

FC15-03

## MENTAL DISTRESS AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN A DEAF POPULATION

J. Fellingner

Institute for Neurology of Senses and Language, Hospital St. John of God/Konventhospital  
Barmherzige Brüder, Linz, Austria

**Introduction:** High risks of mental illness within the deaf community are reported. The assessment of the level of mental distress and quality of life in the deaf community is difficult due to communication problems in spoken and written language. The deaf community is characterized by the use of sign language.

**Objective:** This study aims to compare levels of psychological distress and the quality of life with levels reported by the signing deaf people and the hearing population.

**Methods:** A measure of acceptable reliability using sign language is described. The interactive computerised package including special versions of the WHOQOL-BREF, the GHQ-12 and five subscales of the BSI was administered to a large community sample of deaf people ( $n=236$ ), and results were compared with normative data for German speaking hearing people.

**Results:** The deaf sample has a significantly poorer quality of life than the general population for the physical and psychological domains ( $p < 0,01$ ) as measured by the WHOQOL-BREF. However, in the domain of social relationships no significant difference ( $p=0,19$ ) was demonstrated. All findings with the GHQ-12 and the BSI show much higher levels ( $p=0,01$ ) of emotional distress among the deaf.

**Conclusion:** Although a poorer quality of life and a higher level of mental distress is demonstrated the similarity to the general population in the domain social relationships shows that this does not affect all domains. These findings show the need for easily accessible health services for the deaf which offer sensitive communication with them.