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The knowledge of the Municipal Guard of Curitiba about the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), deafness and deaf people

O conhecimento da Guarda Municipal de Curitiba a respeito da Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Libras), da surdez e do surdo

Keywords

Sign language
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Descritores

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In Brazil, there is a considerable number of deaf people, sign language users, who should have access to equal opportunities. However, sign language is unknown by the most Brazilian population, especially those who work in public institutions, and deny the deaf their rights to equality. Therefore, several professionals, among them, the municipal guards, are not prepared for the diversity. **Purpose:** to investigate the knowledge of the Municipal Guards (MG) from Curitiba about the deaf, Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), and their service practices when they need to interact with deaf citizens. **Method:** It's a mixed crosscut study; data were collected by the application of a semi-structured questionnaire answered by 50 municipal guards, with questions on their knowledge about the deaf, the sign language and the service practices conducted by their corporation towards deaf people. Data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively by means of Bardin's Content Analysis. **Results:** The results demonstrate that participants have a limited knowledge of deafness and Libras. **Conclusion:** Most members of the Municipal Guard have a view of deaf people and the Brazilian Sign Language based on an organic perspective of deafness, and it was also observed that during their service practices towards deaf people, many of them could not either interact or communicate with them.

RESUMO

Introdução: No Brasil, há um número considerável de pessoas com surdez, usuárias de língua de sinais, as quais deveriam ter acesso à igualdade de oportunidades. Apesar disso, a língua de sinais ainda é desconhecida por parte da população brasileira, especialmente os que trabalham em órgãos públicos, negando seus direitos de igualdade. Assim, em geral, vários profissionais, entre esses os guardas municipais, não estão preparados para a diversidade. **Objetivo:** Investigar o conhecimento dos membros da guarda municipal (GM) de Curitiba a respeito dos surdos, da Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Libras) e das práticas de atendimento diante da necessidade de interagir com cidadãos surdos. **Método:** Trata-se de um estudo transversal de natureza mista, cuja coleta de dados se deu por meio da aplicação de um questionário semiestruturado, respondido por 50 policiais da GM, com perguntas a respeito do conhecimento deles sobre os surdos e a língua de sinais e das práticas de atendimento realizadas por membros da corporação com pessoas surdas. Os dados foram tabulados e analisados em percentuais quantitativos e eixos de análise qualitativa, sob a Análise do Conteúdo de Bardin. **Resultados:** Os resultados demonstram que os participantes possuem conhecimento limitado da surdez e da Libras. **Conclusão:** A maioria dos integrantes da GM da cidade possui uma visão de surdos e da Língua Brasileira de Sinais baseada em uma perspectiva orgânica da surdez. Além disso, foi possível observar que, durante as práticas de atendimento desses servidores públicos com um cidadão surdo, muitos não conseguiram interagir nem se comunicar.

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INTRODUCTION

According to data released by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, in Portuguese) on July 1, 2015⁽¹⁾, 6.2% of the Brazilian population has some kind of hearing, visual, physical and/or intellectual impairment. Among those, the hearing-impaired account for 1.1% of the population, which corresponds to nearly 10 million people. From the total of the hearing impaired, 21% feature severe hearing loss, which, generally impairs the daily activities, and may cause a series of disabilities, especially linguistic ones.

In Paraná State, according to the census, 1,879,355 people with diverse types of disabilities were identified. Among them, 18,988 people cannot hear anything, 100,206 feature great difficulty in hearing, and 396,755 feature some hearing impairment⁽¹⁾. Concerning specifically the capital city of this State, Curitiba, the census of 2015 registered 79,185 hearing impaired, several degrees of disability.

Based on these data, in Brazil, there is a considerable number of disabled people. Consequently, in the past years, specific public policies for this share of the population have established technical criteria and regulations, which define the participation and inclusion of this population in the society, signaling that those people must have equal opportunities, accessibility, no discriminations, respected and valued in their diversities^(2,3).

An example of that legislation is the Law number 13.146/2015⁽²⁾, which aims to ensure and promote, in equal conditions, the exercise of the fundamental rights and freedom for the disabled, viewing their social inclusion and citizenship.

Accessibility is understood as a dynamic process, associated not only to the mobility and to technological development, but also to the societal development, which comprises citizens from diverse groups, with the right to social and economic participation, leisure and education. Keeping in mind that this study focuses on the hearing impaired, users of the sign language, it reflects on the accessibility of this share of the population⁽⁴⁾.

The discussion on the accessibility of the deaf users of the sign language has expanded since 2002, when the Law number 10.436⁽³⁾ was passed. It recognized, in its article 1, the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) as their legal means of communication and expression. Additionally, in its article 2, it ensures that the public authority, in general, must support and spread its use in an institutionalized way, being the current, objective means of communication of the deaf communities in Brazil.

Subsequently, Decree number 5.626/05⁽³⁾, art. 17, established that this share of the population has the right to an interpreter of Libras in public settings, to study in bilingual schools, to health, among other criteria.

With Law number 13.146/15⁽²⁾ coming into effect, the legal regulations discussed again the deaf access by eliminating the linguistic barriers faced by the Libras users, claiming that one of the ways to eliminate such barriers is the mandatory presence of interpreters in public settings, such as health units, hospitals, police precincts, among others.

Despite the law, the mandatory presence of interpreters in public settings has not been complied. Thus, most Brazilian

public institutions are not adapted to the reality of the sign language users⁽⁵⁾.

Moreover, the sign language is unknown by part of the Brazilian population, especially for those who work in the public service, denying their rights to equality. Thus, in general, public service professionals are not prepared for the diversity. Among them, the municipal guards or municipal police officers, who play an important role in the public services of Brazilian cities, as they provide immediate help to the population, as well as the conflict resolution occurring in those contexts.

According to the Law number 13.022/14⁽⁶⁾, the municipal guards are professionals committed to the society, to protecting citizens' human rights, to preserving life, performing preventive rounds, in addition to the problems in the exercise of Public Security activities. In police approaches, officers usually identify themselves by a voice command, urging the approached citizen to stop, show his/her hands, turn his/her back and identify him/herself. In addition, the use of other commands to reduce risk for the involved is common: to request the approached citizen to stand still and not to make sudden movements. In such situations of police approach, it is quite usual that the stress level of the involved is high, aggravated in case of deaf users of the sign language, who fail to understand oral language, and their use of gestures or signs are usually unknown by the officers. Thus, misunderstandings may occur in such approaches⁽⁷⁾.

Although the law establishes that civil servants must warrant any citizens' rights, the Law number 13.022/14⁽⁶⁾, article 11, establishes that the municipal guards should have specific training and educational level which meet their attributions, in order for them to perform their job more effectively. Thus, they must have complete high school level and go through municipal training process. The training, 720 hours, comprises disciplines related to public security and human rights. It calls attention the fact that themes regarding the rights (with legal notions) of the elderly, the child and the adolescent, the disabled, the consumer, ethnics/race, gender, religion, sex orientation are addressed in only 16 hours of class.

Moreover, necessary to point out that, during the literature review for this manuscript, no studies were found that discuss the theme of the deaf accessibility in the national public security, or studies on the training of such professionals.

As we understand the importance for the Brazilian deaf people, sign language users, to have egalitarian access to all the social sectors, and this access should mainly occur by means of visual resources, such as the sign language. In the same sense, the Brazilian municipal guard, in most public places in the country, must protect all the population, this study aims to investigate the knowledge of the MG members from Curitiba, Paraná State/Brazil, on the deaf and Libras. It also aims to examine the service practices of these public servants when they confront situations of interaction with a deaf citizen.

METHOD

It is a mixed crosscut study, with data collection by means of a semi-structured questionnaire, open and closed questions,

regarding the knowledge of the municipal guards on Libras and the deaf, in addition to their service practices when they are confronted with a deaf subject or hearing impaired. The questions were elaborated and applied to three officers from the Municipal Guard to find about their understanding about the research, and as all of them could respond them without any difficulties, the study was applied to other officers.

For the professionals' selection, sampling by accessibility was chosen, being included those who participated in a professional qualification course held by the MG from Curitiba.

During that course, held at the MG headquarters in the city, its participants were invited to participate in the research. Those, who accepted, were informed about the objectives of the study, and signed the free informed consent form, which ensured the information confidentiality. Subsequently, each participant responded the questionnaire, individually and in writing, without the researcher's interference. Average time to respond the questionnaires was 30 minutes.

The final sample comprised 50 municipal guards. The inclusion criteria in the research limited the participants to those who were municipal guards, and volunteered to participate in the study. All the participants, for anonymity purposes, were identified as "P" (participant) and "n" (numbered) from 1 to 50, in the sequence of the tabulations.

The qualitative responses were analyzed by means of Bardin's content analysis⁽⁸⁾, which enables the recognition of meanings in different types of speeches, based on criteria inferences that allow the understanding of the gathered data in thematic structures. Those data were pre-selected and categorized in two axes: 1. Knowledge on Libras and deafness; 2. Service practices to the deaf citizens.

The quantitative data were submitted to statistical analysis of significance (Chi-squared or Fischer's test, when the total of the frequencies was inferior to 30, in order to assess the significant correlation of some questions to quantitative results).

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee, opinion 1,315,024, under number 4988715.5.000.5529/2015.

RESULTS

Mean age of the 50 participants was 43.5 years (minimum age of 25 years, and maximum age of 58 years), standard deviation of 8.22 years. Sample profile shows that 47 participants (94%) were males, and three (6%) were females. Regarding their educational level, 46% of the sample only concluded high school, 36% reported that they had higher education, and 18% reported that they had a postgraduation course. Average job length was 14.92 years, with minimum length of six years and maximum length of 31 years performing this job.

The axis 1 – named Knowledge on Libras and Deafness, comprised the tabulated data on how the participants define Libras (Table 1), who the Libras users are (Table 2), and how they define deafness (Table 3).

Table 1. Distribution of the sample in the category of Libras definition

Response categories	Frequency	%
Sign language	26	52%
Communication method/code	12	24%
Others	4	8%
Did not answer	8	16%

Source: Source: research data

Table 2. Distribution of the sample in the category of Libras user

Response categories	Frequency	%
Deaf/mute	17	34%
HI (hearing impaired)	9	18%
Others	12	24%
Did not know the answer	12	24%

Source: Source: research data

Table 3. Distribution of the sample in the category of deafness definition

Response categories	Frequency	%
Physical/hearing impairment	36	72%
Isolation, sadness	5	10%
Obstacle/barrier/disease	3	6%
Others	3	6%
Did not answer	3	6%

Source: Source: research data

The question about who uses that language, 38 participants (76%) responded that they knew who Libras users were, and 24% reported that they did not know who used that language. The characterization of the participants' responses is shown in Table 2.

Among the participants who responded that they knew who used the sign language, 52% wrote in their answers, "the deaf, hearing impaired or mute". By distributing that percentage among the deaf, the mute and the hearing impaired, the following percentage was obtained: 34% for the deaf and mute, and 18% for the hearing impaired.

Still about this axis, another question addressed the theme on how the participants defined deafness, and their responses allowed organizing the data according to the categories shown in Table 3.

In axis 2_ Service practices to the deaf, the professionals answered questions related to their work in the Municipal Guard, regarding the services held to this share of the population. By responding whether they had already had any occurrences involving a deaf subject, 34 participants answered no, that is, 68% of the sample, and 16 participants answered yes, that is, 32% of the sample.

Among those who answered that they had already had occurrences involving deaf subjects, 62% reported that the contact had been a police approach, in which the deaf citizen was suspect of an illegal act.

The 37.5% who reported having had contact with deaf subjects on duty, stated that it happened in situations when a deaf citizen requested help or asked for information.

When asked whether they had had any difficulties in rendering service to the deaf, 87.5% answered yes, and only 12.5% answered no.

Another question in this axis is whether the professional could communicate with the deaf subject. 81% of the participants answered yes, by means of gestures, written and visual communication. The other 19%, who reported some kind of similar occurrences, could not communicate with the deaf citizen at all.

The professionals, who could communicate with the deaf, used several resources; 31% of them reported that they used written Portuguese language, 23% could communicate by lip reading, and 46% reported the use of gestures to interact.

On the question whether they knew any municipal guards who had had any occurrences involving a deaf subject, 35 participants answered no, which accounted for 70% of the total sample. The other 15 participants reported that they knew other guards who had occurrences involving a deaf subject.

When asked about the type of occurrence that the officer they knew had, involving that population, 38% of the participants reported service rendering and help with some requested information. Police approach and service delivered to victims of crimes account for 31% of the reported cases, and the other 31% of the participants stated that they did not know what type of service was rendered by their colleague from the MG.

Regarding the quantitative analysis, some statistical tests were applied to part of the results in order to verify if the results could be correlated to the participants' age, job length, and educational level. The initial hypothesis was that the participants working longer as MG, and having higher level of schooling might have more relevant knowledge on the deaf and the sign language. Moreover, they might have more positive results during police approaches. By means of the Chi-squared test (or Fisher's test), when the sum of the frequencies was inferior to 30, no significant correlation ($p > 0.05$) between age, job length and educational level of the participants was verified.

DISCUSSION

According to the sample profile, participants' mean age was 43.5 years, ranging from 25 to 58 years, standard deviation of 8.22 years. Sample profile evidences that most participants were males: 47 participants – 94% of the total, and only three were females (6% of the sample). Data of the corporation from this city in Southern Brazil report that it comprised 1,533 males and only 133 females. That fact is probably related to the MG institution, founded in hierarchy, regulations and rituals anchored in male values and tenets, according to a crystalized, daily culture, and assimilated by men and women, marked by power relations, which determine the limits and advances for women's admission in the institution. Thus, the Brazilian public security field basically comprised only males not long ago⁽⁹⁾.

Concerning the level of schooling, results evidenced that almost half of the sampling only concluded high school, 36% reported concluding higher education, and 18% reported

attending a postgraduation course. It is worth mentioning that High School is mandatory for the admission in the municipal guard career. Therefore, it is still common that these professionals only have this level of schooling, once it is not mandatory other qualifications to be admitted in the corporation. Only in 2014, in Paraná State, Law number 14.522/2014⁽¹⁰⁾ established a career plan for the members of the MG, which allows them to advance in the career ("title advancement").

As for the job length, the collected sample evidenced a mean rate of 14.92 years, with minimum time of six years, and maximum time of 31 years in the job. Considering the period of three years on probationary phase, most professionals are assumed to be experienced in the area.

Regarding the data shown in Table 1, on Libras knowledge, most participants answered that Libras is a sign language used by the deaf, or it is a code or method of communication.

Although more than half of the sample considers Libras as a language, many consider it a communication code among the deaf. That view seems to be connected with the notion of instrumental language, which does not consider that the language needs a relation to the others. Thus, in this work^(11,12), language is considered to be in steady evolution, and it is used by the speakers to meet their concrete enunciation needs. In order to understand a language, it is necessary to perceive the linguistic forms as flexible and variable, not unchangeable and identical, just like in the view of the language as a code. Other four participants (9.52%) defined Libras with information which is not straight related to the sign language, including one of them mixed Libras with the Braille system.

Additionally, among the responses categorized as others, Libras is reported by some of them as a course. That answer corroborates the reality, as there are several courses on the sign language under this name. Another participant answered that Libras are hearing-impaired people, that is, this participant seems to know that those words entail the same semantic field; therefore, he mixed the language denomination with the deaf subject. Still another participant stated that Libras is "to speak with your hands".

Table 2 outlines the categories of whom the Libras users are. Most responses state that deaf or hearing-impaired subjects use Libras. Although, in the deafness area, these two denominations generally mean different knowledge fields, deafness can also be defined as hearing impairment⁽¹³⁾. This view is usually related to the clinical-medical area, where hearing disability needs to be treated and cured. The clinical area commonly refers to the deaf as hearing impaired, disregarding the cause of the loss or its severity. On the other hand, studies that denominate deafness as such are usually from another field of knowledge, which claims that the deaf are a linguistic minority community, characterized by sharing the sign language and their own cultural values, habits and socialization ways⁽¹¹⁻¹⁴⁾.

There is no neutrality in the choice of the words during the process of enunciative elaboration, once the use of the language is linked to an appreciation set of the language system⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁷⁾. Thus, the choice of the word mute by some participants unveils what they heard about deafness and their social perceptions. That word may mean not only the lack of voice (muteness),

but also the intellectual disability attributed to those subjects. Historically, people who cannot speak are assumed not to be able to think, suffering from an intellectual disability, as they cannot make use of the oral language.

In the category others, 13 participants (31.57%) reported that Libras users are translators, interpreters and family members of deaf subjects, people who need to communicate with others, that is, their responses indicate that translators, interpreters and family members are people in contact with the deaf and their means of communication, once they sometimes use Libras to interact.

Table 3 shows data on the definition of deafness. Most participants (72%) define deafness as hearing impairment, loss of hearing or not hearing. That high percentage of answers is possibly related to the evidences of how deafness is perceived by society, which is the impairment related not to hear at all or decreased hearing. Possibly, such answers are connected with speeches from a pathological, clinical bias, which assumes that there are “normal” and disabled people, who need to be cured, medicated⁽¹³⁾.

Responses related to sadness, loneliness and isolation are also verified in the collected data (10%). Such responses seem to imply negative ideas on deafness, that is, if you are deaf, then you are disabled, sad, and lonely. Deafness is not only bound to the body limits of the individual. It is necessary to include other people’s reactions as an integrating, crucial part of that phenomenon, once those reactions eventually define someone as disabled or non-disabled⁽¹⁸⁾.

Many responses to the questionnaire seem to be connected with the common-sensical view of deafness, that is, they reflect the knowledge acquired by men based on their lived world experiences and observations. They are social discourses, which are loaded with daily marks⁽¹⁹⁾.

According to a research study⁽²⁰⁾, common sense entails the popular knowing, understood by the author as full of misconceptions, contradictions and preconceptions, which vulgar knowledge reflects grounded, true knowledge. Knowledge that comprises common sense features lifetime knowing, passed on through generations. It is grounded in the cultural heritage, whose function is to guide human survival in its varied aspects.

It is by means of the common sense that children learn what is dangerous and what is safe, what they can or cannot eat, what is fair or unfair, to distinguish good from evil, among other norms. Common sense articulates with science, including clinical-medical science and philosophy in order to systematize what we learn by formal, informal and, sometimes, unconscious processes, and includes a set of valuations, entailing historical facts, religious beliefs, scientific information made popular by the mass media, and the accumulated personal experience^(19,20). Thus, it is predictable to assume that those MG members, who did not have any content on the deaf or Libras in their educational background, carry commonsensical ideas.

Only one participant in this study had voluntarily attended a distance course on Libras, offered by the Ministry of Justice (MJ), in a partnership with the MG, a total of 60 class hours.

The availability of this content to the Public Security institutions by the MJ, even though as distance education, may unveil that the public authority has begun an activity aiming at spreading

and using Libras. In spite of that, it should be pointed that the course attended by the participant was distance learning in a voluntary way, that is to say, it is not part of the MGs’ training curriculum, or included in the MG training of the studied city.

As for the answers which define deafness as a kind of barrier, obstacle or disease (6% of the sample), it is possible to infer that they are related to the clinical view of deafness. The search for solutions to the problem of deaf people’s communication is founded in two grounds: that one offered by the biological sciences, which uses technological breakthroughs to correct it, and the one connected with the human sciences, in which Libras is considered the language of the deaf⁽¹³⁾.

According to the data in axis 2, when answering the question whether they had already had an occurrence involving a deaf subject, 34 participants responded no, accounting for 68% of the sample, and 16 people answered yes, 32% of the sample. Currently, the total of municipal police officers is 1,341, with 455 officers working in the night shift, and 158 mainly take care of the public property, such as schools and primary health care units, without any direct contact with the population.

Among those who answered having occurrences involving deaf subjects, 62% reported that the contact occurred at the moment of the police approach. The others (37.5%) reported having contact with deaf subjects on duty in situations that the deaf asked for help or information. In general, those situations occur because the MGs are easily identified by their uniforms, and they can be found in several public places, aiming at the immediate help to the population.

Concerning the difficulty in delivering service to the deaf, 87.5% of the participants answered yes, and only 12.5% answered no. The main difficulty in rendering service to the deaf, according to the participants who reported difficulties, is related to the ignorance of the necessary procedures for a good interaction with the deaf.

Regarding the difficulties in the interaction with the deaf, the importance of the language as the mediator of interaction stands out, once it is by means of the language that human beings become sociocultural subjects^(11,21-23). A study⁽¹⁴⁾ explains that the deaf, in general, undergo difficulties during their process of language appropriation, and many deaf subjects, children of listening parents, fall behind, once that process depends on the social environment, on the communicative and social interactions, on the hearing and a common language between the children and their parents. Therefore, in the case of the MG officers, we can assume that those difficulties are even greater.

Thus, when questioned whether the participants could communicate with the deaf subject during a police approach, 81% of the participants answered yes, using other communication resources rather than speech, such as gestures, writing and eye communication. The other 19%, who had any occurrences, could not communicate with the deaf citizen, which can be understood as occurrences that the MG could not render quality service, or even solve the situation for unknowing Libras.

The officers who could communicate with the deaf used several resources: 31% reported the use of written Portuguese language; 23% could communicate by means of lip reading, and 46% reported that gestures were used for the interaction.

According to the questionnaire responses, we can assume that it is essential for the municipal police officers to be increasingly prepared and updated to work with any citizens in society, once they are responsible for serving the population the most varied ways. Therefore, they need to be qualified to interfere, mediate, help and effectively play their role. That is because the safeguards of the social rights, as well as the right to the access and communication, are integrating instruments of the human rights for any individuals, whether disabled or not⁽²⁴⁾.

The MG is usually present in the greatest part of the events, being, or should be a facilitator in conflict mediations, releasing information and offering for help, extremely relevant aspects for the population. Therefore, the MG plays a fundamental role in society, and their interaction with all the citizens should be based on the dialogical interactions, which are considered fundamental in order to put down any linguistic barriers.

Another aspect to consider is related to the municipal guards' educational level, that is, only high school level is mandatory. It is understood that a person with this educational level and a fragmented training course can hardly have a broader, more critical view, so that he/she can serve the population with all its cultural, ethnical, religious, political and social diversity.

Based on the analyzed data, many municipal guards are perceived to ignore deafness and the sign language, and most of them had difficulties in communicating and interacting when they had contact with that population. Although the studied sample comprises only 50 participants, that must be the reality of the greatest part of the public officers in the Brazilian public security area, once studies on this theme are inexistent. Therefore, other studies should be developed with that population, and based on their results; proposals should be elaborated, such as the introduction of disciplines in the MG training course, which reflect on the population diversity, as well assign language courses that may facilitate the interaction between the MG and the deaf users of the sign language.

Although this study focused on the deaf population, user of the sign language from only one Brazilian city, we can be infer that most professionals, who work for the MG in several Brazilian cities, do not have deep knowledge on the diversity of the national population, especially on the disabled people. That is justified by the fact that this theme is not addressed in the MG training course. Therefore, it is fundamental to attend a training course that considers the issues of accessibility, and it should be a primary requisite, due to the social commitment that the municipal guards have to the citizens.

CONCLUSION

According to the results in this study, most officers from the MG in the city of Curitiba have the view of the deaf and Libras grounded in an organic perspective of deafness. Moreover, during their service practices towards deaf citizens, they could not interact or communicate with them.

Therefore, it is fundamental that continuing training programs be elaborated, with broad qualification, by means of dialogical interactions, which foster more discussion on relevant themes for the society, such as the Libras. Such continuing training

should qualify the MG officer with the minimum conditions to render service for the deaf user of Libras in his/her differences and singularities.

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Authors' contributions

We also declare that ASP, ACG substantially contributed to the conception and planning, data analysis and interpretation, draft elaboration and critical review of the content, and the approval of the final manuscript version. APB, LTI, TRL, RT, GM, KBB contributed to the data analysis and interpretation,; content elaboration and review, and approval of the final manuscript version.