# Thesis abstract

**Health Communication for Deaf Persons: A Phenomenological Inquiry of Response to HIV and AIDS Information in Central**

**Uganda**

Health Communication (HC) has been variously stated as the single most critical intervention in efforts to prevent, reduce and manage the HIV and AIDS. The Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHH) are one of the groups which suffer from the effects of exclusion in most HC interventions. Little is known about how this group of vulnerable individuals perceive and respond to HIV and AIDS communication initiatives while there is a paucity of literature on the social support provided to them by their ‘Significant Others’ (SOs) who live with, interact and influence such persons on a regular basis. The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions, constructed meaning and response to HIV and AIDS communication by DHH persons and the influence of their SOs in the dissemination of such information to them. Data for this study – carried out in Central Uganda – was collected and analysed using semi-structured interviews inspired by the phenomenological research design. The principal finding was that DHH persons are unique individuals with different self-identities who construct different meanings from HIV and AIDS communication through processes that are predominantly affected by socio-cultural factors shaped by the multi-cultural environment in which they live. The study also demonstrates that most HIV and AIDS communication conjures unclear messages and images to DHH persons which greatly affect the way they perceive and respond to them. It further highlights the critical role of the deaf ‘silent’ grapevine language and a burgeoning influence of both formal and informal SOs in the interpersonal and group communication for these individuals. The main conclusion is that the design and implementation of HIV and AIDS communication for this ‘silent’ group of persons must take cognizance of the unique identities and a refocus on developing partnerships with, and harnessing the untapped potential of their SOs.

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