

Deaf British Sign Language users and sexual health

“Hard to reach or excluded?”

Damian Brewer

**Hands up if you have
worked with a Deaf sign
language user?**

Background

I am a CODA (Child of Deaf Adults) as well as having a hearing loss myself (deaf in right ear, some loss in left)

- Bilingual in British Sign Language and English
- Half my social time is with other sign language users

Have worked in various roles directly with Deaf people in past 28 years (care work, employment adviser, deaf-blind running guide) and directly supporting my Deaf father (and mother when she was alive), helping to set up Deaf Rainbow (Deaf LGBTQ+ charity)

Currently working as a Public Health Principal in Croydon Council, in the Public Health team (various projects)

Completed Masters in Public Health (dissertation focussed looking at Deaf access to sexual health services)

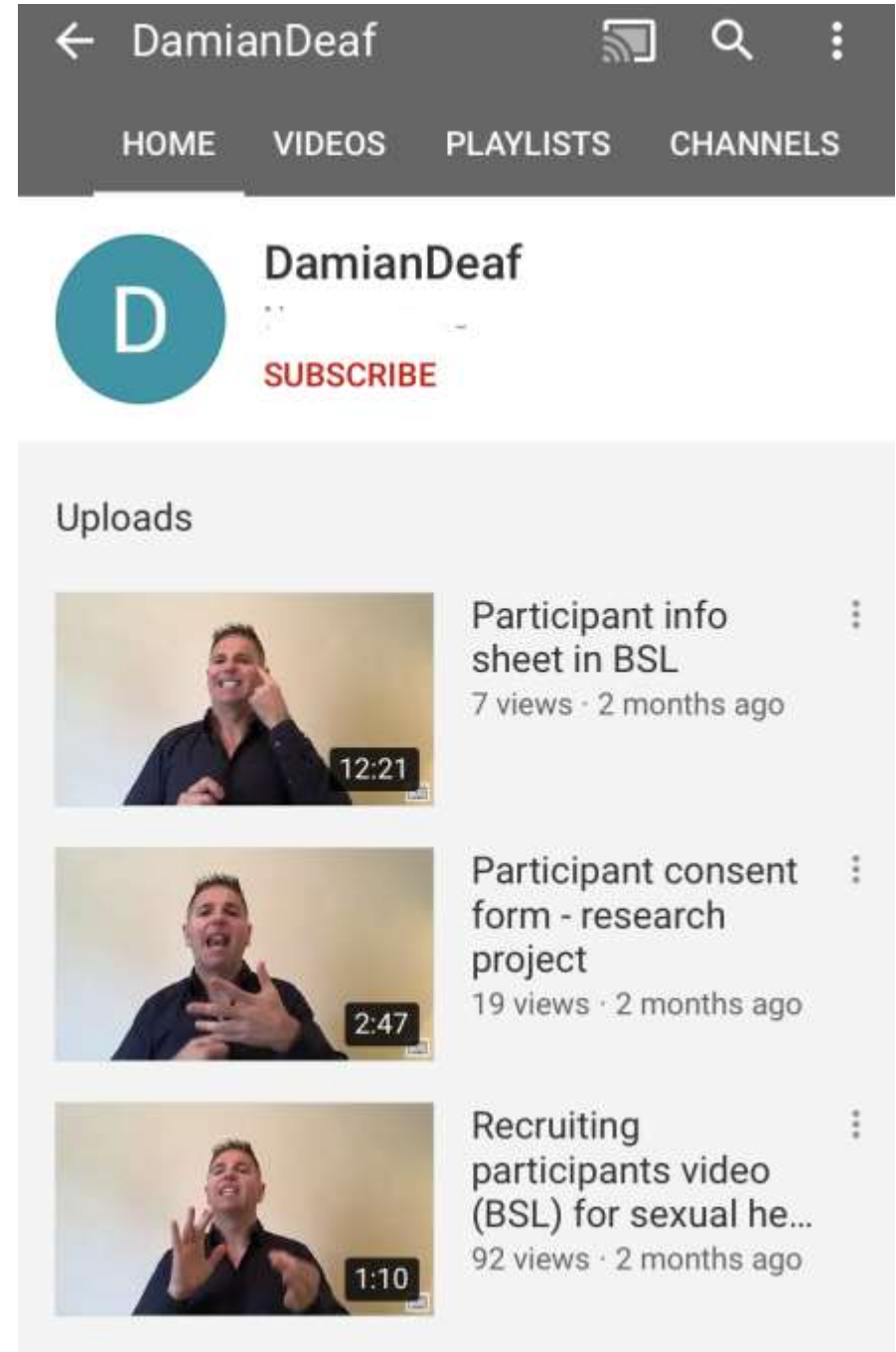
British Sign Language

- Roughly 1 in 1000 people use BSL **50-70,000 UK wide –**
how does that translate to your service?
- (numbers vary, BDA, AOHL, Census)
- Recognised language within the UK (recent BSL Act 2022)
- Some Deaf people find writing and reading English difficult
- Own grammar and structure (not gestures)
- Not a literal translation of spoken word
 - “Where do you live?” is signed “You.. Live.... Where?”
- May refer to capital D for Deaf – proud linguistic minority (using social model of disability, and moving away from medicalised perspective of Deafness/hearing loss)

Research

An evaluation study using qualitative phenomenological (looking at people's lived experience) methods, of the experiences of Deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users who had accessed sexual health services in the South of England

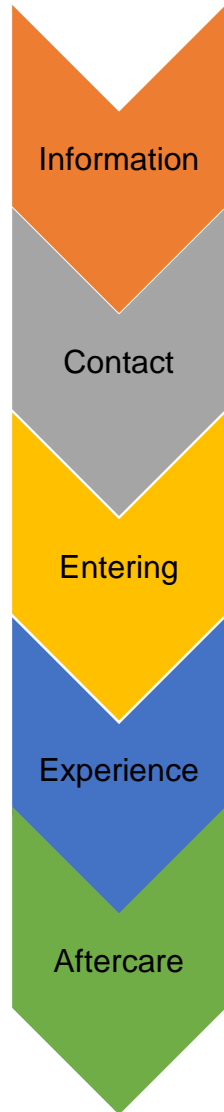
- Recruitment – BSL videos on YouTube –Participant information sheet, consent form and recruitment video
- Small number of people interviewed in BSL (in person or remotely) and videos recorded/transcribed
- Conversations were analysed, and themed (via NVivo software)



The image shows a screenshot of a YouTube channel page for 'DamianDeaf'. The channel name is at the top, with navigation tabs for HOME, VIDEOS, PLAYLISTS, and CHANNELS. Below the channel name is a circular profile picture with a white 'D' on a teal background and a red 'SUBSCRIBE' button. The 'Uploads' section lists three videos:

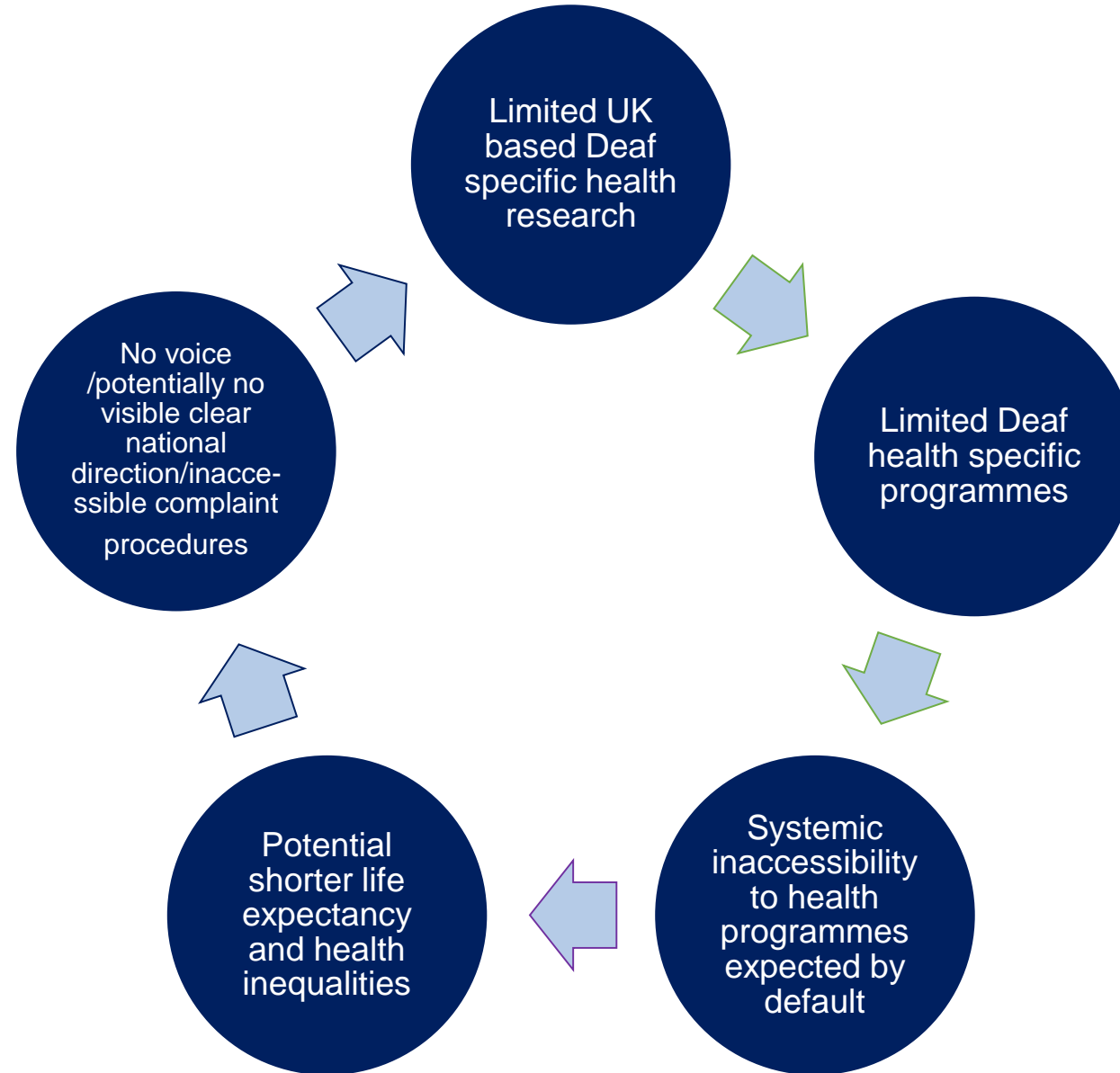
- Participant info sheet in BSL**: 7 views · 2 months ago. Video duration: 12:21.
- Participant consent form - research project**: 19 views · 2 months ago. Video duration: 2:47.
- Recruiting participants video (BSL) for sexual he...**: 92 views · 2 months ago. Video duration: 1:10.

Findings – 5 main themes



- Some participants struggled to understand written information on websites due to no content in BSL
- Limited opportunities for participants to request BSL interpreters or to alert services that participant is Deaf
- Some issues with reception space, in terms of participants missing their name being called out, and communication with reception staff
- Range of communication experiences with healthcare professionals (lip-reading, signing, pen and paper, computer, BSL interpreting)
- Staff noted to be supportive, but not always able to meet participants needs
- Unclear for some participants how they can access aftercare

How do we break this vicious cycle for UK's Deaf BSL users?



Solutions/recommendations

Transformation of sexual health services in England needs to include:

- Review of policies for Deaf inclusion (engage with local Deaf people/groups)
 - Improving the accessibility for Deaf people by providing more information in British Sign Language (be strategic – collaborate and share across sites, much info is replicable)
 - Accessible waiting areas (including Deaf friendly alerting)
 - Clear booking processes that allow for seamless booking of qualified interpreters and usage of interpreters where requested (online provision/access can work)
 - Deaf awareness to be delivered to staff who deal with service users to aid communication
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- The new BSL Act will put additional responsibilities on the public sector to do more for Deaf sign language users

Thank you

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