

The Contribution of Personality Traits to Hearing Handicap in Older Adults

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Hearing handicap (HH), the self-reported effect of hearing loss on daily function, is as prevalent as hearing loss, associated with reduced quality of life, and a better predictor of hearing health behaviors than audiometric thresholds. Although auditory factors such as severity and configuration of hearing loss are known to contribute to HH, they typically account for less than 50% of the variance in HH measures. Individual differences in personality have long been assessed in the context of other health domains and shown to influence self-reported and, in some instances, objectively measured health outcomes. For example, high levels of Neuroticism (N), or the tendency towards high negative emotionality, is linked to higher rates of depression. Low Conscientiousness (C), the personality trait of self-discipline and diligence, is associated with poor treatment adherence. The goal of this study was to determine the contribution of personality to self-reported HH in older adults across a range of hearing abilities, from normal hearing to severe hearing loss. We used correlational analysis and hierarchical regression to assess the relationships between and the contributions of the personality factors of C and N to two measures of self-reported HH (Hearing handicap inventory for the elderly (HHIE) and Speech Spatial and Qualities of Hearing Scale (abbreviated version SSSQ-12)). We found that age, better ear pure tone average (BEPTA), C, and N, were significantly correlated with self-reported hearing handicap. After accounting for the variance in hearing handicap explained by age and BEPTA, C accounted for an additional 10% and 17% of variance in HHIE and SSQ-12 scores, respectively. Preliminary results suggest that personality significantly contributes to self-perceived hearing difficulties in older adults with normal to impaired auditory function and could provide clinical insight for hearing loss treatment. Support provided by NIH T32AG000030 and K01DC017522.

Poster only

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