

Accessibility of Religion for the Deaf Community

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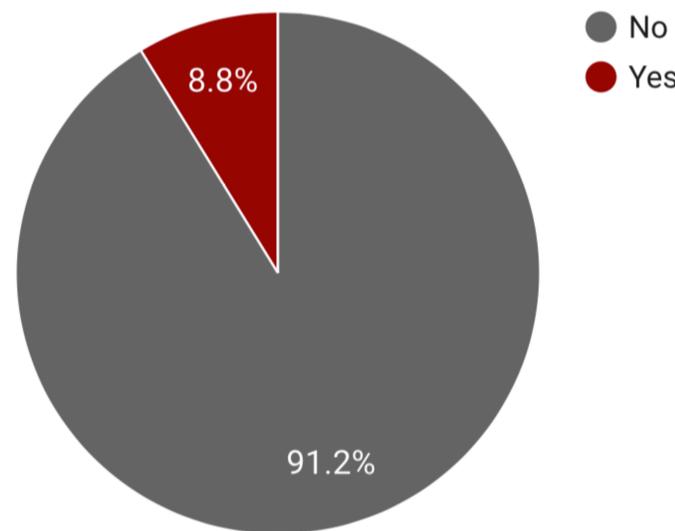
ABSTRACT

In the United States, about 6% of Deaf people attend church on a regular basis, compared to 40% for the hearing population (Linderman, 1990, p. 2). One assumption is this difference is due to limited accessibility of religion for the Deaf. The average Bible is translated to English at an eighth grade reading level (Bible Translation Guide, n.d.). However, research shows that the average eighteen year old Deaf student reads at a fourth grade reading level (Morere, 2011). The purpose of this study is to examine how different religions in the United States are accessible to Deaf persons. This research relied on a literature review and analysis of available data about world religions and the ways in which they are accessible to the Deaf. Results show that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are the most accessible religions in the United States, respectively. Specifically, Christianity, as a whole, is the most accessible religion to Deaf people in the United States because more Christian churches offer interpreting services, hold Deaf Bible study classes, and partner with Deaf churches than any other religion. Local Christian churches in the Tuscaloosa, AL area were also contacted to determine the ways that they were accessible to the Deaf community. Future research should examine how the accessibility of a religion is related to the amount of Deaf followers of that religion. Overall, findings support the notion that practitioners of religions should consider partnering with the Deaf community to create Deaf churches led by Deaf pastors when aiming to reach Deaf populations.

METHODS

- A literature review and analysis of available data about world religions and the ways in which they are accessible to the Deaf community was conducted.
- The results from this analysis showed Christianity to be the most accessible religion for the Deaf community.
- Local Christian churches (N=57) of all denominations were contacted to determine if they had any forms of accessibility for the Deaf community.
- Data collected from the churches were used to create a pie chart expressing the percentage of local Tuscaloosa Christian churches that offer some form of accessibility for the Deaf community.

Deaf Accessible Tuscaloosa Churches



Silent Hands, Grace Bailey. (Da Vinci's Studio)

CONCLUSIONS/SIGNIFICANCE

In conclusion, Christianity is the most accessible religion for the Deaf community. Christian churches of all denominations offer interpreted worship services, hold Deaf Bible study classes, and partner with local Deaf churches. Findings also suggest that practitioners of religion should partner with the local Deaf community to create Deaf churches led by Deaf ministers when aiming to reach the Deaf community. Overall, the Southern Baptist Convention is the most accessible denomination of Christianity for the Deaf community, as they currently have 58 Deaf churches (SBC Deaf Churches, n.d.) and 16 Deaf church plants and are planning for 84 more Deaf church plants (Church Planting Map, n.d.). The Southern Baptist Convention also employs more than 1,000 interpreters for their majority hearing churches (Costello, 1986, p. xiii).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future researchers should examine how the accessibility of a religion for the Deaf community relates to the amount of Deaf followers of that religion.

Future religious practitioners should consider partnering with the local Deaf community to create Deaf churches in order to reach Deaf populations.

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