

Deaf People in the Community:

Executive Report

Prepared by Deaf Studies Trust, October 2000

Although we have always had deaf people in the community, we have never really worked with them to understand their way of life. Treated as a deviant minority with special needs, they have been the subjects of alternating neglect and charity with no investigation of whether either “treatment” is helpful or beneficial to their quality of life.

For the first time, with funding from the National Lottery Charities Board, we have been able carry out an extended study of deaf people through interviews with trained deaf representatives and to repeat this process six times in order to complete the whole picture of deaf lives in the UK today.

The DPIC project is a three year research project (1997-2000) which focused on the social development of deaf people. It was designed to provide a detailed profile of deaf people's lives in a way which will be of great value to service providers into the 21st century.

There were three major components to this project:

- the collection of interview data twice a year, from a target group of 240 deaf people nationwide
- the provision of telecommunications tools to deaf people to allow them to connect with each other and
- the establishment of a dial-up information service.



Figure 1: UK regions in DPIC

Who are the Deaf People?

A quota sampling procedure was used to select 240 members of the UK Deaf community from an initial contact sample of over 300 persons. The quota was based upon the best available data: a study of the Deaf community in Avon (Kyle and Allsop, 1982), the GB Census (1991) and the General Household Survey (1996). In the GB Census (1991) there were 54,156,067 people resident in Great Britain. Of these 52% were women, and 48% were men. White people represented 95% of the population, with Black people at 2% and Asian people at 3%.

The make-up of the DPIC quota sample almost exactly mirrors these statistics. There is a slight deviation from the Census data in terms of age group. The quota sample contains a smaller proportion of 60-75 year olds (19% compared with 26% in the Census), and a greater proportion of 18-29 year olds (28%, with 15% in the Census).

This quota sample was interviewed six times in 2 years by trained Deaf interviewers. A series of reports will present the data collected and analysed. Taken together these reports will offer a unique insight into the community of Deaf people in the UK today. This report concerns the demographic and baseline data.

The sample was 236 Deaf people aged 18 to 75 years, of whom, 53% were women. Minority ethnic groups were included in the sample, in the same proportions as in the General Household Survey (1998). In the sample, 54% were married or living with their partner, 24% were single and had never been married, and 22% were separated, divorced or widowed. The sample was structured to reflect population in 12 regions of the UK including Northern Ireland (Figure 1).

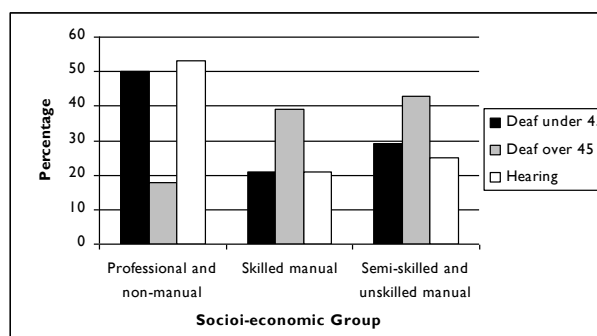


Figure 2: Younger Deaf are more likely to be in professional categories than in the past

Deaf People's Economic Activity and Employment

There appears to have been a shift since the 1970s reports in the type of jobs Deaf people have. Those aged under 45 years are much more likely to be in professional or non-manual occupations than young Deaf people 25 years ago i.e. than those currently aged 45 years and over (50% and 18% respectively). Despite the use of quota sampling, we had great difficulty in finding younger Deaf people in skilled manual occupations. Indeed, for younger Deaf people, the number in *non-manual* occupations is similar to that found amongst hearing people (53%).

Nearly a quarter of Deaf women in the sample were unemployed (23% of those economically active). This seems to reflect a large amount of part-time work (less than 11 hours per week), greater child-rearing responsibilities or a ‘glass-ceiling’ in terms of employment because of a combined perception of being both deaf and a woman.

Also of interest, is the “new” professional category of *sign language tutor*. We believe that these tutors form a unique group: in the UK, virtually the whole responsibility for the teaching of BSL lies with Deaf people, yet most have no formally recognised teacher training certificate. Over half of the tutors included in the study are paid for contact time of less than 11 hours per week, and are officially classed as unemployed.

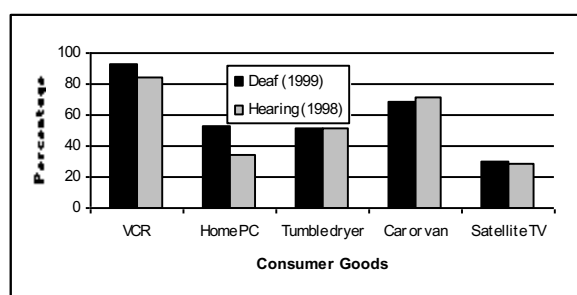


Figure 3: Ownership of consumer goods by deafness

Consumer Goods

Ownership of consumer goods, such as washing machines, televisions and dishwashers, is similar for Deaf and hearing households. However, Deaf households are marginally more likely to own a video cassette recorder (93% of Deaf households and 85% of hearing) and/or a personal home computer (53% of Deaf households and of hearing). However, the ownership does not necessarily lead to use as there is considerable anecdotal evidence that Deaf people purchase equipment to make sure that their children (usually hearing) are able to keep up to date with the community as a whole.

Households

Although there are no *major* differences in accommodation type, Deaf people are more likely to live in terraced houses, and slightly less likely to live in other types of accommodation (32% compared with 26% of hearing households). In terms of household composition: (a) Deaf couples have more children on average (2.1 children) than hearing couples (1.8 children), and (b) Deaf households are more likely to be *large adult households*, containing 3 or more adults (28% compared with 9% of hearing households). This seems to reflect larger numbers of Deaf people still living with parents. Bedroom standard data suggests that despite the larger size of Deaf households there is no concomitant increase

in actual dwelling size: 55% of Deaf households exceed the standard, compared with 71% of hearing households.

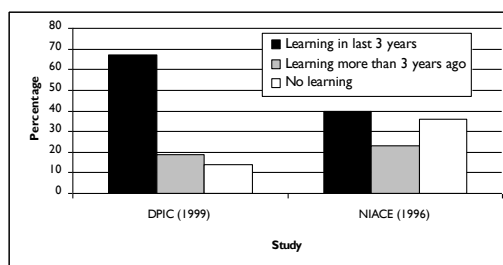


Figure 4: Deaf people are more likely to engage in adult learning

Education

Thirty-nine percent of Deaf adults reported attending a boarding primary and secondary school. Indeed, over a half of those who attended a primary deaf school, and three-quarters of those attending a secondary deaf school, were boarders. Deaf boarding schools provide an environment within which a deaf pupil can interact with deaf peers, often forming lifelong friendships.

Twelve percent of 18-29 year olds remained in education until at least 18 years of age—compared to none of the 60-75 year olds, and only 4% of 45-59 year olds. Nearly three-quarters of 18-29 year olds carried on into Further or Higher Education. This opportunity was not available to older deaf people—the figure drops with age—only 43% of 30-44 year olds and only 2% of 60-75 year olds continuing their education.

Deaf people are less likely to possess some form of Higher Education qualification than their hearing peers (5% and 22% respectively). This may be a reflection of the lower number of Deaf people reporting GCE 'A' level qualifications. It appears that success within the Higher Education environment is still eluding Deaf people: 8% of Deaf 20-29 year olds reported having a HE qualification, much less than the 23% of hearing 20-29 year olds studied in 1996.

Despite the findings reported above, two-thirds of Deaf people reported involvement in some form of adult learning during the last 3 years. This information is taken up in a later report on Education and the Deaf community, although we can note here that Deaf people are clearly active learners. Any lack of success within the educational system does not appear to be due to a lack of interest in or commitment to learning. A more likely explanation is a lack of appropriate access.

Sign Language

Younger Deaf people (18-44 years) were the most likely to have Deaf parents (more than 10% of respondents in this age range), with only half that number for those aged over 45 years. The most likely explanation for this is the change in educational policy which tends to keep Deaf children apart and in mainstream education. Younger respondents are more likely to have been mainstreamed at school, with the result that fewer of those from hearing families become members of the Deaf community. Younger respondents with Deaf parents are introduced via their parents, and older respondents are more likely to have attended Deaf boarding schools.

Forty-two percent of respondents with hearing parents stated that they learned BSL before the age of 5 years. Only 16% reported that their mothers signed to them as children (13% of fathers). These figures are much higher for the same Deaf people when asked about their parents today. Many more parents have learned to sign as their child became older.

Conclusions

The Deaf Community in the UK appears to have changed substantially since previous reports in the 1970's. Younger members of the Community are more likely to have non-manual occupations rather than traditional

skill-based manual work. They are also more likely to possess Higher Education qualifications.

However, all is not perfect. Success at HE level still falls far short of that enjoyed by young hearing people, with lack of appropriate access being the most likely culprit. There is also some evidence that educational mainstreaming has reduced the number of young Deaf people with hearing parents who are participating in Community life.

Comments

At this point, conclusions are not appropriate since this is only the first in a series of reports of the Deaf Community. However, we can see perhaps for the first time, that characteristics of Deaf people are not at odds with society in general. They are participants and consumers with a language which they feel strongly about and which underpins their community life.