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**Hearing Voices Groups: A safe place to (re)connect**

Barbara Schaefer<sup>1</sup>, Jenny Boumans<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Parnassia Psychiatric Institute, THE HAGUE, The Netherlands

<sup>2</sup>Netherlands Institute of Mental Health and Addiction. Trimbos Institute., UTRECHT, The Netherlands

**Learning Goal:**

It seems that we need more safe places where people can be themselves and can share experiences regarding hearing voices without fear of rejection, prejudice or people wanting to take immediate action to try to stop the voices. However, creating such places can prove to be a challenge.

**Abstract Text:**

Hearing voices that others do not hear often leads to a sense of alienation and can be very confusing and frightening. Society generally regards these experiences as strange and deviant. Because of the stigma, many people who hear voices do not talk about them and feel that they have no safe place to speak openly about their experiences. Hearing Voices Groups can offer them such a safe place. As these groups continue to spread across the world, the demand for research into these groups increases.

The present study explored participants' experiences of attending Hearing Voices Groups in the Netherlands. Thirty one participants of eight Hearing Voices Groups across the country were interviewed about their experiences using semi-structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using a grounded theory approach to identify main themes and concepts. The main goal of the study was to better understand the different meanings that groups can have for participants and what the individual voices hearers gain by attending these groups.

Preliminary results will be presented and discussed in the context of the topic of the day (how to bridge the gap between the person who hears voices and family, friends and clinicians). For example, it appears that many participants share experiences in the Hearing Voices Group they never told others before or tell them in much more detail than they do outside the group (also often much more than they do with loved ones or their clinicians). This is a relieving experience. Participants are invited to discuss what they want to say to others and learn how to start sharing more with people outside the group. However, creating a place where everyone can say almost anything can be a challenge, especially regarding a Hearing Voices Group situated within a mental health care organisation.

**ON THE HEALING POWER  
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**