



# What is Social Participation? Establishing a definition in hearing research

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## Introduction

Extensive literature on social participation exists however there are considerable inconsistencies in how the concept is defined and how it should be measured:

- Rehabilitation field – focus is on the physical performance and objective outcomes.
- Public health – relates to society's expectations and roles valued (paid employment, volunteering, and involvement in policy making processes).
- Ageing literature – refers to informal interactions with family and friends.

## Aim

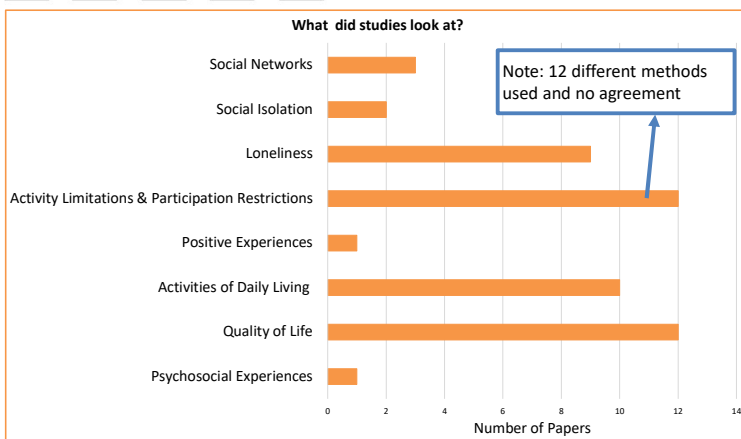
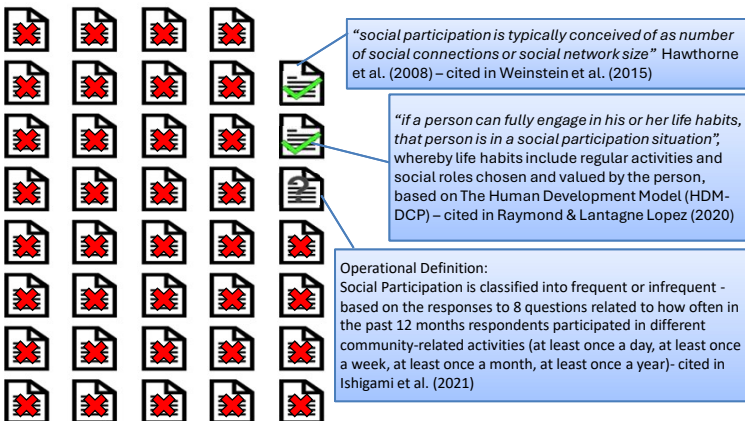
- We look at how social participation is currently defined in the hearing science literature by extending upon the recent review by Prieur Chaintreé (2024) that looked at the influence of hearing loss on social participation in older adults.
- Utilising new thinking from other disciplines we determine a working definition of social participation in the context of hearing research.

## Methods

- 41 papers selected for inclusion in the scoping review by Prieur Chaintreé et al. (2024) were selected for review. Two were excluded; a French full-text paper and unable to access a complete copy of a Californian master's thesis in the UK.
- The content of the 39 papers were reviewed for any conceptual definitions or operational definitions of the term social participation with no re-classifying or re-labelling from the papers examined.

## Results

- **No definition of the specific term 'social participation' in 36/39 papers**



## Findings

- No social participation definition (conceptual or operational) is universally cited across hearing science.
- When the definition is not clearly articulated, it can lead to ambiguity and this lack of consensus highlights the need for clarity going forward.
- Levasseur et al. (2010, 2022) generated a single definition - which is widely referenced - however it has constraints, and we suggest why it should be reframed:

*"A person's (who) involvement (how) in activities providing interactions (what) with others (with whom) in community life and in important shared spaces (where), evolving according to available time and resources (when), and based on the societal context and what individuals want and is meaningful to them (why)".*

Levasseur et al. (2022)

Reframing

- On reading the original definition in isolation the wording is not that transparent – we want to have a workable definition that is more self-explanatory and user friendly.
- We want to pick up the informal and everyday aspects of social participation (original definition infers a more formal perception).
- Inclusion of the word '**communication**' in the definition, indicating the sharing or exchanging of information – an important aspect within hearing science.
- The **degrees of interaction** is noteworthy - to examine the depth of participation within a situation.
- The **regularity** and **environmental/situational contexts** are important elements to capture when considering social participation in the hearing research field.
- Activities may also be undertaken out of sense of duty or **obligation**, while Levasseur's definition suggests positive experiences.

Proposed new working definition:

**A person's activities involving communication with others in degrees of interaction occurring with variable regularity and in varying environmental and situational contexts, serving the meaningful fulfilment of needs, desires and obligations.**

## Future works

- This PhD will seek to gain comprehensive insight into the impact of hearing ability on social participation in a longitudinal study looking at the provision of hearing aids and considering the key communication partner.
- Importantly, social participation is not an identical or uniform experience for everyone, and the intention is to uncover information related to both the objective and subjective elements by using the interrogative pronouns – who, what, with whom, how, when, where and why.
- Planned use of the following methodology in a mixed methods approach:
  - Social network analysis (SNA)
  - Ecological momentary assessment (EMA)
  - Questionnaires

## References

- Levasseur et al., 2022. *Age and ageing*, 51(2). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afab215>
- Levasseur et al., 2010. *Social science & medicine* (1982), 71(12), 2141-2149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.09.041>
- Prieur Chaintreé et al., 2024. *Research on Aging*, 46(1), 72-90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01640275231174561>

