and receiving sufficient support, especially among friends who are also having hearing loss, may improve the quality of life of people with hearing loss. The reasons are their deeper trust and understanding, sharing similar cultures, having the same language, and making them feel valued (Nikolarazi and Hadjidakou, 2006).

### *Sense of Belonging*

The participants believe that sense of belonging is creating a healthy relationship with others, to love others, and to get loved by others. Aruma and Hanachor (2017) have mentioned that having a feeling that certain people could support them always is a feeling of love and belonging which boosts peoples' confidence in decision-making. That's why it becomes a crucial requirement for human beings (Ellis, 2013). It was interesting to the researcher that the majority of people with hearing disability showed interest to marry those who are hearing clearly, but unfortunately, they have not been accepted most of the time as a potential partner. Mosier (1999) has mentioned that people with hearing disability could not get along well with hearing-sound individuals because both cannot interact well, which in turn can lead to unsuccessful marriage life if they got married anyhow (Mosier, 1999).

Parent-children relationship is a natural relationship. However, in all kinds of relationships which people create by himself/herself, marriage is the closest and strongest one. That's why it is believed that marriage has a greater potential in creating confidence, happiness, and peace of mind to couples (De Veirman, Haage, & Vikstrom, 2016). Fay (1898) and De Veirman, Haage, and Vikstrom (2016) have mentioned that people with hearing disability prefer to marry with people with hearing disability themselves. According to McIntosh (1995), it is estimated that 90% of all mixed deaf-hearing marriages end up with divorce (Mosier, 1999).

On the other hand, Vikström, Haage, and Lundevaller (2020) study revealed that

men and women with disabilities are reluctant to marry each other. They also mentioned that disability significantly impeded people's marriage prospects as a possible consequence of social marginalization in society. Packer (2017) states that this is because of the inability to communicate and refers to the secrets of successful marriage which are according to her communication, sharing feelings, and living by them. She further mentions that a British study involving over 1500 people with hearing loss with an age of 55 years and above revealed that almost half of them (44%) failed in maintaining a good and healthy relationship with their family and peers because they cannot hear properly (Packer, 2017).

As mentioned above participants agreed that a healthy relationship is a social need for every human being. A book entitled *Triumphs of Experience* (2012) shows that happiness and health are results of having good and healthy relationships with closed ones. They are not the result of having a good amount of money. People who are more socially related to their families, friends, or communities are happier, physically healthier than those who are less connected (Edwards, et al., 2016).

Based on the latter, it seems having a healthy relationship is a survival need for a human being. Healthy relationship stands for respecting the partner, his/her wishes, thoughts, and appearances, supporting him/her, having trust in him/her, seeking compromises if a disagreement takes place as it is natural since everyone does not think the same, and giving the needed space to each other (Roffey, 2017). But the greatest challenge for people with hearing loss in building a good and healthy relationship is their limited communication capacity which is the essential pillar among all mentioned indicators.

## CONCLUSION

People with hearing loss need to receive social support from family members and friends to gain a sense of belonging. Fulfilment of this need would help them feel more successful, boost their self-esteem, develop emotional and social well-being, and reduce the feeling of being unwanted and lonely. People with hearing loss may be faced with constant challenges from within their family circle as well as from the outside world. With proper support from all quarters, these obstacles can be a positive challenge that would encourage the hearing disabled to be more resilient and fearless in the face of difficulties.

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