

# EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS DEALING WITH DEAF CLIENTS

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**Abstract:** Social Workers deal with diverse client including deaf individuals. However, dealing with deaf clients can be challenging, especially for new social workers without much experience with this type of client. The study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of social workers in dealing with deaf clients. It involved four social workers with experience dealing with deaf clients for at least 3 years and working in Cagayan de Oro City. This study employed Creswell's Simplified Version of Moustaka's adaptation of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Phenomenological Analysis. The data analysis procedure involved bracketing of experience, horizontalizing the data, clustering of meanings, writing a textural description and structural description of the experiences of the participants, and writing the essence of collective experience. Four themes emerged in the study namely; Walking through client behavior; Dealing with client management issues; Employing client-centered strategies; and Providing meaningful services. These identified themes emphasize the complex nature of interactions between social workers and deaf clients. It shows how social workers work hard to understand and connect with the deaf clients, revealing a potential gap in education and information on effectively addressing this unique client group. The study highlights critical need for specialized training, ongoing professional development, and a deepened cultural competence among social workers engaging with the deaf community. The insights gained from this study pave the way for the enhancement of social work curricula, training programs, and support structures, ensuring that future practitioners are equipped with the skills, insights, and sensitivity required to forge meaningful connections and provide effective, client-centered services.

**Keywords:** deaf, lived experiences, Transcendental Phenomenology, challenges, strategies

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## Introduction

One of the largest sectoral groups of differently abled individuals nationwide is the group of the deaf. In the Philippines, 1.23% of the entire population is either deaf, mute, or hard of hearing. As of 2009, the projected deaf population is already at 241,624 for those who are deaf, and 275,912 for those who are partially deaf. It means that at least 517,536 people currently have very limited access to information or perhaps services because of their hearing condition (The Filipino Sign Language Act in Broadcast Media, 2014). Throughout history, Deaf individuals faced many challenges but not limited to discrimination, violence, and language deprivation (Dirksen & Bauman, 2004; Sandlin, 2021).

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Deafness is a condition that is either congenital deafness, where the hearing loss occurs since birth, or acquired. In the account of the hearing-centric community, deaf people face a variety of obstructions brought on by accessibility issues and poor communication. The Philippines, in particular, have some conflicting issues when it comes to the employment processes and accessibility to education intended for deaf individuals. A study by Dela Cruz and Calimpusan (2017) noted that the city in the Philippines is not yet ready in accommodating deaf individuals considering the limited availability of skilled hearing interpreters and lack of awareness of the hearing academic community about the deaf culture and sign language. In the business world, employers highly prefer to hire a hearing workforce compared to deaf individuals. The primary concerns are on communication access which may cost them time and financial resources in training deaf and hearing employees. The lack of access to capitalization undermines the opportunity for deaf individuals to start their businesses, often leaving them reliant on their family members. Individuals who are in difficult situations including the deaf are referred to social work services for different reasons such as health care services, mental health, education, employment, etc. (Glickman, 2014)

From the perspective of social workers, in times of difficulty, everyone including deaf clients has to receive well-competent services to help them overcome such crises. Deaf clients are individuals who are deaf or are hard-of-hearing that need assistance from social workers to restore their social functioning disrupted by internal and or external factors. The problem-solving process involves identifying the problem, assessing the case, planning, and implementing the plan. However, before this process occurs, one must be able to communicate in a way the client understands. Communication in Social Work is not merely a skill but much like a vital organ, without which it may cease to exist (Richi Simon, 2018). Attending to deaf individuals, the social worker must be culturally and linguistically competent.

According to the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, specifically, Standard 9 states that: “Social Workers shall provide and advocate for effective communication with clients of all cultural groups, including people of limited English proficiency or low literacy skills, people who are blind or have low vision, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and people with disabilities” (Bonner et al., 2015). This implies that the social workers are legally obligated to communicate to the deaf through sign language or provide an interpreter who adheres to the mode of social workers working ethics.

Rezende’s (2021) studies showed that deaf clients prefer to be attended by public health workers that can communicate with them through sign language. Overcoming such language barriers promotes more humanized care to clients. Although social workers are continuously striving for the best way to deliver their services to clients, the lack of materials as well as understanding in this field brought negative

implications to the helping process of social work. As a result, social workers tend to rely on friends for communication which is considered an incompetent way of service delivery. In one survey of deaf individuals, the respondents had several negative feelings about social service and community service agencies. Respondents reported frustration with workers' inability to properly help with their needs, largely due to their incapability to communicate, and that they were made to "feel stupid", a stigmatizing attitude that hindered them from seeking social services (Polokoff, 1980 as cited in Garibay, 2019).

While there have been studies conducted about the employment of PWDs, in recent years, there has been very little attention focused on the phenomenon of social workers dealing with deaf clients in Filipino Society. Hence, an in-depth and greater understanding of the lived experiences of social workers working with deaf clients is necessary for the successful management of this particular group of clients and for providing appropriate services or programs. It is of critical importance to gain an understanding of the experiences of social workers working with the deaf, as a better understanding of these experiences may help other social workers learn and work around issues at all levels, as well as try to implement best practices in their agencies as much as possible.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of social workers in dealing with deaf clients. This study endeavored to gain insight into the actual experiences of these social workers who work with deaf individuals. Documentation efforts focused on experiences that the social workers believed are typical experiences; and challenges and strategies for overcoming these difficulties. The anticipated product of this study is a greater understanding of the lived experiences of social workers which will be utilized as recommendations for social workers who serve and will serve this population.

The study assumes that social workers need to be exposed to different situations to acquire and develop appropriate skills to effectively help deaf clients. This assumption is supported by two theories: Experiential Learning Theory by David Kolb and Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura. Experiential Learning Theory suggests that individuals learn through experiences and a four-stage cyclic process: Concrete Experience, Reflection, Abstract Conceptualisation, and Active Experimentation. In this study, social workers' personal experiences dealing with deaf clients will serve as the first stage, followed by reflection, abstract conceptualization, and future planning.

The social work profession highly regards inclusivity where the welfare of the poor and the marginalized are always upheld, and nobody gets left behind. However, there is considerable evidence of the absence of subjects in the Social Work Curriculum in the Philippines that prepare social work

students in handling deaf clients. Deaf individuals are marginalized in our society, the lack of social workers trained to work with deaf individuals, combined with communication barriers and inconsistent to almost no access to interpreters adds to the potential marginalization. Many social work professionals that are not prepared to work with Deaf clients. Dealing with deaf clients have become a practice problem in social work. Moreover, despite the growing body of research on social work practice, there is still a need for more empirical studies that explore the experiences of social workers particularly in dealing with deaf clients. Therefore, it is only just and fitting to explore the experiences of the social workers who have direct experience working with deaf client to understand the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. This study intended to explore the experiences of social workers dealing with deaf client through the overarching question: What is lived experiences of social worker dealing with deaf client. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions: 1) How do the Social Workers describe their experiences in dealing with deaf clients? ; 2) How do the Social Workers describe the contexts of their experiences with deaf clients? 3) How do the participants see their future in dealing with deaf individuals?

Limitations are commonplace in most research studies and should be considered when deliberating the meanings of the findings and the result of their interpretation. First, since the research participants did not include those employed in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) this study may have failed to capture some of the experiences and perspectives of these social workers who work with the deaf clients. NGOs may have policies, practices, and resources that differ from those of the government agencies that may influence the experiences of the social workers. Secondly, the study was conducted solely in Cagayan de Oro City so the findings may not be representative of other regions. Thirdly, the study excluded the perspectives of the deaf clients, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Finally, the study did not assess the long-term outcomes of the strategies identified in the study, particularly the effectiveness of the art-based interventions. The effectiveness of the arts-based interventive strategies used in the residential care centers can be an area for future research. Research participants were selected using selection criteria. This study used the framework of transcendental phenomenology.

## **Methods**

### *Research Design*

Phenomenological research aimed to explore the essential structure or the central underlining meaning of individuals' lived experiences. By determining what an experience means as it is subjectively lived by individuals who have had the experience, a comprehensive description of it can be provided (Moustakas, 1994, Creswell, 2013) Moustakas (1994), define phenomenology in his book

"Phenomenological Research Methods," as "the study of the meaning or essence of human experiences as they appear in everyday consciousness, rather than as objects of scientific observation or investigation". Moustakas emphasizes the importance of bracketing or setting aside one's preconceived ideas and biases to fully engage in the phenomenological inquiry process. He also emphasizes the role of intuition, empathy, and imagination in accessing the essence of lived experiences. This descriptive approach requires the researcher to set aside previous understandings or presuppositions, a process of epoch or bracketing, and achieve the state of transcendental, a state of being required for fresh perception of the participants' experiences to depict the essence of the phenomenon (Davidsen, 2013). Drawing on Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas illustrated a systematic approach to analyzing phenomenological data, focusing on searching for a composite description of a phenomenon that captures the meanings and essence of experiences (Moustakas, 2013). In line with the purpose of this study, it understands the nature of social workers lived experiences in dealing with deaf clients. Moustakas' transcendental (2013) phenomenology was chosen to delineate the essence of how social workers interpret, process, and experience while dealing with deaf clients. In line with the purpose of this study, it understands the nature of social workers lived experiences in dealing with deaf clients. Moustakas' transcendental (2013) phenomenology was chosen to delineate the essence of how social workers interpret, process and experience while dealing with deaf clients.

#### *Sample and Sampling Procedure*

This study involved four participants who's a social workers had an experience of dealing with deaf clients. All of the participants are currently employed in a government agency and is working in a care center facilities. This study employed purposeful or criterion-based sampling. Purposeful sampling involves identifying individuals or group of individuals that are knowledgeable and have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell 2013; Etikan and Bala, 2017; Sharma, 2017). The participants were chosen based from the selection criteria. These criteria were: 1) the participant must be a graduate and licensed social worker; 2) had experience dealing with deaf clients for at least 3 years and 3) lastly a resident in Cagayan de Oro City.

#### *Data Collection Method*

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main data-gathering instrument (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995). This study used interview as a tool for obtaining the data. Interview is a powerful tool to gain insight into important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues (Seidman, 2006). The purpose of the in-depth interview is to understand the lived experience of other people and meaning they make of their experiences. An in-depth interview is the

best avenue of inquiry for this study as the researcher is interested in investigating what it is like for social workers dealing deaf clients, their experiences, and the meaning of their experience.

In searching for the participants of the study, the researcher has reached out to the City Social Welfare Department of the City to ask for any recommendations of possible participants in the study that was also qualified based on the given criteria. The researcher also made contact with friends and colleagues who social workers who have experience in dealing with deaf clients. Although there were possible prospects, some others weren't available as participants due to work and study conflicts, and other circumstances. As the researcher do not need a massive number of participants, she was able to gathered four (4) participants for the study through friends and colleagues' recommendations. The researcher was able to meet with each participant alone for a preliminary discussion. The researcher and participant just had a brief meeting during which the researcher thanked the participants for participating in the study, although there was no discussion about the study at this time. During the short meeting, the researcher got to know the participant and talked about the interview and study schedule, making sure that it worked for both the researcher and the participants. The data collection process for this study involved both in-person and virtual interactions with the participants. The researcher met with some participants personally, while others preferred virtual meetings using a Google Meet link. The meeting schedules were arranged based on the participants' availability, and the interview locations were chosen according to the participants' convenience or virtual preferences.

The first step in data collection was the Focused Life History and Details of Experience (PAG-ILA-ILA) interview. This phase introduced the study, its timeline, and confidentiality measures. The interview questions were designed to gather information about the participants and their experiences working with deaf clients. During the study, the researcher presented a permission letter and an informed consent form to the participants. The informed consent form outlined the study's guidelines, duration, purpose, interview process, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality and anonymity, the right to withdraw, research approval, participant responsibilities, and contact details of the researcher. The participants had the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification before signing the consent form. The data collection involved three phases; Phase 1 of the interview focused on the social workers' experiences in working with deaf clients. The questions explored their involvement in the deaf community, early memories, experiences over time, and initial exposure to and interest in working with the deaf. Follow-up questions were asked to gain deeper insights. The participants were informed about the topics for the next session and the transcription process. Phase 2 of the interview delved into the participants' recent experiences working with deaf clients, including their feelings, challenges, strategies employed, and specific instances they encountered. The researcher provided an overview of the next meeting's topic and confirmed the accuracy of the transcription. Phase 3 of the interview

discussed the participants' aspirations, reflections on meaning, and recommendations for the future. They shared their future goals in working with deaf clients and suggested programs and services to address current challenges. The researcher expressed gratitude to the participants and reiterated the transcription process. After each interview session, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings, and the participants received copies of the transcripts for review. If needed, revisions were made based on the participants' feedback, which could potentially delay the schedule of subsequent interview phases.

Overall, the data collection process involved a combination of personal and virtual interactions, informed consent procedures, multiple interview phases, and transcription of audio recordings for accuracy.

### *Data Analysis*

This study employed the Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) method of qualitative data analysis technique that was described by Clark Moustakas in his 1994 book "Phenomenological Research Methods". It is a modification of the original Stevick-Colaizzi method and incorporates the Keen approach to thematic analysis. The Modified SCK method involved the following steps: 1) Bracketing, 2) Horizontalizing 3) Clustering 4) Textural Description 5) Structural Description 6) Composite Description or Essence.

Before taking in to the process of Colaizzi (1978), the researcher described her “personal experiences with the phenomenon under study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159) as the first step of the phenomenological study. This is called *epoche* or bracketing. This full description of the researcher’s experience was done to bracket all her experiences about the fanfiction writing. Furthermore, the researcher did it to avoid her biases that may cloud the narratives of the participants. This description of the researcher’s experience of fanfiction writing can be found in Appendix G. After bracketing the researchers’ experiences of fanfiction writing, she began transcribing the interviews of the six participants. A total of eighty-four (84) pages formed the transcribed narratives of the participants.

*Horizontalizing.* The researcher analyzed the data in relation to each other to identify connections, similarities, and differences between the themes and experiences. *Clustering.* During this step, the researcher clustered the formulated meanings into themes that were common across all accounts. Again, bracketing of pre-suppositions is crucial, especially to avoid any potential influence of existing theory. At this point, the researcher can already identify the pattern of meanings as grouped into a particular theme. *Textural Description.* The researcher developed a comprehensive description of the experiences of the participants based on the themes and categories identified in the data. The emergent themes

guided the research to write a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes. *Structural Description*. This researcher developed the underlying structures or patterns that emerge from the themes and categories identified in the data. *Essence*. In this step, the researcher combines the textural and structural description, to create a comprehensive description of a phenomenon. the researcher condensed the exhaustive description down to a short, dense statement that captured just those aspects deemed to be essential to the structure of the phenomenon. *Verification of the fundamental structure*. After the fundamental structure of the experience was described, the researcher validated and verified it with the participants. The findings were returned to the participants for verification. The participants were asked if the fundamental structure, indeed, captured their experience of fanfiction writing. The positive feedback from the participants prompted the researcher to continue with the process.

#### *Trustworthiness.*

Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their book the *Naturalistic Inquiry* started their topic on trustworthiness with the question: “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?” (p. 290). The four criteria of trustworthiness of Lincoln and Guba (1985) were employed in this study such as: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is “determined when coresearchers or readers are confronted with the experience, they can recognize it” (Guba and Lincoln, 1989 as cited by Nowell, et al. 2017, p.3). Transferability means the “generalizability of inquiry. In qualitative research, this concerns only to case-to-case transfer” (Tobin & Begley, 2004 as cited by Nowell, et al., 2017, p.3). Dependability can be achieved when the “researchers can ensure the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented” (Tobin & Begley, 2004 as cited by Nowell, et al., 2017, p.3). Confirmability means to establish “that the researcher’s interpretations and findings are clearly derived from the data, requiring the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Tobin & Begley, 2004 as cited by Nowell, et al. 2017, p.3). To establish credibility, the researcher have constant debriefing with her mentor and colleague who is expert in qualitative research. The researcher has also prolonged engagement with the participants. The weekly interview allowed the researchers to know the participants deeply by engaging into informal dialogues and guided interviews. After each interview, the researchers personally transcribed the recorded conversations. The transcripts were then returned to the participants to ensure that the transcript is correct. Participants may also add if they would like to enrich what they said during the actual interview. This is called member checking. To ensure transferability, the researchers had formulated probing questions in each phase of the interview. It made sure that the researcher could get a detailed account of the lived experience of social workers who work with deaf clients as well as a thick description of the context where the phenomenon

occurred. The researcher was able to compile detailed descriptions of the participants themselves through the informal discussions that followed each interview. The researcher had ensured dependability by making sure that methodological guidelines are properly followed during the whole study and that the data-gathering techniques were thoroughly discussed. To ensure that the scholarly procedure of the study was followed, design-specific frameworks were objectively used. To guarantee confirmability an audit trail had been carried out. The researchers made note of every step of the process, particularly the data gathering stage. Before the actual data collection began, the research also set up the epoche. By using brackets, you can make sure that the data reflect the participants' realities and not your own.

### *Ethical Considerations.*

Through the use of an informed consent form, the researchers sought the participant's consent. The participants were given a full explanation of the contents and components of the informed consent in both Cebuano and English. It was also made clear to the participants that their involvement in the research is entirely optional and they are free to opt out of taking part in any aspect of it. In addition, they received a full explanation of confidentiality. They were informed that their identify would be kept private, particularly when the data was reported. They were also told that everything learned during the interview, with the exception of anything that may be used to identify them, would be made public.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Presentation of Findings*

The results from the three-series interview of the participants under study were phenomenologically analyzed. After careful analysis of the interview transcript, four themes emerged such as 1) walking through with the client behavior; 2) dealing with client management issues; 3) employing client-centered strategies 4) providing meaningful services. These themes speak of the experiences of social workers in dealing with deaf clients.

***Theme 1. Walking through the client's behavior.*** Based on the participants' narrative, walking through with clients was a difficult experience because they have to deal with a different kind of client. These clients could not talk verbally. They are deaf. It required the participant to undergo training in sign language for them to communicate with these clients. Additionally, some of these clients do not have a proper education in sign language. The participants have to walk through with these clients amidst the difficulty. The participants have mixed emotions when dealing with their clients, and observing their clients' behavior was another area of difficulty they had to manage. The deaf clients being served by the social workers had varying attitudes, with some being distant or uninvolved, while others

exhibited combative or aggressive behavior. However it is important to note that the participants noted some positive behavioral changes among clients. These positive behavioral change can be seen through the ability of the deaf taking responsibility for his hygiene, socialization and willingness to learn and improve during classes which is a crucial step toward personal growth and development.

**Theme 2. Dealing with client management issues.** For social workers, working with deaf and mute clients presents major difficulties. Two major categories of management issues that emerge in this situation are center-related issues, communication barriers, Lack of resources, services, and infrastructure are center-related challenges that might make it challenging to give deaf clients the care and help they require. Communication barriers on the other side of the coin describe the difficulties that develop while attempting to communicate with clients who are not able to speak verbally. These barriers may involve, a lack of sign language proficiency and a lack of knowledge of deaf culture and effective communication techniques.

**Theme 3. Employing client-centered strategies.** Employing client-centered strategies is essential for successful social work practice when working with deaf clients. Building the client's competence, utilizing art, adopting a holistic approach, reinforcing, and being resourceful are just a few of the key strategies that respondents recognized as being effective in fostering pleasant and cooperative relationships with clients. Another crucial strategy the participants find efficient while dealing with deaf client is a Collaboration among social worker, other professionals and paraprofessionals. Participants stresses how good teamwork and communication may result in improved outcomes for clients, especially those with specific needs like deaf people. To create a collaborative environment and produce the greatest results, social workers must be willing to learn about and adapt to the needs and challenges of their clients. The third strategy is Expression through art. Providing clients with the knowledge and abilities they need to handle their own problems can help them become more capable of managing their own care. The use of art can be a useful instrument for expression and communication. Fourth is holistic strategy considers the client's total well-being and attends to all of their needs, not just those that are urgent right now. Other than that, positive reinforcement is used as a tactic to encourage positive actions and discourage negative behaviors. Positive reinforcement can be helpful to motivate clients to keep progressing. Last but not least, being resourceful involves finding creative solutions to address problems that arise, such as using visual aids when sign language is not available as an option.

**Theme 4. Providing meaningful services.** The study has identified important components that providing of meaningful services for deaf clients should consider. First and foremost, the client-social worker relationship is crucial in establishing trust and promoting effective communication. Social workers need to be trained in sign language or have access to sign language interpreters to facilitate communication with their clients. Moreover, they need to be able to adapt their communication styles to accommodate clients who have varying levels of education in sign language. Strengthening client

services is also essential, as the needs of deaf clients are diverse and require a holistic approach. Finally, upskilling of social workers is crucial in enhancing their competencies in working with deaf clients, which includes developing cultural competence, understanding the impact of deafness on individuals, and utilizing appropriate interventions to address clients' unique needs.

***Textural Description.*** The study showed that working with deaf clients as a social worker is a challenging and complex experience that elicits mixed emotions from the social workers. While the participants have noted difficulties in attending to the varied behaviors of their clients, they have also expressed positive emotions toward the progress they have seen in their clients. One of the significant challenges they encountered is the communication barrier, which hinders them from providing high-quality care and support to their clients. Additionally, they also experienced center-related issues such as lack of resources, services, and infrastructure. To address these challenges, the participants emphasized the importance of client-centered strategies in effective social work practice. They identified effective key strategies in building a positive and collaborative relationship with their clients, including building clients' capacity, using art as a useful tool in communication and expression, adopting a holistic approach, and reinforcement as a strategy used in disciplining deaf clients. Based on their experience, the participants noted several key components that ensure effective service delivery, including the client-social worker relationship that plays a vital role in building trust and promoting communication. They also stressed the importance of strengthening client services to make them accessible to the diverse needs of deaf clients. Finally, social workers need to be upskilled and equipped with necessary competencies to work effectively with deaf clients. By implementing these components and strategies, social workers can provide high-quality care and support to their deaf clients and improve their overall well-being.

***Structural Description.*** The experience of the social workers takes place in residential center which caters primarily clients who are in conflict with the law and those individuals who have been abandoned. The residential care center is a two-story structure with a capacity of 60 beds that is situated on a 10-hectare piece of land. The institution features separate dorms for boys and girls, each of which can accommodate up to 30 occupants. It has a chapel, a library, a dining hall, and classrooms. Social workers, psychologists, and other experts work at the institution and offer the residents round-the-clock care and support. The aforementioned care facility includes areas for gardening, farming, and therapeutic meetings.

On occasion, a deaf person may need their assistance but because there are no institutions that focus on helping deaf clients, social workers in a care facility may be required to take on these instances. The majority of the services offered by these centers, however, are not accessible to the deaf because they were not initially intended to serve those who are deaf. Due to their primary concentration on serving

their original clientele, social workers also struggle to manage their time, learn sign language, and comprehend deaf culture. It is tough for them because the agency does not prioritize educational training in sign language or other necessary skills, despite their desire in learning about deaf culture and how to work with deaf clients.

***Essence.*** The experience of the social workers takes place in residential center which caters primarily clients who are in conflict with the law and those individuals who have been abandoned. The residential care center is a two-story structure with a capacity of 60 beds that is situated on a 10-hectare piece of land. The institution features separate dorms for boys and girls, each of which can accommodate up to 30 occupants. It has a chapel, a library, a dining hall, and classrooms. Social workers, psychologists, and other experts work at the institution and offer the residents round-the-clock care and support. The aforementioned care facility includes areas for gardening, farming, and therapeutic meetings.

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***Theoretical and Practical Implications.*** The theoretical implication of this study suggests that social workers who work with deaf clients can benefit from applying both David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory in their practice. Kolb's theory emphasizes the four-stage cycle of learning, including concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In the context of working with deaf clients, social workers had concrete experiences involving communication challenges and utilized various methods, such as interpreting and visual aids, to facilitate communication. Through reflective observation, social workers reflected on the challenges faced by the clients and their own biases, gaining a deeper understanding of the needs and effective strategies for working with deaf clients. Bandura's Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of learning through observation and modeling of behavior, as well as the role of cognitive processes in shaping behavior. Social workers observed effective communication strategies from other service providers and integrated them into their practice. They learned sign language, used visual aids, and paid attention to nonverbal cues. Additionally, the theory emphasizes self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to perform a task successfully. Social workers increased their own self-efficacy and that of their clients by using positive reinforcement and feedback to reinforce successful communication interactions.

The practical implications of this study suggest that social workers who work with deaf clients should prioritize ongoing professional development and a commitment to cultural competence. Social workers should engage in experiential learning by reflecting on their experiences, developing abstract conceptualizations, experimenting with new approaches, and applying what they have learned to their practice. Social workers should also utilize collaborative learning and upskilling opportunities to develop their skills and improve their self-efficacy in working with deaf clients. By doing so, social workers can provide more effective services to their clients, ultimately leading to better outcomes and improved quality of life.

## **Conclusion**

The study shows how social workers work hard to understand and connect with the deaf clients, revealing a potential gap in education and information on effectively addressing this unique client group. Social workers' experiences in working with deaf clients involve a range of emotional and practical challenges, center-related issues and communication barriers. However, by employing client-centered strategies such as building clients' capability, collaboration, and expressions through art, holistic approaches, and reinforcement activities, social workers can create a supportive environment that promotes positive client outcomes. Social workers must prioritize providing meaningful services by developing strong relationships with clients, strengthening client services, and upskilling themselves to better serve the needs of the deaf community. Sheafor (2008), to perform effectively the social worker must use a combination of art and science. The social worker must combine his or her artistic abilities with professional knowledge and scientific base.

The study shows that it is crucial for future social work practitioner and currently practicing with deaf clients to be equipped with the skills, insights, and sensitivity required to forge meaningful connections and provide effective, client-centered services. Hence, there is critical need for specialized training, ongoing professional development, and a deepened cultural competence among social workers engaging with the deaf community.

*The following recommendations may be drawn from the findings of the study:*

For social workers, it is highly recommended to study how to communicate through the sign language. The entire helping processes in social work hinges on communication; For schools offering social work degrees. To incorporate the sign language course into their curriculum; Social Welfare Agencies/Residential Care Centers. It is very rare that local government units, public and private agencies have specialized facilities for the deaf clients; For the providers of continuing professional development (CPD) to include training in sign language and case management of deaf clients; For the CSWD it would be advantageous to develop and implement a comprehensive protocol or set of

guidelines specifically addressing the challenges faced by social workers when working with deaf clients.; Future Research. It would be beneficial to conduct more in-depth studies on the experiences of social workers working with deaf clients, particularly in different contexts and settings.

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### **Declaration of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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