4. Language Acquisition

The operational definition of language acquisition for the DODA program was the ability to understand abstract communication from other people and the ability to effectively communicate with others. This often involved discussion between the counselor and participant to assure that the spirit of the question was fully understood. The initial explanation’s wording is included here.

**At what age did you acquire language?**

**Reference onset of deafness age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age of Acquisition</th>
<th>First Group (1-4 years)</th>
<th>Second Group (4-9 years)</th>
<th>Third Group (10-20 years)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1-4 Years (n=45)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.1-9 Years (n=44)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-20 Years (n=18)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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The mean age of first language acquisition overall was 65.94 months (± 45.06). The distribution was positively skewed and the distribution was tri-modal with distinct groups. The first group (n=45) had a mean age of acquisition of 29.2 months (±12.77), with a range from 12 to 48 months (1-4 years). The second group (n=44) had a mean age of acquisition of 71.32 months (±14.82), with a range from 54 to 114 months (4.5-9.5 years). Lastly, 16.8% of participants (n=18) were significantly delayed with an age of acquisition of age ten or later.

Age Of Language Acquisition

- 1-4 Years (n=45)
- 4.1-9 Years (n=44)
- 10-20 Years (n=18)

Some participants indicated proficiency in more than one communication language. Seventy-two participants (67.3%) used ASL, thirty-three (30.8%) used Pidgin Signed English (PSE), and thirteen (12.1%) used oral communication. There was no significant difference between age of acquisition groups by mode of communication, although participants who used ASL were slightly more likely (23.5%) to be represented in the group with the earliest age of acquisition.

Communication Modes

- American Sign Language
- Pidgin Signed English
- Oral
- Total Sample

- First Group (1-4 years) 34
- Second Group (4-9 years) 26
- Third Group (10-20 years) 12
- Total Sample 45

Of the eighteen participants with significantly delayed language acquisition, eleven (61.1%) reported having attempted suicide in the past. The difference between the rates of suicide attempt was marginally significant (p=0.063) with those participants whose language acquisition was significantly delayed reporting a rate 22.9% higher than the rate for participants whose age of language acquisition was less than 10 years. Suicidal ideation was also higher among participants from the group with the greatest delayed language acquisition, but not significantly so (p=0.114).

5. Past Mental Health Diagnosis

A total of 48 participants (42%) reported being diagnosed with a mental illness in the past. These participants reported past suicidal behavior more often than those without, and were significantly more likely to report a past suicide attempt (p=0.001) as well as past suicidal ideation (p=0.001) compared to participants without past reported mental health diagnosis.

- Past suicide attempts Yes No
- Past mental health diagnosis Yes No
- Past suicidal ideation Yes No

- Past suicide attempts
  - Yes: 30 (62.5%)
  - No: 18 (37.5%)
- Past mental health diagnosis
  - Yes: 31 (66.0%)
  - No: 16 (33.0%)
- Past suicidal ideation
  - Yes: 16 (33.3%)
  - No: 32 (66.7%)

The sample included 63 men (58.9%) and 44 women (41.1%). The mean age was 39.64 years (± 10.90) and ranged from 19 to 67 years of age at the time of intake. Sixty-seven participants (62.6%) identified themselves as Caucasian, 22 participants (20.8%) as African American, six participants (6.0%) as Latino, and 12 (11.2%) chose not to respond. Mean years of education were 12.16 years (±1.738), and 62 participants (77.6%) reported a high school diploma or equivalent. Twenty-six participants (25.2%) were employed at least part time at the time of intake.

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