

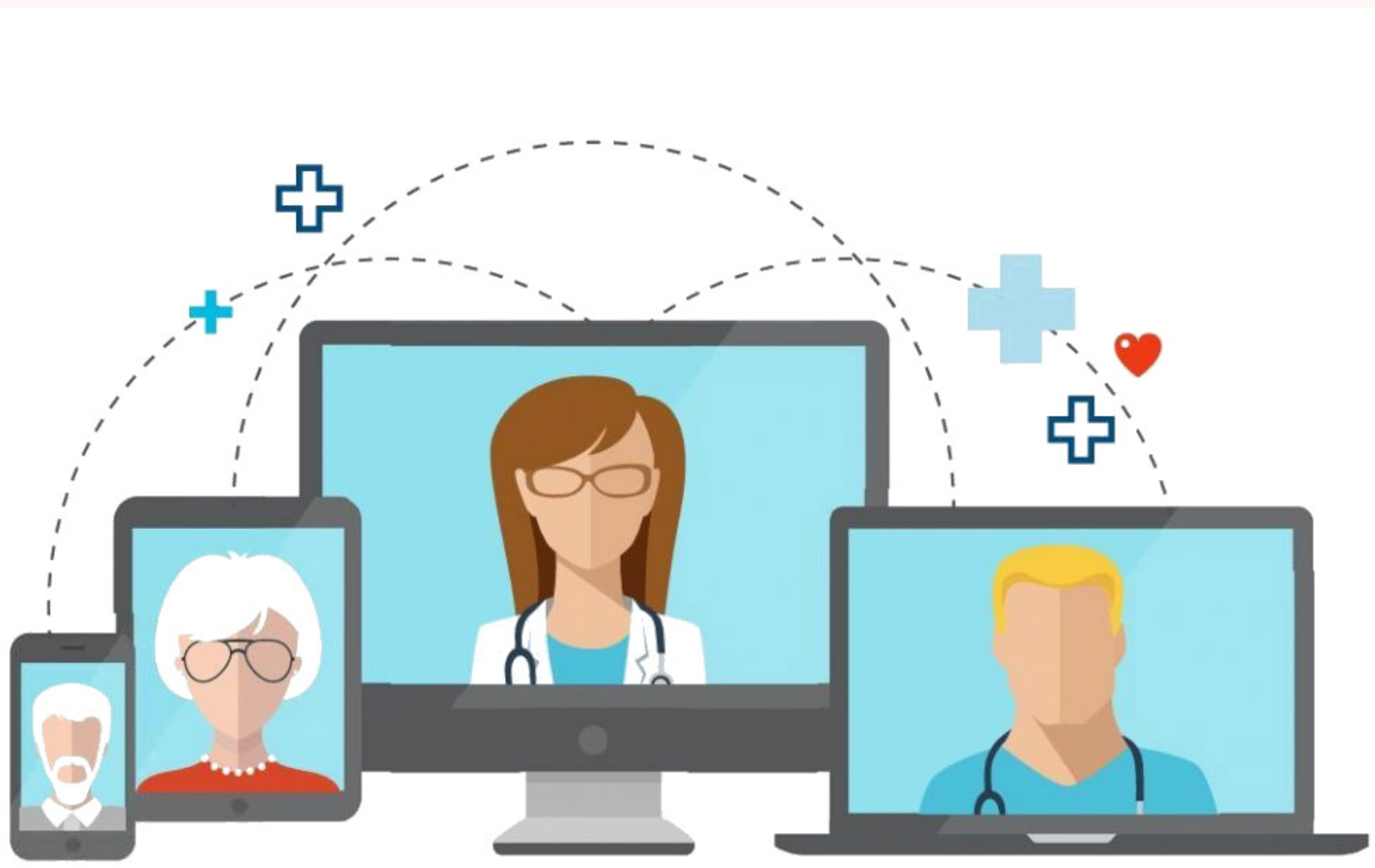
Perceptions of Telehealth Services for Hearing Loss in South Africa's Public Healthcare System



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Background

Telehealth is a promising way to improve access and affordability of hearing healthcare services, and it is recommended as a priority by the recent World Report on Hearing [1-5].

Its role in hearing healthcare service delivery is especially important in areas where hearing healthcare resources are limited, such as within the South African public healthcare system.

Telehealth for hearing healthcare was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic, where physical distancing was essential.

Research Aim

This study aimed to describe audiologists' perceptions regarding telehealth services for hearing loss within South Africa's public healthcare system.

Method

This study was divided into two phases.

- Phase 1:

97 audiologists completed an online survey regarding their perceptions of telehealth for hearing loss within South African public sector hospitals (four questions were adapted from an international survey [6]).
- Phase 2:

Synchronous virtual focus-group discussions were conducted with nine audiologists.

Results

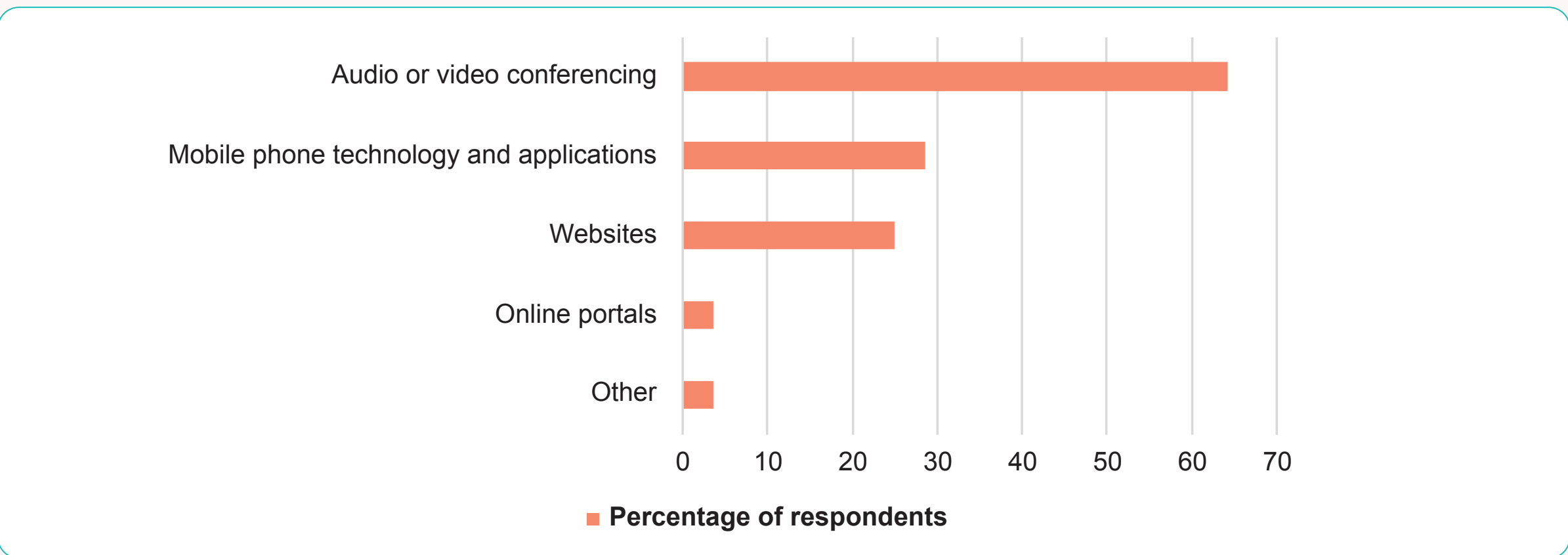


Figure 1. Types of Telehealth Services Used in Audiology Departments within South African Public Sector Hospitals as Perceived by Audiologists, Indicated in Terms of % (n=28)

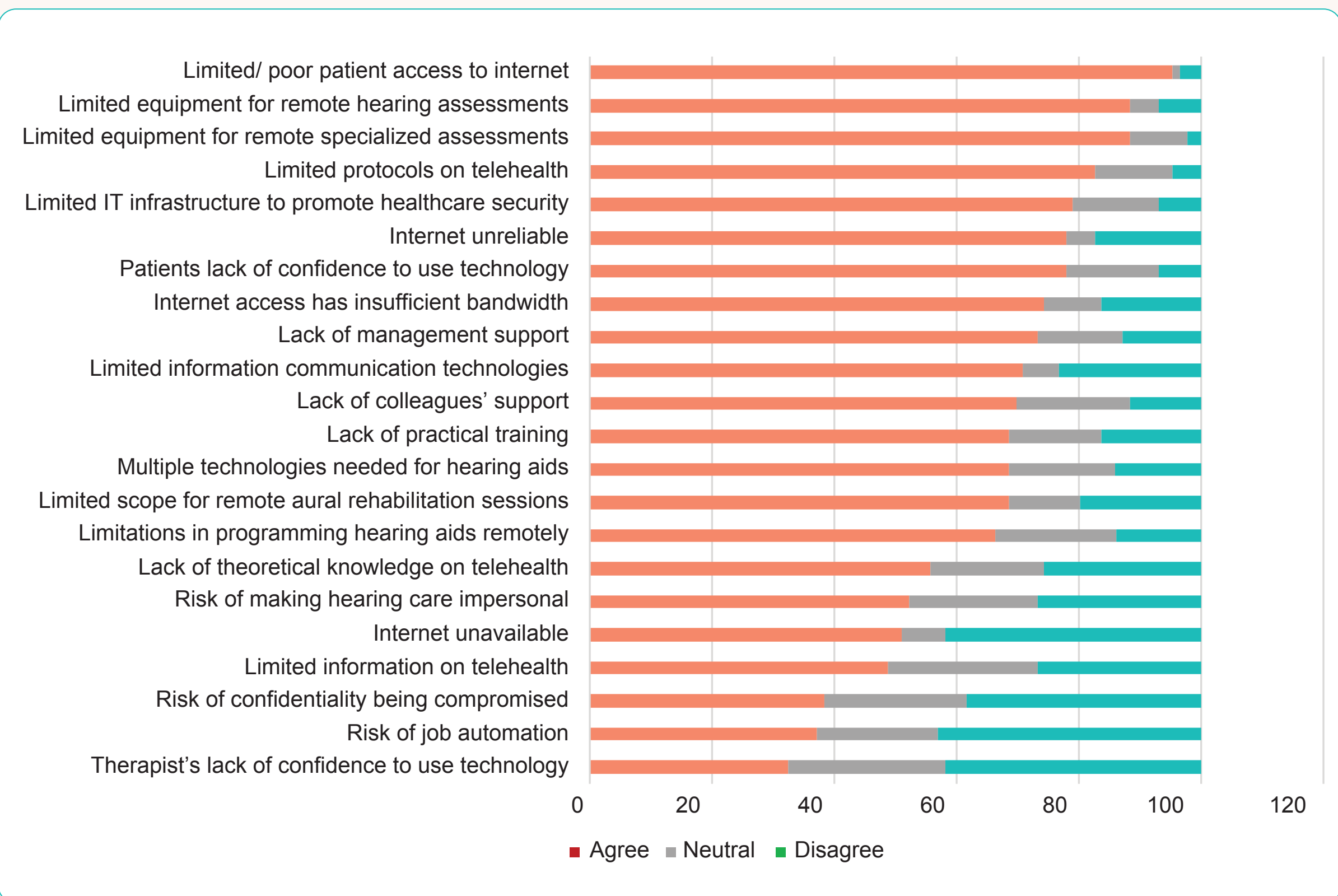


Figure 2. Perceived Barriers Toward Telehealth Service Delivery Within South African Public Sector Hospitals, Indicated in Terms of % (n=86)

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes Identified on Perceptions of Telehealth Services for Hearing Loss in The Public Healthcare System from the Open-ended Question and Focus Group Discussions (n= 86 Open-ended Question Participants + 9 Focus Group Participants)

Themes	Sub-themes
Clinical practices	Limitations of remote hearing healthcare Limitations of South Africa's public healthcare setting Policy and protocol Knowledge and training
Hearing healthcare resources	Information systems and technology Equipment and infrastructure Human resources
Patient restrictions impacting hearing healthcare	Financial resources Education Employment
Perceived benefits of telehealth	Accessibility to services COVID-19 pandemic Potential and willingness to use

- Results indicated that audiologists recognized telehealth services' potential to improve hearing healthcare efficiency within the public sector, and most (84.1%) were willing to use it.
- However, telehealth's actual uptake was low (7.2%) despite almost doubling during the COVID-19 pandemic (19.6%).
- Prominent perceived barriers to telehealth were primarily related to hospital resources, including the unavailability of equipment for the remote hearing/ specialized assessments, internet-related barriers, and limited IT infrastructure.

Conclusion

An increased understanding of telehealth in South Africa's public healthcare system will assist in identifying and in improving potential barriers to telehealth, including hospital resources and infrastructure.

Note

This study has recently been published as: Bhamjee, A. et al. (2022) 'Perceptions of Telehealth Services for Hearing Loss in South Africa's Public Healthcare System', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(13), p. 7780. doi: 10.3390/ijerph19137780 [7]: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/13/7780>

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