

Worldwide Parental Aspirations and Fears echoed from Rwanda

Researchers: Teresa Quail (DeafReach UK) & Elie Kwizerimana (Nyabihu Demonstration School for the Deaf)

Acknowledgements: Empowering Children with Disabilities (EmCD), Rwanda

DeafReach UK and Isobel Blakeley, DeafReach UK's lead for Rwanda, co-interviewer

British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) Mary Grace Wilkins travel scholarship award.

Introduction

Formal deaf education in sub-Saharan Africa is usually only available through the efforts of missionary groups or passionate individuals. There is a dearth of research about education of deaf children and the effects in developing countries (Knors, Brons & Marschark, 2019). In Rwanda, schools for the deaf are viewed as private schools and are not funded by the state. I wanted to find out the aspirations and fears of parents of deaf children who access education at a school for the deaf in rural Rwanda. An initial scoping study arose in February 2019 during a visit to various community organisations in Rwanda coordinated by DeafReach– a UK charity. The study involved interviews with four 'hearing' parents of deaf children receiving education; two parents from ubudehe category 1 (extreme poverty) and two parents from ubudehe category 3 (average income).

Method

Qualitative research using a thematic analysis of open-ended questions with a group of parents, who are Kinyarwanda speakers. The focus group was selected by the school's non-government organisation (EmDC). The interview was conducted in presence of school founder on the school site. Translation provided by Elie, co-author and Head Teacher for whom English is a second language. The group consisted of three mothers and one father of children and young people aged 10 to 23 (present and past pupils of one school for the deaf). Three children are assumed to have been born deaf and one acquired deafness through meningitis. Three were residential students and one was a day student.



Results

Each parent expressed **pride**, **high aspirations**, and a strong sense of **valuing the education** made accessible to their deaf child. They all shared examples which reflected a change in their view of their children's abilities; representing a moving away from a deficit model of what their child could not do towards a positive model of how family engagement, parental confidence, child's social/emotional well-being, friendships, **independence** and two-way communication have developed.

Pride: We feel great to have [a] deaf [child], I no longer feel guilty about having a deaf child. I am comfortable with it and **proud** of it.

High aspirations: I dream that tomorrow his future will be bright. And I think he can go for even university, if he gets that chance. That can sharpened much more, much better his future. But I now see his future is bright. I didn't have hope before but now I see it will be better.

Valuing education: My daughter, am very pleased to have my daughter, A, here getting education because before she was always rude and aggressive. But now she is very good and kind and loves other children, she treats them well. She does no longer have negative attitudes towards other children or other people.

Nurturing independence: ...but now that fear is decreasing, almost 100%. Because if he lost in Kigali or even in big town he can know My name is ..., my mother is ..., my father is ..., I am from ..., it is easy to know where that child comes from. So we were very scared and lot of fear before, now it is we feel highly safe with our children.



Results

The positive parental role to develop their child's well-being reflects the views of respondents in Rwanda's 2018 study on violence against children and young people with disabilities in institutional settings (Ministry of Health (2018)). Each parent expressed concerns about their child's **vulnerability**, their own communication skills and ability to understand and protect their child from abuse.

The father discussed nurturing his son to aim high academically to reduce likely **discrimination** in employment opportunities.

Similar to Szarkowski and Brice's U.S. positive psychology framework study (2016), each of the parents presented a pragmatic and empowered **parents as leaders** approach. Two parents articulated how they **advocate** within their society for **inclusion**, respect and equality. One mother shared that she has ensured in her village everyone 'treat our children safely' and 'treat him as other children'. The father explained he raises the needs of 'these children disabilities' each Tuesday at his village meeting and at the public school parent meetings which his other children attend. The father is also raising, via the school, the need for the council to make road improvements such as a zebra crossing to prevent accidents and signposting so drivers slow down.

Vulnerability: ... when they reach level of puberty then... if a girl, people will rape her or if a boy this can also [happen], people can ... sexually abuse.

Discrimination: getting job, when he goes to apply with hearing ones although he can perform the test, the examination, better than that one, they prefer the person without disabilities. But also they fear thinking how will our children get jobs, and will be for my thinking maybe if he goes for more studies, like university, he can give him chance to get job easily but that is a fear we have.

Parents as leaders: We as parents have different techniques that we are using to advocate for and talk about the threat of these children of ours.

Advocacy: can advocate for our children, like these completing senior six as is my son, if at least some of them goes for further education like University, it can encourage other children.

Inclusion: Because of communication with relatives and other family members so if we improve our sign language communications it can make them feel well as they do when they are here at school.

Discussion

This was a limited study. Interviewing a wider range of parents from schools for the deaf and inclusive state education provisions may indicate if these perceptions, aspirations and fears are universal for Rwandan parents of deaf children or specific to the relationship and support of one school environment.

References

- Knors, H., Brons, M. & Marschark, M. (2019) Deaf education beyond the western world: Context, challenges and prospects. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ministry of Health (2018) Violence against children and young people with disabilities in institutional settings. A Qualitative Study. Kigali: Rwanda Ministry of Health.
- Szarkowski, A. & Brice, P. J. (2016) Hearing parents' appraisal of parenting a deaf or hard-of-hearing child: Application of a positive psychology framework. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, **21** (3), 249-258. [Viewed 4 May 2019]. Available from <https://academic.oup.com/jdsde/article/21/3/249/2404216>