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Background

Within the first year of their child's life, caregivers of deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) infants are faced with decisions regarding their child's communication method.

However, a large majority of caregivers are unfamiliar with the array of communication methods for DHH children.

Objectives

1. Describe communication method recommendations given to caregivers.
2. Identify the influence of communication method recommendations on caregivers' decision-making.
3. Identify the influence of child, family, and community factors on caregivers' decision-making.

Methods

Participants

105 caregiver-child dyads

Child eligibility:

- (a) between 12-18 months of age
- (b) bilateral, congenital hearing loss
- (c) one caregiver with normal hearing
- (d) exposed to spoken language by their caregivers

63.81% of children were exposed to sign language in addition to spoken language.

Measures

Caregivers completed the "Making Decisions about Sign, Speech, and Multilingualism Survey" (Crowe et al., 2014).

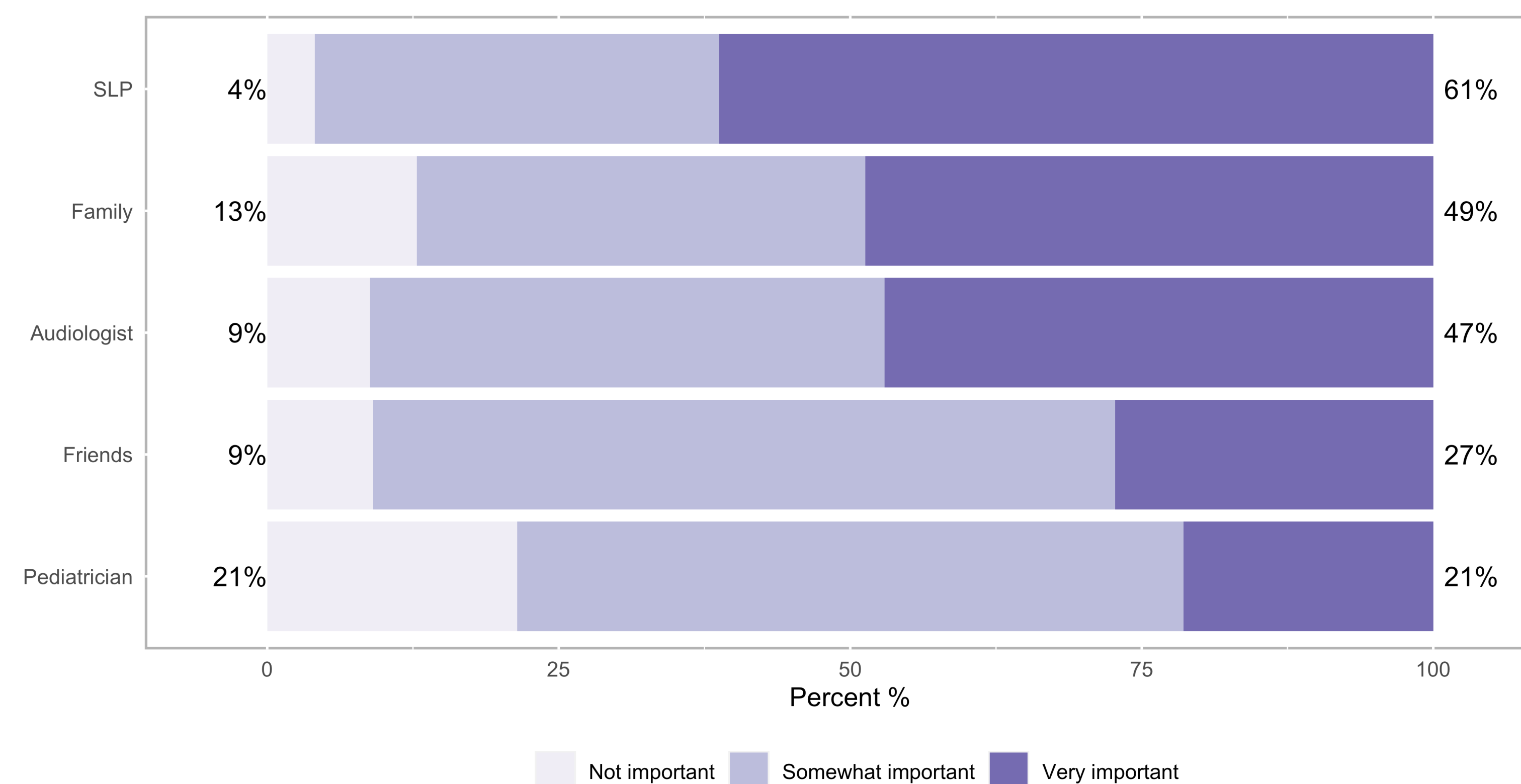


Results

Communication method recommendations

	Sign and speech	Sign or speech	Speech only	Sign only	Not advised
Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP)	47%	3%	22%	0%	27%
Family	32%	1%	25%	0%	42%
Audiologist	26%	2%	25%	0%	48%
Friends	19%	0%	12%	0%	69%
Pediatrician	12%	1%	10%	0%	78%

Influence of communication method recommendations on caregivers' decisions



Factors influencing caregivers' decisions regarding the use of speech

Most Important

- "My child's future academic success" (96%)*
- "My child's future literacy success" (95%)
- "My child's future access to higher education" (95%)

Least Important

- "I want my child to be able to participate in my religion" (29%)
- "My local community's attitudes towards speech" (28%)
- "I don't want people to think my child has a disability" (28%)

*Percent of caregivers that rated item as "Very Important"

Factors influencing caregivers' decisions regarding the use of sign

Most Important

- "My child's ability to form friendships and future relationships" (83%)*
- "My child's future literacy success" (81%)
- "My child's future academic success" (81%)

Least Important

- "I don't want people to think my child has a disability" (17%)
- "I didn't want my child to be able to sign" (6%)
- "I didn't want to learn to sign" (3%)

*Percent of caregivers that rated item as "Very Important"

Conclusions

It is critical for providers, particularly SLPs, to understand the influential factors in caregivers' decision-making process.

Throughout the decision-making process, the highest priority for caregivers was their child's access to future opportunities and relationships.

Conversely, negative perceptions and attitudes towards sign language and disabilities did not influence caregivers' decision-making.

With this understanding, providers can provide relevant, influential information that empowers caregivers to make decisions in line with their values and priorities.

Future Directions

Future research may consider:

- Additional factors, beyond those included in "Making Decisions about Sign, Speech, and Multilingualism Survey" that influence caregivers' decisions
- The extent to which factors influencing caregivers' decisions vary across families
- How caregivers' decisions change over time and what factors influence such change

The goal of this line of research is to support caregivers' decision-making and tailor client education to match the values and priorities of each family.

References

- Crowe, K., McLeod, S., McKinnon, D. H., & Ching, T. Y. (2014). Speech, sign, or multilingualism for children with hearing loss: Quantitative insights into caregivers' decision making. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 45*(3), 234-247.

Additional Information

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