

Research suggests deaf children more at risk of developing emotional well-being issues

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Research from Queen's University Belfast suggests that deaf children are more at risk of developing mental health and emotional well-being issues compared to children who can hear.

The research report, "[The Emotional Well-being of Deaf Children and Young](#)," by Dr. Bronagh Byrne and Dr. Catherine McNamee, from the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's was recently launched at the University.

The research, which was commissioned by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, sought to identify current and future service needs relating to the mental health and emotional well-being of deaf children through the lens of a human rights framework that explicitly situates deaf children as rights-holders.

The researchers undertook a secondary analysis of the Northern Ireland Youth Well-being Study as part of the project.

Key findings included:

- Deaf children are more at risk of developing: depression, anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder, OCD, [panic disorder](#), and separation anxiety disorder compared to hearing children.
- Almost 21% of deaf children reported having at least one psychological condition compared to about 12% of hearing children.

Dr. Byrne said, "These findings are also aligned to findings from interviews and focus groups with deaf children and [young people](#) and their parents, which provide important insight into some of the reasons why deaf children may be at higher risk of having emotional well-being issues. These factors are rooted in environmental, structural, social and cultural issues, which interact with a child's deafness to produce distinct barriers and challenges.

"There was also a perception that more [deaf people](#) should be accessing emotional well-being services but were not due to communication

barriers."

There are almost 1,400 deaf children in Northern Ireland (CRIDE 2021). However, there is an absence of reliable or recent data on the prevalence of their emotional well-being issues and little research which examines the perspectives and experiences of deaf children and their parents in accessing emotional well-being services and/or the types of services they would find helpful or like to see developed. Also, there is currently no specialist deaf Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for deaf children in Northern Ireland.

Dr. McNamee said, "Based on the levels of need identified in this report's findings, these gaps in service provision are concerning, especially given their likely impact on the lives of these children.

"Recommendations include providing early intervention support and services that specifically targets the emotional well-being needs of deaf children."

Based on the project's findings, the Northern Health and Social Care Trust piloted a regional deaf CAMHA service to support the emotional well-being of deaf [children](#) and youth.

Dr. Holly Greer, consultant psychiatrist for the Northern Trust and Chair of Child and Adolescent Faculty of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Northern Ireland, and Caroline Doherty, Regional Deaf CAMHS Project Worker overseen the pilot project service.

Dr. Greer said, "This research is the first of its kind in Northern Ireland to really quantify and highlight the [mental health](#) needs of [deaf children](#) and young people. It has helped us understand how to shape any future service around what is important to young people and families and will help to provide the evidence of need for a service to bring us in line with

NHS England."

More information: The report is available online:
www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres ... pload,1554000.en.pdf

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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