



The COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on the Deaf Adult Community's Accessibility to Healthcare Services in Puerto Rico

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Background

- The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the daily impediments and inequity that communities with invisible disabilities face, especially the Deaf community.¹
- Studies report that members of the Deaf community have faced additional barriers in communication due to the safety measures mandates like masking and social distancing.¹
- Studies conducted by the U.S. and South Africa strongly suggest that the pandemic has affected the access Deaf individuals have to COVID-19 information and healthcare services.^{2,3}
- A total of 218,495 deaf adults lived in Puerto Rico in 2018. This number represents 8.4% of the population.⁴
- There is scant evidence regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Puerto Rican Deaf adult community.

Objectives

- Investigate and compare Deaf adults' accessibility to healthcare services and their ability to communicate with providers before and during the pandemic.
- Create a demographic profile of healthcare disparities, needs and barriers in Deaf adults living on the island.

Methodology



Results

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants.

Participants (N=10)	
Female, n (%)	8 (80)
Level of Education	
Certificate/Associate's degree, n (%)	3 (30)
Bachelor's degree, n (%)	3 (30)
Master's degree, n (%)	4 (40)
Age	
21 – 29 years, n (%)	1 (10)
30 – 39 years, n (%)	5 (50)
40 – 49 years, n (%)	1 (10)
50 – 59 years, n (%)	2 (20)
60 – 69 years, n (%)	1 (10)
Degree of deafness	
Hard of hearing, n (%)	8 (80)
Profoundly deaf, n (%)	2 (20)
Knows Sign Language, n (%)	7 (70)

Figure 1. Understanding of the information provided by the physician

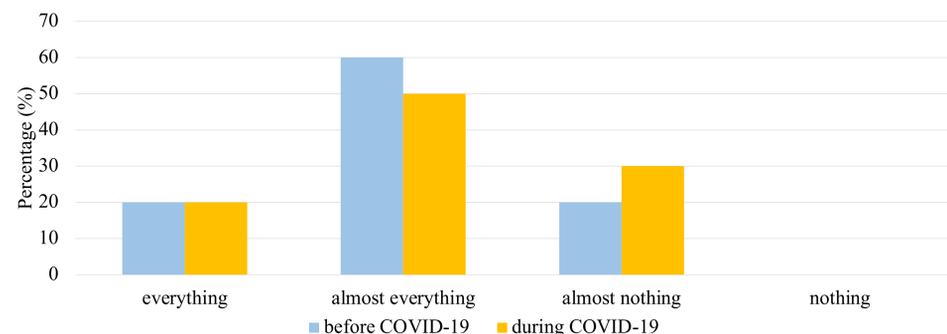
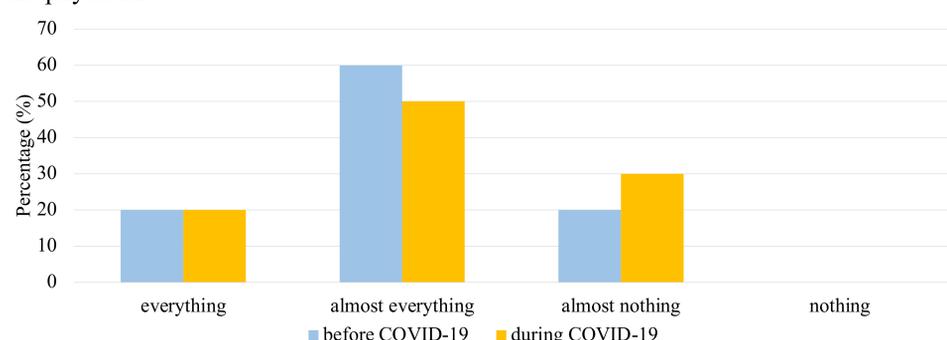


Figure 2. Subjects' perception of the quality and quantity of information discussed by the physician



Results

Figure 3. Subjects' perception of the physician's understanding of their complaints

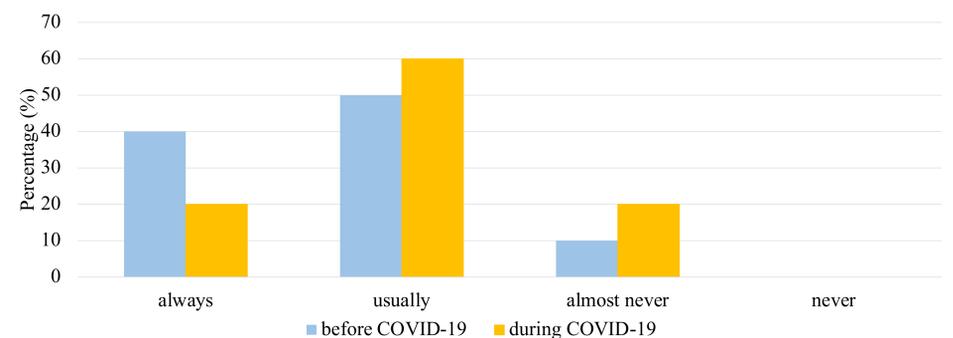
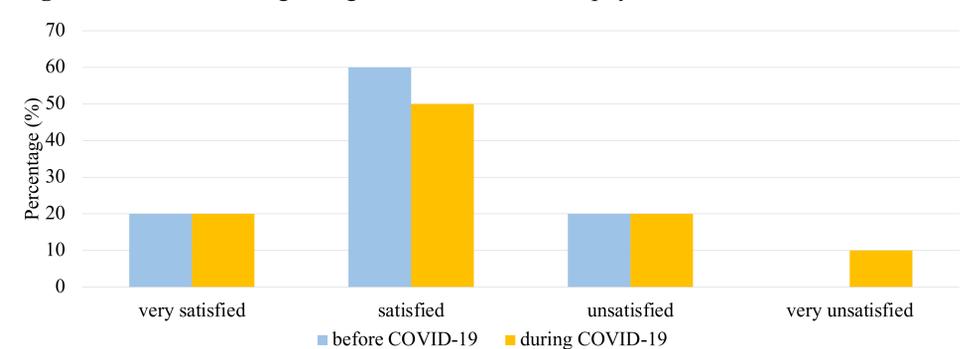


Figure 4. Satisfaction regarding communication with physicians



- Sixty-four subjects accessed the questionnaire, but only ten completed it.
- Seventy percent expressed that their access to healthcare services worsened after the pandemic.
- Before the pandemic, 80% of the patients used gestures and lip-reading, and 70% used family members as interpreters, however, these methods decreased by 70% and increased by 10%, respectively.
- Communication by writing on paper increased to 60%.

Discussion

- The enforcement on the use of personal protective equipment created a communication barrier for the Deaf population.
- Access, dissatisfaction with the clinical experience and loss of autonomy are realities faced by this population.
- Inability to properly communicate can lead to patient safety issues and decreased outcomes.

Conclusions

The global crisis provoked by the pandemic managed to expose and deepen issues of societal exclusion for Deaf population. Deaf community's access to healthcare services suffered a blow due to the pandemic, contributing to inequity. Healthcare providers should be aware of their individual responsibility in closing inequity gaps.

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