



BEING DEAF: CASE STUDY OF A WOMAN, OVERCOMING DISABILITY TO ROAR WITH SUCCESS

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Abstract:

This paper documents the success of a young woman with congenital severe to profound hearing loss. Her highly focused and hardworking parents along with the correct choices about intervention at the right time made Apurva Joshi's (AJ) progress unstoppable. Currently working as an audiologist and speech language pathologist, she and her parents have become a role models for many families of children with deafness. This paper has tried to analyze the contributing factors for AJ's success. Few of the learning points for the better outcomes from this case study are early identification and intervention of hearing loss, hard work and perseverance of the family, parent's role and correct choices made at the right time, stimulation in early years only with one language, consistent use of hearing device and most importantly faith and conviction to raise the CWHI like any other typical child, thus giving him /her opportunity to live productively with dignity in a mainstream society.

Keywords: *Hearing Impairment, Better Outcomes, Hearing Device, Role of a Family, Early Intervention, Perseverance, Deaf, Woman, CWHI (Children with Hearing impairment)*

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INTRODUCTION:

Hearing impairment impacts development of a child in different domains, the most devastating effect it can have is on speech and language development. If not identified and intervened early, it can turn into a hearing handicap. A person suffering with hearing loss is at risk of having very poor quality of life. Incidence of hearing impairment in India is 3/4 cases in 1000 live births. Sachdeva & Sao (2017) have reported 1.2–5.7 per thousand neonates seem to be affected with congenital hearing loss. Girls /woman with disability have often faced neglect and have been deprived of educational

opportunities. In 2019, UNESCO published a report titled 'State of the report education for India 2019 children with disabilities' where it states that "A girl child with a disability is especially vulnerable and there is a high probability of her exclusion from the education system altogether." However, this case study will prove that, irrespective of gender of the child, some parents leave no stones unturned to see their deaf girl child attaining exceptional success.

Purpose of this study is to identify the factors which led to phenomenal outcomes in AJ. Listing and profiling factors for better outcomes in children with hearing impairment will be a torch bearer for many



families who are struggling to make their child with hearing impairment succeed. The method used to collect the qualitative data for this study was use of an interview schedule. AJ answered all the questions elaborately which were noted down. A consent was obtained from AJ not only to disclose her identity but also to share the details of her journey from her disability to her success.

CASE PRESENTATION:

This case study is of a girl child born to a typical middle class family. AJ's Parents suspected their baby girl having hearing loss when she was 6 months old. Though doctors advised them to wait and watch, mother's intuitive nature, keen observation and frantic search for medical help, landed them at National Institute for Hearing Handicapped. Various audio logical tests confirmed her to have severe to profound mixed hearing loss in both the ears. Identification of hearing loss followed with immediate intervention began when she was just 11 months old. Use of hearing aids was made compulsory and as a toddler she wore it for almost 18 hours. As a child, AJ never rejected hearing aids nor felt ashamed of wearing it. The hearing aids became an integral part of her life.

First four years she wore body level analog hearing aids then moved to Behind the Ear hearing aids for almost 14 years and much later in her life, she started listening with digital hearing aids. AJ recalls, many sounds which she had not heard before were audible to her with digital hearing aids. Her parents made sure that, there was always a spare hearing aid with her, which confirmed that she was never deprived of any auditory input.

INTERVENTION: AJ attended a special school for the hearing impaired at Dadar at a young age for

almost one and half years. Seeing a rapid increase in her speech and language skills, she was advised to attend mainstream school. AJ was given intensive speech therapy all this while. It has been reported that parents at one point of time, juggled between three different institutes to give her speech therapy. She continued with speech therapy for almost four and half years even while attending a mainstream school.

PRESENT ACCOMPLISHMENT:

She completed her school and college education with regular curriculum and did not claim any concessions for disability. Apart from giving her preferential seating arrangement, no major adaptations were needed by her during her educational journey. The teachers, her peers treated her at par with any other child, this probably boosted her confidence.

AJ has mastered three languages. Generally deafness imposes a setback on development of speech and language, it is indeed commendable that she is fluent in three languages. Her academic achievements also have been exceptional, with a Master's degree in Audiology and Speech Language Pathology, she caters to children with disabilities in an inclusive school and also owns a center, where she does private Audiology and Speech therapy practice. AJ is in a happy state of professional as well as personal life, a life partner with normal hearing sensitivity vouches to be with her in every moment of life.

DISCUSSION:

It would be pertinent and important to analyze the road map drawn for AJ by parents and professionals to guarantee the success in developing communication skills, achieve academic accolades



and most importantly lead a content and productive life as a part of mainstream society.

HURDLES TURNED INTO OPPORTUNITIES:

Some of the hurdles faced by the family included dilemma of choosing a hearing device due to limited resources. A choice between the then latest technology of cochlear implant versus hearing aids was albeit tough. However, the parents chose what they thought was the best choice for their girl. Once opted for hearing aids, they worked with full conviction and faith to get the best from the hearing device. Scarcity of special schools and speech therapy services in and around their residential area was another challenge, family had to travel long distances for seeking intervention. They would navigate long distance from Kalyan to Dadar for therapy and every moment of this arduous journey was fruitfully utilized for language stimulation by both the parents. Not often but AJ did recollect facing ridicule by some children and a unique response of her mother to the comments made by her playmates. AJ's mother asked her to come to terms with reality and face it instead of reprimanding her playmates. AJ has also has commented about acceptance of a woman with hearing impairment in the society. In spite achieving a lot, leading a normal married life with a life partner who doesn't have a hearing loss can be distant dream for many girls, mainly because the stigma attached with the disability.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR THE SUCCESS: According to AJ, it is her positivity and perseverance along with untiring efforts by parents contributed to her success. Consistent use of appropriate hearing aids, use of only one language

(mother tongue) for stimulation at home and school, intensive speech and language stimulation by all and the firm belief of parents about raising AJ like any other 'typical' child enabled her to be the person she is today. Parents encouraged her to explore things and function independently. AJ started travelling alone by bus at a very young age, now rides a two-wheeler comfortably even on highways. No attempt was made to hide the disability and in fact she was encouraged to face it and fight her own battles. There was no gender discrimination at home, both AJ and brother were given equal opportunities. The attitude of the parents was always to include her in the mainstream society. AJ opined, inclusion in mainstream is a team work and success depends upon response and contributions of every person in proximate contact to the needs of the child with disability. AJ's parents did not think about raising her differently and did not ask for any concession /exemption. She would participate in competitions with typical children and winning accolades in these competitions gave her exuberant confidence. The teachers and the therapists felt AJ' higher cognitive functioning along with stimulation and the constant nudge by her parents predicted better outcomes.

CONCLUSION:

There are many evidence based research studies which conclude importance of early identification and intervention of hearing loss for better outcomes. This case study also endorses the same but it also emphasizes the crucial role of parents of CWHI in initiating early identification and intervention especially in Indian context. In India due to absence of mandatory Universal Newborn Hearing Screening, the responsibility of early identification



and intervention of babies with hearing loss primarily lies on parents. In current scenario most of the CWHI have access to either digital hearing aids and or cochlear implants. AJ has shown commendable achievements in spite of using analog body worn hearing aids in early years which makes it evident that at what age the hearing aids were fitted, how often the hearing aids were used and how much auditory access hearing aids gave her were few of the deciding factors for her speech and language development. To summarize the learning points from this case study, early identification and intervention of hearing loss, parent's involvement and correct choices made at the right time, stimulation in early years only with one language, consistent use of hearing device and most importantly faith and conviction to raise the CWHI like any other typical child, giving him /her all the

opportunities to live productively with dignity in a mainstream society are the factors which guaranteed AJ's success.

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