STAMMA Journal Club September 24th, 2024

**Paper:** “The Impact of Stuttering on Development of Self-Identity, Relationships, and Quality of Life in Women Who Stutter”

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**Journal:** American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology

**Access:** <https://pubs.asha.org/doi/full/10.1044/2018_AJSLP-ODC11-17-0201>

**Paper Summary:**

The paper describes a qualitative study *(i.e. text/verbal responses rather than numbers or categories)* that explores the experiences of women who stutter, focusing on their perceptions of stuttering, the impact of stuttering on their quality of life and how gender might impact these experiences.

The study involved nine women aged 35-80 years in Western Australia and used interviews and the OASES (Overall Assessment of the Speaker’s Experience of Stuttering) to gather data.

The findings revealed themes related to the impact of stuttering on self-perceptions, relationships, career choices, and gender dynamics in the workplace. The study also highlighted the need for tailored interventions and support for women who stutter, as well as the potential benefits of support groups for this population.

The OASES was used to quantify the impact of stuttering on the participants' lives, with overall impact scores ranging from mild to moderate, indicating a moderate rating across all women.

The study identified themes related to the impact of stuttering on self-perceptions, relationships, career choices, and gender dynamics in the workplace

The study also highlighted the limitations, such as the small sample size and the lack of representation of younger women and those with more quality-of-life impacts, suggesting the need for further research to explore these aspects.

**Possible things to think about:**

* What are the main questions that the researchers wanted to ask?
* What did the authors expect to find, prior to doing the research?
* Did the results reveal what the authors expected to find, or did they reveal something else?
* Was the study designed well? Could other methods have been used?
* Are there any cool things about this paper?
* What could be improved in the paper?
* What should be done to follow up from this study?

Discussion Points from the Session

* This study was useful to see some beginnings of general life trends but it would be interesting to explore them more to see whether these apply to women more generally.
* This paper has only 9 participants, which means it might be hard to know if these views really reflect those of women who stammer or just the views of these 9 people.
* Several of the people involved were also bilingual and had moved to Australia as adults. It would be interesting to see whether their views and opinions reflect that of the countries that they come from and how much this influences their perspectives -for example, does someone originally from Ireland have similar or different perspectives to someone from India or native to Australia? Due to the small sample size it’s hard to be able to draw these comparisons.
* Is there also a link between someone’s perceptions of stammering and the types of therapy and support they have received? For example, would someone who has focused on supports which encourage them to speak fluently feel differently to someone who has focused more on acceptance?
* In this study the women involved were aged between 35-80 years old, and it would be interesting to see whether younger women have similar views. Attitudes towards stammering and support for people who stammer has evolved significantly over the past 10 years, and it would be interesting to see whether this would be reflected in the perspectives of people across the lifespan.
* This included people’s thoughts about children who stammer – do boys and girls have similar perspectives or are their thoughts similar to what we see in adulthood? Are they similar to each other or is there a difference between the two genders?
* People were also interested in whether for across the lifespan hormones might play a part in a way that’s different to men e.g. during menopause and pregnancy whether this impacts on women’s perceptions of their speech and their stammer.
* In the article one of the women talked about not having children and her fears about being laughed at on the school playground. Does stammering have an impact on women’s feelings about having children? If they have children who stammer, what impact does this have and is it the same for men or people who don’t stammer with children who do?
* In this study people who were neurodiverse were not involved and it would be interesting to see whether the impact for them is similar or different. We know that a lot of people who stammer also have other neurodiversities such as ADHD and Autism – does it affect them in the same way?

Extra: Answering Your Questions

In the journal club session people were interested in whether hormonal changes (e.g. the menopause) have an impact on stammering. We were interested too, so a student did some research on it for us! Read what she found below…

The people in the paper were women aged between 35 and 80; women who have had a lifetime of stuttering and have probably experienced a variety of situations, but those experiences might overshadow one another. For example, if stammering is affected by hormones (Cherkasky, 2000) this would probably lead to increased stammering during puberty. However, as far as I recall the women did not mention any of this because it was outweighed by what they saw as more important impacts – their dating and their professional lives (which makes sense, but leaves a gap in the research).

As for the hormones part, there's some research into how hormonal cycles affect someone’s singing voice (Hoover, 1991). There is some old research which suggested the endocrine system (a messenger system in the body which uses hormones) might be involved in stammering (Glaser, 1936), while more recent work mention the role of a certain cellular receptor of oestrogen (Bilal, Kurutas, Oran, 2018).

These suggest the possibility that the differences observed in men and women's experiences of stammering might be affected by more than sociological/gender roles factors. There might also be an underlying biological difference.

Additionally, for many women, going through menopause causes significant psychological distress (Kharkanis and Mathur, 2016). Having both hormonal and psychological changes at the same time might affect someone’s stammer more than the hormonal change or societal pressure on their own. It’s an area which could do with some more research!

**References:**

1. Bilal, N., Kurutas, E. B., & Orhan, I. (2018). An evaluation of G-protein coupled membrane estrogen receptor-1 level in stuttering. European Archives of Oto-Rhino-Laryngology, 275, 469-476.
2. Cherkasky, A. S. (2000). Exacerbations of disfluency and the menstrual cycle in women who stutter. California School of Professional Psychology-Berkeley/Alameda.
3. Glaser, E. M. (1936). Possible relationship between stuttering and endocrine malfunctioning. Journal of Speech Disorders, 1(3), 81-89.
4. Hoover, C. A. (1991). The singing voice: effects of the menstrual cycle. The Ohio State University.
5. Karkhanis, R., & Mathur, K. (2016). Impact of physical distress and psychological distress in women passing through different stages of menopause. Indian Journal of Health & Wellbeing, 7(1).

Extra: Structure of Interviews:

#### **Topic Guide Used for Semi structured In-Depth Interviews**

Introduction

* Introduction to the purpose of the research (refer to information sheet):
  + *We are conducting a research project aimed at improving our understanding of the specific experiences of women who stutter in relation to quality of life and how stuttering is managed. We are interested in women who stutter because research indicates that there are fewer women who stutter than men who stutter and because there is little information about this topic.*
* Clarify any issues raised in the previously completed case history background questions.

Perceptions of living with a stutter

* *Can you tell me what it was like growing up with a stutter?*
* *Can you tell me about situations in which you feel more comfortable/uncomfortable?*
* *How do you feel when you stutter? Has this changed over time? If yes, how?*
* *How do other people react to your stutter?*
* *What has been your experience when communicating with others?*
* *Is there a specific situation/occasion when stuttering affected you negatively/positively that sticks in your mind that you can share with us?*

Quality of life

* *How has stuttering impacted on different areas of your life:*

 ○ *at school;*

 ○ *at work;*

 ○ *at a social level; and*

 ○ *in your relationships?*

* *Can you tell me about times when stuttering has influenced decisions you have made in your life?*
* *How has the impact of your stutter changed over time?*

Management of stuttering

* *What have you found helpful for managing your stutter?*
* *If you have had previous therapy, can you tell us about that?*
* *Can you tell us about your participation in support groups for people who stutter (Speak Easy)?*
* *Can you tell me what your motivations were for the support/strategies you have tried/used?*
* *What have you found to be unhelpful?*
* *What advice would you give to another woman with a stutter?*

Being a woman who stutters

* *I am interested in women's experiences of stuttering because very little has been written about it. What are your thoughts?*

Overall Assessment of the Speaker's Experiences of Stuttering (OASES)

* Ask the participant to complete the questionnaire.
* Once completed, ask if the participant had anything to add to their interview. If yes, record and transcribe.