



**PhD student:**

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**Research project:**

From expert consensus to clinical practice: an integrated approach to understanding language deprivation in deaf individuals and assessing their Mental Health

**Abstract:**

**Introduction**

According to the World Health Organization (2023), over 450 million people worldwide experience hearing loss, and by 2050, approximately one in four individuals will be affected by some form of hearing impairment. In Europe, an estimated 70 million people are affected (Censis, 2018), with around 7 million in Italy—equivalent to 12% of the population. A significant proportion of deaf individuals face conditions of marginalization and social exclusion, which negatively impact their quality of life and mental health. In particular, the consequences of marginalization can compromise behavioral, social, and emotional skills, as reflected in the high prevalence rates of psychiatric disorders. This situation may be further exacerbated by language deprivation, which can occur during the critical period for first language acquisition, typically within the first three years of life. Currently, there is no consensus in the scientific community regarding the contributing factors to language deprivation in deaf individuals. As a result, health professionals often have limited awareness of this condition, and standardized pathways for assessment and rehabilitation remain scarce. Although some tools have been developed to evaluate mental health dimensions in deaf populations, very few have been validated in groups that include individuals with both deafness and language deprivation.

**General Objective**

To assess and enhance the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of healthcare professionals regarding language deprivation in deaf individuals.

**Methods**

- **Delphi Study:** Building on a literature review, a Delphi study will be conducted to reach expert consensus on the definition of language deprivation in individuals with congenital or early-onset deafness.
- **Systematic Review:** To organize and synthesize existing evidence on the use of assessment tools targeting mental health dimensions in deaf individuals, including those with a history of language deprivation.
- **Validation Study:** Development and validation of a tool designed to assess anxiety and depressive symptoms in individuals with early-onset deafness and a history of language deprivation.