ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING COMMUNITY (SUMMARY)

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol31/iss4/5

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING COMMUNITY

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Principal Topic
A growing stream of entrepreneurship research has explored the dynamics and characteristics of non-majority entrepreneurs. Despite considerable interest in non-majority entrepreneurship, in general, and entrepreneurship within the disadvantaged community, in particular, virtually no research has been conducted on entrepreneurship within the disabled community. This paper reports the findings of a study exploring the nature of entrepreneurial activities and proclivities within the deaf and hard of hearing community. It also seeks to explore the differences between hearing and deaf entrepreneurs. A particular emphasis is placed on self-efficacy and the impact of communications enabling technology in fostering new business creation.

Method
This study utilizes both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (survey data) research methods to explore the dynamics of entrepreneurship within the deaf and hard of hearing community. Twenty-five deaf and hard of hearing entrepreneurs were interviewed concerning a wide range of issues related to their backgrounds, motivations, and ventures. Two parallel surveys were administered: One to the alumni of the largest US deaf institution of higher learning and another to a hearing group of similar educational backgrounds and ages. The surveys explored issues related to general self-efficacy, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, entrepreneurial motivations, entrepreneurial barriers, and the impact of computer mediated communication, etc.

Results and Implications
This paper provides preliminary insights into the deaf entrepreneurial community and the proclivities and efficacies of non-entrepreneurs. The results suggest that deaf owned businesses tend to be smaller and lifestyle oriented. The interviews reveal that many deaf entrepreneurs were pushed into entrepreneurial activity rather than moving towards a longer term career goal of entrepreneurial activities. A lifelong pattern of adversity and adaptation emerged among most of the deaf entrepreneurs. This adaptability was present in their entrepreneurial efforts. Survey results reveal a variety of motivational and entrepreneurial self-efficacy differences among deaf and hearing entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs with entrepreneurial intentions.

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