

STUDY ON SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF PERSONS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT

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Abstract: *This paper analyses the issue of socio-professional integration of hearing-impaired persons. The research methods used were the questionnaire survey and the interview-based survey. The group of subjects consists of 49 people – 34 adults with hearing difficulties, 4 teachers in special education, 10 employers from the private sector, and 1 sign language interpreter from the United States. The findings of the research prove the limited access of the hearing-impaired people to the labor market. Also, employers' professional requirements do not match the formal education of people with hearing impairment.*

Key words: *hearing impairment, labor market, socio-professional integration.*

1. Introduction

What is the role of hearing in human development? To answer this question, we need to know a few things about hearing. Hearing is one of the five senses of the human being and is a particularly important component in our lives, because through it we can differentiate the sounds. The ear perceives the vibrations that occur in the air, these vibrations in turn produce the sound waves, which then the human ear transforms them into sounds that give us information about the environment. The ear is an organ of both hearing and balance. For proper functioning of normal hearing, it is important that each soundtrack compartment is functional, otherwise we are talking about a hearing impairment.

The word 'handicap' was first mentioned in the 16th century and since then has undergone several changes in both content and meaning. The word comes from English and has three different meanings, as follows: HAND IN CAP, where 'hand' means 'hand', 'in' is equal to 'in', and 'cap' means 'casket' or 'hat' (Anca, 2001). In support of the clarification of the term 'handicap' and the operationalization of this concept, the World Health Organization (WHO) presents three approaches in addressing this issue: the medical aspect referring to the impairment; the functional aspect that refers to incapacity; the socio-economic aspect of disability (Verza, 1995).

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1.1. Etiology and Typology of Hearing Impairment

Hearing impairment falls within the category of sensory impairment, along with visual impairment. The main causes of hearing impairment can be grouped into two categories: hereditary hearing loss and acquired deafness. The most common hereditary hearing losses are: Sibenmann type, Sheibe type, and Mandini type (Roşan, 2015). When referring to the causes, the deafness can be of three types: prenatal, perinatal and postnatal (Stănică et al., 1997). The next step is to identify the hearing impairment which often causes both malformations in the auditory analyzer and external, medium or internal ear injuries. Detecting and diagnosing auditory dysfunction is based on a method to make a clear delimitation between categories.

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) makes a classification of hearing impairment based on a few basic criteria, namely: hearing loss, grade, and hearing loss characteristics (Roşan, 2015). Hearing loss can be: hearing loss of transmission type; hearing loss of neurosensory type or perception; mixed hearing loss.

Hearing measurement and diagnosis of the impairment is determined by means of devices called audiometers. The audiometric measurements record the thresholds at different intensities measured in decibels and different frequencies measured in hertz (Anca, 2001). Human hearing perceives the sounds from an intensity of 0 to 20 decibels or even up to 30 decibels. Perceiving sounds above the intensity threshold of 20 decibels indicates light, medium, severe hearing loss and even deep losses at intensities exceeding the 90 decibels threshold (Verza, 1995). Thus, a hearing deficiency can be distinguished by the location of the lesion and by its depth.

According to BIAF (International Bureau for Audio-phonology), it is estimated that: a) between 0-20 dB audition is normal, the person can hear a conversation without any difficulty; b) between 20-40 dB there is a slight hearing loss or mild hearing loss. The person can hear the conversation if it is not removed; c) between 40-70 dB there is an average hearing loss or moderate hearing loss where the person can hear the conversation very closely and with great difficulty. In this case, prosthesis is required; d) between 70-90 dB we refer to severe hearing difficulty or severe hearing loss in which the person can hear noises or voices. In this case prosthesis is possible; e) over 90 dB is a deep hearing deafness or deafness (cofosis). The person can hear very strong sounds, but they also cause painful sensations. It can only be prosthetized with special prostheses (Anca, 2001). Gherguţ (2006) considers that a complex assessment of children with impairment is necessary in order to establish a diagnosis that has as final objective the school orientation of the child, the elaboration of a therapeutic recovery program and later its school and professional integration. The terms used in the literature as well as in the usual language to describe the category of hearing impairment are: deaf-mute, deaf speaker, hearing impaired, dysfunctional hearing, deaf, hearing disabled, deafened.

2. Research Objectives and Assumptions

The objectives of this study were: 1) to identify the perception of people with hearing impairment on the chances of professional integration; 2) to identify how school supports

hearing-impaired people for their socio-professional integration; 3) to identify employers' attitude regarding the integration of hearing-impaired people into the labor market.

Based on these objectives, the following general hypotheses were formulated: 1) The degree of satisfaction of the hearing-impaired personnel vary by the special working conditions necessary for carrying out the professional activity; 2) The career development of the hearing-impaired persons vary by the special working conditions provided by the employers; 3) If impaired people benefit from the support and guidance of social welfare services then they increase the chances of socio-professional integration of hearing-impaired persons; 4) If educational and specially integrated institutions develop collaborative relationships with economic agents during their internships, then the employment opportunities of the deaf graduates increase; 5) If employers are aware of the benefits they get by employing impaired people, then the percentage of hearing-impaired employees would increase; 6) If employers are informed about the work capacity of different categories of impaired people, then the percentage of hearing-impaired employees would increase.

2.1. Participants

The research group includes 48 participants – people with hearing impairment, teachers who work in special education, and more representatives of private employers (Figure 1).

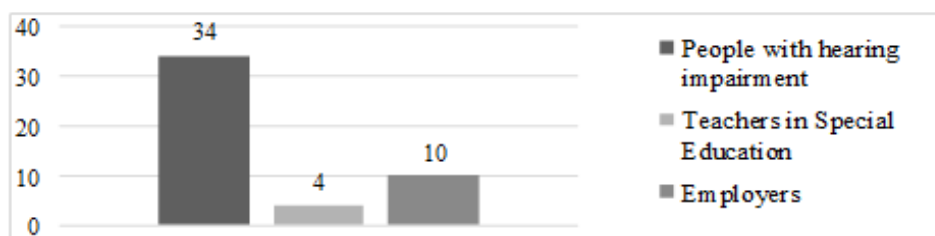


Fig. 1. *Distribution of participants*

2.2. Methods and Research Tools

We have opted for the ascertaining research where we combined quantitative research with qualitative research to highlight data on the importance of formal education in the socio-professional integration of hearing-impaired people as well as the opinions and attitudes of economic agents on hearing-impaired people. The research has focused on the socio-occupational integration of hearing-impaired people in the labor market and includes three research directions. A first direction is directed towards the special education teachers where they try to surprise the degree and the way of their preparation for the integration into the labor market of the disabled persons. The second direction is aimed at participants with hearing loss, where it is attempted to surprise their socio-professional training to integrate into the labor market. The third direction is trying to capture the way the labor market is prepared to receive impaired people.

Antecedent variables include special working conditions, career development, support

and guidance of social assistance services, existence of collaboration relationships with economic agents, information of economic agents, while dependent variables include the satisfaction of the deaf employees, the socio-professional integration, the employability, the number of employees with hearing impairment. To verify the above hypotheses, several appropriate methods and techniques have been used. The research methods used in this paper were questionnaire-based and interview-based survey, and as research tools the interview questionnaire and guide were used.

The questionnaire is made up of 21 items. The questions were designed to capture the aspects of work satisfaction of hearing-impaired people. The questionnaire also contains items on the barriers encountered by people questioned during the employment and after employment, as well as their own recommendations to employers.

The survey based on an interview addressed to special education teachers comprises 11 items aiming at collecting information on the professional orientation of hearing-impaired persons within the school institution. The first two items related to the structure of the Romanian education system. The next two items of the questionnaire, items 3 and 4, address the degree of involvement of non-governmental organizations in the labor market inclusion approach in relation to the needs of people with hearing loss. The following items aim at identifying the difficulties and barriers to access the vocational training for people with hearing impairments, their level of information on employment opportunities and the degree of promotion of social integration.

In the interview-based survey (semi-structured), we used the interview guide as a research tool with 14 questions, addressed to private-sector employers. By asking the questions, we wanted to get as much information as possible, details of the employer's knowledge and opinions as to the costs they expect to have from such recruitment, what kind of people with disabilities have hired, the general perception of employers about hearing-impaired people and how much these views matter in the employment decision, as well as identifying other issues that might or may not cause them to recruit people with disabilities.

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

In line with the first objective of research on identifying the perception of hearing-impaired people on the chances of professional integration we used the questionnaire as a way of collecting data. The degree of contentment felt by the hearing-impaired persons in the work done was followed in the questionnaire addressed to the hearing impaired by question number 17, which is represented on a 5-step Likert hierarchical scale numbered from 1 to 5 in which the response possibilities are: 1 – very dissatisfied, 2 – dissatisfied, 3 – moderate, 4 – satisfied, and 5 – very satisfied.

The results presented in figure 2 show that the vast majority chose the middle, moderate degree of contentment. It can be noticed that the highest percent of the results is 85% of moderate degree of satisfaction, followed by 9% very satisfied degree of 9% and 6% satisfied. These results show that employed hearing-impaired people active in the labor market are not very motivated in relation to the work done, which is a weak motivational incentive.

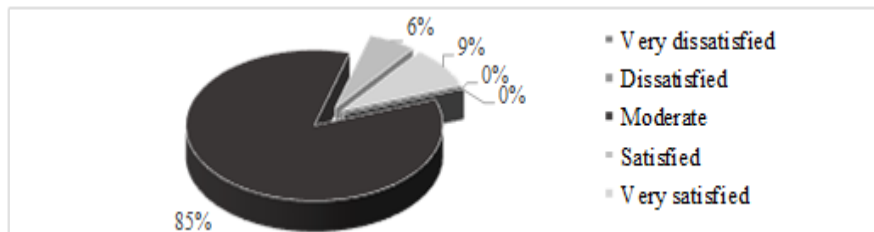


Fig. 2. *Professional satisfaction*

When asked how difficult it was for them to find a job, the hearing-impaired people responded according to the Figure 3.

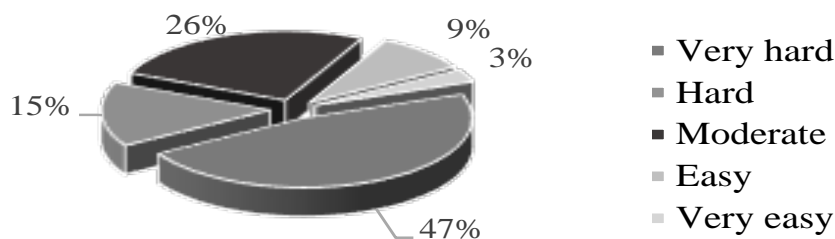


Fig. 3. *Degree of difficulty in finding a job (in percent)*

It is worth noticing the results obtained by the percentage of 47% of the respondents who considered that they had serious difficulties in finding a job, the next step is the 26% median answer where respondents could not decide whether it has been difficult or easy to find a job, which can be explained by the fact that many years have passed since the first employment and may no longer feel the initial moment with the same intensity. The next response chosen by 15% of the participants is one with a high degree of difficulty. The percentage of 9% of respondents who stated that it was easy to find a job is significantly lower than those who encountered various obstacles. The conclusion is that most people with hearing difficulties encountered difficulties in finding a job.

The other items in the questionnaire have collected data on the level of schooling of hearing impaired people, their seniority, their opinion on the possibility of living without being employed, the nature of the obstacles encountered in finding a job, the level of qualification for the work done, the facilities at the workplace, the conditions in which you work, the collegiality relationships and, the future perspective on the job.

For the second objective of research aiming to identify how school supports hearing-impaired people for their socio-professional integration, we used the interview guide as a means of collecting data. The information gathered from the interview with the special education teachers were grouped into categories, respectively: data on the exerted profession and the structure of the special education system, the needs of people with hearing disabilities and their relationships with the teachers and involvement of teachers in the socio-professional approach and the problems encountered, the implications of the state and of the non-governmental organizations in the professional

training and integration of the young hearing-impaired. Based on the participants' reports and after consulting the legislation in force, the Romanian education system provides an itinerant teacher for 15 children with special needs in primary and one for 20 children with special needs in secondary school. Another point of the interview focused on the way in which the educational system works, the participants pointing to the fact that there are special schools for children with disabilities, but children with hearing impairments are integrated into mainstream education depending on a few factors: the moment of diagnosis, the degree of hearing deficiency, the level of language acquisition, the existence of a support teacher with abilities in mimic language, and the availability of school and teachers to adapt to child deficiency. Children integrated in mass school participate in all the activities provided in the curriculum helped by the itinerant teacher. In advance, the itinerant teacher together with the titular teachers establishes a personalized intervention plan and the main objectives that the hearing impaired child must reach, and then every three months this program is reviewed to see the progress of the child.

Discussions with interviewed teachers highlighted the medical factor in which people with hearing deficiencies are particularly in need of early prosthesis. The other needs of people with hearing impairment are similar with all persons with disabilities: social protection from the state, social and professional integration, unconditional acceptance, support and help for the person's family with hearing impairment. Regarding the issues related to the training of people with disabilities faced by teachers in our country, they refer to the issue of integration of children in mainstream education, as there is a reluctance on the part of some teachers to accept children with hearing deficiencies. We have also pointed out from the teachers' reports and other shortcomings that threaten the training. We mention here: the lack of material endowments, the lack of cooperation between different institutions, deficiencies in staff training, and personnel fluctuations due to low wages. With regard to the professions for people with hearing impairments, the interviewed teachers felt that the most appropriate activities are those that do not involve the verbal communication. The participants touched this question with concrete examples of the professions suitable, namely: tailor, hairdresser, chef, and carpenter.

Typical employees compared to the number of employees with disabilities Table 1

Companies	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	K	L
Typical employees (without disabilities)	2	3	4	5	5	9	9	100	129	1500
Employees with disabilities	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	2

For the third objective of research, on identifying employers' attitudes about integrating people with hearing deficiencies into the labor market, we used the interview guide as a way of collecting data. To highlight the percentage of disability awareness in general, we asked a question to employers about the number of people with disabilities they are currently employing. The data is shown in Table 1. Looking at this data, we can state that compared to the number of people with disabilities who are currently employed in these institutions, the number of persons with disabilities

employed is significantly lower. Another finding is that out of a total of 10 companies, only 3 had employees with disabilities and only one met the criterion required by law that any employer with more than 50 employees is obliged to hire people with disabilities as a percentage of 4%, this employer having 9% disabled people employed.

When asked about the determinants of hiring a disabled person, the views of employers are divided. Some consider that the field of activity does not include the employment of such a person and thus they are not willing to take that risk, others have stated that the lack of staff could cause them to employ people with disabilities or if there is no other solution and the need to fill the job requires it. Other interviewed employers said they should apply for available jobs, which is very rare, and during the interview they meet the minimum requirements for the job they want, and others would prefer to hire people with disabilities during holidays or unpaid leave of typical employees.

The other items in the interview collected data on the field of activity of the interviewed employers, their status within the institution they belong to, the degree of disability awareness, the nature of the deficiencies, the work capacity of the different categories of persons with disabilities and the level at which they carry out their tasks work, but also the facilities obtained by employing this category of people.

4. Conclusions and Future Research Directions

For the first objective of research that aimed the overall view of people with hearing deficiencies on professional integration, I found that these people primarily need financial stability. However, for this to be possible, it is necessary to provide jobs that are appropriate to their needs and which suppose compliance with the law in force. I also found poor professional motivation to be explained by the fact that the activities carried out by these people involve routine work that does not encourage the intellectual effort and where neither the salary motivation does not register significant values and companies in most cases do not provide qualification in the workplace nor promotion because post does not imply this. With all these shortcomings, people with hearing impairment like their work because offer them a degree of personal autonomy. The professional training of these persons gives them the right to practice in the trades they have been trained for, but the requirement of the labor market does not always correlate with the basic profession, and for this reason people with hearing impairment choose most of the times the professional reconversion to be able to survive. Another aspect is that people with hearing impairment are not aware of the rights and facilities they have in their approach on integration in the labor market, which is a disadvantage to their detriment. It is precisely because of this that the long-term and long-term aspirations of these people do not foresee major changes in the workplace, perhaps due to the installed routine or the fear of the unknown.

In the case of the second objective of research aimed at identifying how schools support hearing-impaired people in order to socio-professionally integrate them, I have found that the educational system in our country has recently made progress and is currently a functional system. On the other hand, although children with hearing impairment have

access to mainstream schools, the number of support people facilitating their educational path is insufficient. Besides all this, society plays an important role and it can be seen that it is not yet sufficiently shaped to integrate people with hearing deficiencies into education, which means overcoming anxiety and prejudice and unconditional acceptance of the child by other members of the school community to which it belongs. Our society is confronted with problems related to the ways in which people with various disabilities are accepted in the community, as well as the constraints on the choice of a job, which involve, in particular, physical work, without the freedom to choose the desired job, the vocational dimension being rarely taken into account.

The third objective of the survey was to identify employers' attitude regarding the integration of people with hearing disabilities into the labor market where we found employers' perceptions of people with disabilities to be satisfactory, however, they hesitate to employ such persons in the company because they believe that people with disabilities are at risk of injury. Another aspect to be taken into consideration is that lack of contact with such persons is a further reason not to employ disabled persons and a first step in this respect is to inform employers by any means of information about what the concept of disability refers to. Also, the professional requirements imposed by employers do not always match the educational and formal sphere of people with disabilities. Then the employment prospects of people with disabilities depend to a large extent on the type of person's disability, on his/her own autonomy and on the real desire to work.

Future orientations based on this research work can go to several directions of approach. A first way of approach is the long-term observation of hearing-impaired people to see the nature of the difficulties they are experiencing. The second approach is to make a comparative study between the parents of hearing-impaired children and the parents of typical children in order to be able to see the views and attitude of the two categories of people in relation to disability. A third approach can be directed to research on studies over the last twenty years on the educational, social and professional development of people with hearing impairment from birth to old age.

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