

CAREER DECISION SURVEY ON AUDIOLOGISTS AND SPEECH-LANGUAGE THERAPISTS IN GHANA, WEST AFRICA

George Kweku Danful ¹, Priscilla Deede Hammond ²

¹Audiologist (MSc), Centre for Hearing & Speech Services – University of Education Winneba, P. O. Box 25, Winneba, Ghana

²Public Health Promoter (MSc), P. O. Box KU 156, Winneba, Ghana

ABSTRACT

Audiologists and Speech-Language Therapists (SLTs) in Ghana are on the increase. This study evaluated factors influencing career choice in Audiology and SLT among Ghanaian Audiologists, SLTs, and students in the profession. An online survey via Google form link made up of 3 questions was employed to assess the factors that most directly affected career choice in the profession of Audiology and SLT among Audiologists, SLTs, MSc Audiology and MSc SLT students in Ghana. The link was sent to the “WhatsApp” platform of the Speech Therapists and Audiologists Association of Ghana (STAAG) with 66 members. Participation was voluntary and each respondent was limited to only one response. The identity of respondents was anonymous. A total of 41 individuals made up of 18 (44%) Audiologists, 11 (27%) SLTs, 5 (12%) MSc Audiology students, and 7 (17%) MSc SLT students responded to the questionnaire. Out of 41 respondents, 33 (81%) indicated that working in a helping profession most directly influenced their decision to pursue a career in Audiology and/or SLT. Concerning how participants first learned about the field of Audiology and/or SLT the majority (29%, n=12) indicated that they knew an Audiologist or an SLT. Ninety percent (n=39) indicated that they are more likely to recommend the profession to others. Working in a helping profession most directly influenced Audiologists and SLTs in their choice of career. Many Ghanaians including career counselors are unaware of Audiology and SLT. Awareness should be created to help qualified students to cultivate interest in the field.

Keyword: Career, Audiology, Speech-Language Therapy, Profession

1. INTRODUCTION

As the first sub-Saharan nation to gain independence from Britain in 1957, Ghana is located in West Africa bordering the Gulf of Guinea. The 2019 population as projected by the Ghana Statistical Service is 30 280 811 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2019). Though, the global burden of hearing and communication disorders are greatest in sub-Saharan Africa (Olusanya, Ruben, & Parving, 2006; World Health Organization [WHO], 2018), the number of Audiologists and Speech-Language Therapists (SLTs) in Ghana is nothing to be proud of. Audiologists and SLTs assess, diagnose, manage, and treat persons with problems affecting hearing, balancing, communication, and swallowing. The number of individuals in these careers is gradually growing in Ghana. Fagan & Jacobs (2009) reported 6 Audiologists and 2 SLTs for a population of 22 million in Ghana. As of 2019, about 25 Audiologists and 12 SLTs have graduated from the University of Ghana since the inception of the

Master of Science (MSc) degrees in Audiology and SLT in 2011 and 2016 respectively. Currently, there are about 7 MSc Audiology students and 12 MSc SLT students in their final year at the University of Ghana. Many factors could account for this gradual increase in career choice. Anuja (2017) asserted that aspiration to pursue a particular career may come early in life and may depend on the socioeconomic status, gender and even the genetics of the individual. However, about 92% of Audiologists and SLTs reported satisfaction with their choice of profession (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2018). This is largely because the profession is stimulating; it ensures a good relationship with fellow workers and a convenient work location.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016a) projected a 21% increment in employment for audiologists from 2016 to 2026, resulting in about 14, 800 jobs in 2016. This high demand for audiologists can be attributed to the increase of hearing loss caused

by old age (presbycusis), exposure to excessive noise, complications during pregnancy and child birth, infectious diseases, and administration of ototoxic medications (WHO, 2018). Furthermore, about 80% of all persons with deafness and hearing impairment live in low and middle income countries, and also much advocate has been placed on newborn and infant hearing screening (WHO, 2006; Joint Committee on Infant Hearing, 2007). The demand for SLTs is projected to also increase by 18% from 2016 to 2026 since there is a high prevalence rate of stroke, autism, dementia, and swallowing problems (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016b). This resulted in about 145, 100 jobs in 2016. There is no doubt that more audiologists and SLTs are needed to provide such services to the growing population of over 30 million Ghanaians.

Studies conducted in the United States of America and Australia to assess the factors influencing choice of career in Audiology and SLT among students showed that the desire to work in a helping profession is the most influential factor, followed by the availability of jobs and contact with professionals in Audiology and SLT (Rockwood & Madison, 1993; Keshishian & McGarr, 2012; Stone & Pellowski, 2016). This study sought to replicate these studies in Ghana to better understand the factors influencing the choice of a career in Audiology and SLT among Ghanaian audiologists, SLTs, and students in the profession. Career satisfaction was also assessed to ascertain the level of job satisfaction among Audiologists, SLTs, and students in the field.

The findings of this study will help universities in Ghana to enhance recruitment into MSc programs in Audiology and SLT. It will also assist the effort to increase the number of professionals in the sector to further reduce the audiologists and SLTs to patient ratio.

2. METHODS

2.1. Participants

Forty-one individuals made up of 18 (44%) Audiologists, 11 (27%) SLTs, 5 (12%) MSc Audiology students, and 7 (17%) MSc SLT students responded to the questionnaire. Out of these 22 (54%) were males and 19 (46%) are females. Ten (24%) respondents were between the ages 20-29 years, 25 (61%) were between the ages 30-39 years, 2 (5%) were between the ages 40-49 years, and 4 (10%) were between 50-59

years. The demographic distribution of the participants is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic distribution of participants

Variables	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	22
	Female	19
Total	41	100
Age (years)	20-29	10
	30-39	24
	40-49	2
	50-59	4
Total	41	100

2.2. Materials

A survey made up of a 3-item questionnaire was adapted from Stone & Pellowski (2016) to evaluate factors influencing career decision among Audiologists and SLTs in Ghana. The first multiple choice question assessed how respondents first learned about the profession of Audiology and/or SLT. Those who chose 'other' where required to provide which other means they learned about the profession. The second question assessed factors that influenced respondents' choice of a career in Audiology or SLT. Those who chose 'other' were asked to indicate what influenced the choice of career. The third question assessed how likely respondents would recommend the profession of Audiology and/or SLT to others using a 5-point Likert scale.

2.3. Administration of Questionnaire

A link of the 3-item questionnaire was sent to the WhatsApp platform of the Speech Therapists and Audiologists Association of Ghana (STAAG) via Google form. There are 66 members on the STAAG WhatsApp platform. Respondents were required to respond voluntarily and were limited to one

response only. The identity of respondents was not known by the researchers.

3. RESULTS

Figure 1 shows responses from question 1 which asked respondents to select how they first learned about the field of Audiology and/or SLT. The responses to question 1 are: (a) "I received assessment and/or treatment services from an SLT and/or Audiologist", 2 (5%); (b) "A family member or friend received evaluation or treatment services from SLT and/or Audiologist", 8 (20%); (c) "I learned about the field from a Senior High School career counselor or university admission counselor", 0 (0%); (d) "I know an SLT or an Audiologist", 12 (29%); (e) "Internet", 10 (24%); (f) "Print media", 4(10%); (g) "Other", 5(12%).

Figure 2 represents replies obtained from question 2 which requested participants to select the factor most directly influenced their decision to become an SLT or an Audiologist. The responses for question 2 are as follows: (a) "Having a hearing or speech disorder", 2 (5%); (b) "Working in a helping profession", 33 (81%); (c) "Expected salary", 1 (2%); (d) "A family member works in the field", 2 (5%); (e) "Other", 3 (7%).

Figure 3 displays responses obtained from question 3 which is a 5-point Likert scale assessing how likely participants would recommend the profession of Audiology and/or SLT to others. The responses are as follows: (a) "Very likely", 37 (90%); (b) "Likely", 3 (7%); (c) "Neutral", 0 (0%); (d) "Not likely", 1 (3%); (e) "Very unlikely", 0 (0%).

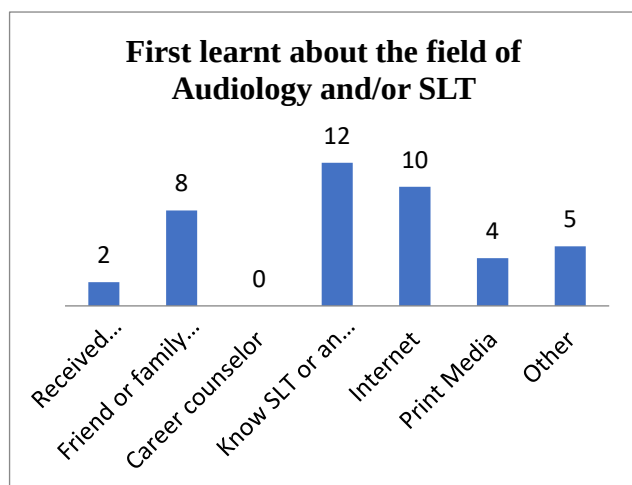


Figure 1: Number of participants indicating how they first learned about Audiology and/or SLT (n=41)

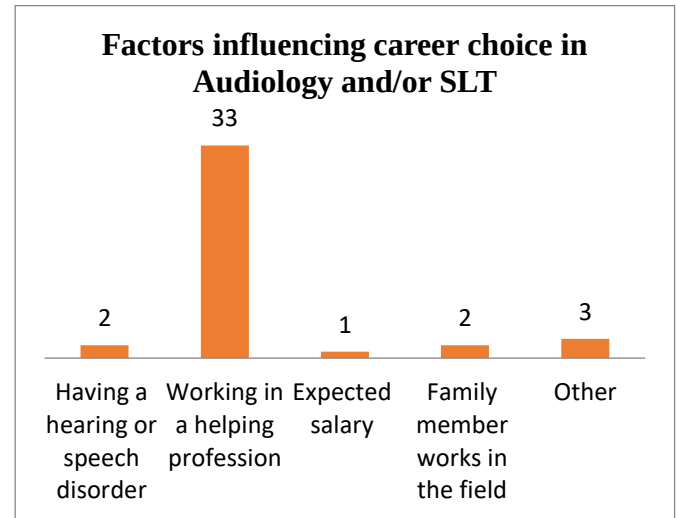


Figure 2: Number of participants indicating factors that influenced career choice in Audiology and/or SLT (n=41)

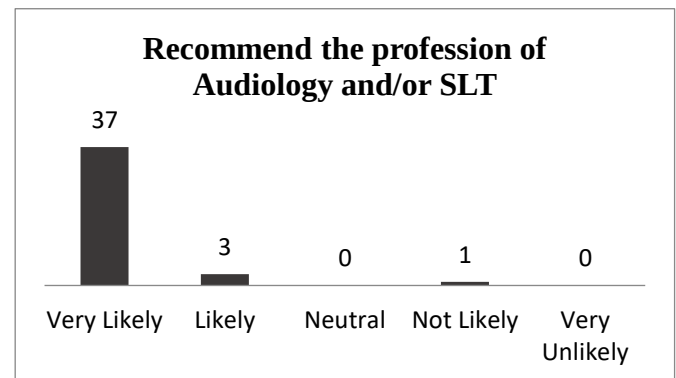


Figure 3: Number of participants indicating how likely they will recommend the profession of Audiology and/or SLT (n=41)

4. DISCUSSION

This study employed an online survey via a Google form link to identify the various factors that most directly affected career choice in the profession of Audiology and SLT among audiologists, SLTs, MSc Audiology and MSc SLT students in Ghana. Also, the likelihood to recommend the field of Audiology and/or SLT to others was assessed.

Concerning how participants first learned about the field of Audiology and/or SLT, it could be observed from Figure 1 that the majority (29%, n=12) indicated that they knew an Audiologist or an SLT. This is in line with the assertion made by Stone & Pellowski (2016), that when students are

exposed to professionals in the field of Audiology and/or SLT it helps them to acquire the interest and gives them the better understanding of these careers. The internet was the second highest (24%, n=10) response, indicating that internet based SLT and Audiology are emerging at a rapid pace (Meltzer et al., 2018; Preminger et al., 2018). Also, 20% (n=8) of the respondents have a friend or relative who received assessment and/or treatment services from an SLT and/or Audiologist. This in some way helped the participants in the familiarization of the profession (Stone & Pellowski, 2016). None of the participants indicated that they first learned about the profession of Audiology and/or SLT from a Senior High School career counselor or university admission counselor. This suggests that the field of Audiology and SLT are unknown to many Ghanaians including career counselors (Offei, Akotey, & Honu-Mensah, 2017). Some also indicated that they learned about the profession during their rotation as nurses.

From Figure 2 it is observed that 33 (81%) participants responded that working in a helping profession most directly influenced their decision to pursue a career in Audiology and/or SLT. This is consistent with findings obtained from studies conducted earlier (Rockwood & Madison, 1993; Keshishian & McGarr, 2012; Stone & Pellowski, 2016). Also, 2 (5%) participants indicated that they have a family member working in the field and another 2 (5%) reported that they had a hearing and speech disorder. Some other responses included; expected salary, working in a school setting, and the need for a challenging profession influenced their choice of a career in Audiology and/or SLT.

Concerning how likely participants would recommend the profession to others, 37 (90%) indicated “very likely, 3 (7%) responded “likely”, and 1 (3%) indicated “not likely” (Figure 3). These results suggest that most Audiologists and SLTs are satisfied with their choice of career. This assertion is consistent with studies conducted by ASHA (2018) that reported about 92% of Audiologist and SLTs expressed satisfaction of career choice.

5. CONCLUSION

Out of 41 respondents, 33 (81%) indicated that working in a helping profession most directly influenced their decision to pursue a career in

Audiology and/or SLT. The majority (29%, n=12) of participants first learned about the profession through an Audiologist and/or an SLT. Exposure to the field of Audiology and/or SLT helps to cultivate interest in potential students in the field. Also, 37 (90%) of participants are more likely to recommend the field of Audiology and/or SLT to others. Though most Audiologists and SLTs are satisfied with their jobs, many Ghanaians including career counselors are not aware of the professions. More awareness should be created to help people cultivate their interest in the field of Audiology and SLT.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

KINDLY SELECT THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

Profession

- ☐ Audiologist
- ☐ Speech-Language Therapist

☐ Audiology Student

☐ SLT Student

Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Age Range (Years)

- ☐ 20-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59

1. How did you first learn about the field of Audiology and/or Speech-Language Therapy?

- ☐ I received assessment and/or treatment services from a Speech-Language Therapist and/or Audiologist
- ☐ A family member or friend received evaluation or treatment services from SLT and/or Audiologist
- ☐ I learned about the field from a Senior High School career counselor or university admission counselor
- ☐ I know an SLT or an Audiologist
- ☐ Internet
- ☐ Print media
- ☐ Other
-

2. Which of the following most directly influence your decision to become an SLT or an Audiologist?

- ☐ Having a hearing or speech disorder
- ☐ Working in a helping profession
- ☐ Expected salary
- ☐ A family member works in the field
- ☐ Other
-

3. How likely would you recommend the profession of Audiology and/or SLT to others?

- ☐ Very Likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not Likely
- ☐ Very Unlikely