

Cochlear Implants Offer Kids A Gift Beyond Hearing

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Children with cochlear implants in the 4-to-7 age group rated their physical, social and emotional quality of life higher than their parents did.

(PhysOrg.com) -- For years, hearing scientists have known that cochlear implants improve the communication of children who receive them. What they didn't know was whether the children and their parents perceived an improvement in their overall quality of life.

Now a study by researchers at the UT Dallas Callier Center for Communication Disorders and their colleagues with the Dallas Cochlear Implant Program (DCIP) is revealing interesting differences among younger and older children with cochlear implants on their quality of life.

In the study, "Health-Related Quality of Life in Pediatric Cochlear Implant Users," the researchers identified, recruited and interviewed about 150 children ranging in age from 4 to 16 years. Their parents and a control group of children who were the same age but without hearing loss also participated in the study.

The research focused on three age groups: ages 4 to 7 years; 8 to 11 years; and 12 to 16 years.

The children in the 4-to-7 age group rated their physical, social and emotional quality of life higher than their parents did and at the same level as same-age children without hearing loss.

"What is very interesting about this group," said Dr. Andrea Warner-Czyz, research associate in the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences, "is that the children would have a puzzled look on their face when we asked questions about their cochlear implant. They don't call the device a cochlear implant. Instead, the parents and children refer to it as their 'ears.'"

The 8-to-12 age group also reported a positive quality of life. "Most of them have had their cochlear implants longer than the younger-age group, and we have found that the duration of implant use has a positive effect on a child's perceived quality of life," said Dr. Betty Loy, special assistant to the DCIP board of directors, who initiated the quality-of-life study because she wanted to learn how the children felt about themselves and how the parents thought their children felt about themselves.

For the 12-to-16 age group, a significant difference between the parents and children with hearing loss was that the parents viewed their child's quality of life - when at school - as being better than the child perceived it.

"The parents are excellent reporters of how their children feel when they are around them," said Loy. "But when the kids are by themselves at school, they don't feel as good about themselves as the parents thought. We can only speculate why this occurs."

The researchers have presented the data at conferences in Colorado, California, North Carolina and Australia. They will also present their findings at the upcoming American Academy of Audiology convention in Dallas in April.

Research participants are currently being recruited for Step Two of the study. The researchers are developing a quality-of-life questionnaire that will focus solely on cochlear implants.

Provided by University of Texas at Dallas

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