University students' perceptions of pre-school and kindergarten children who stutter

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Abstract

To determine how early ''the stuttering stereotype'' is assigned, 160 university students rated a hypothetical vignette depicting either a 3-, 4-, 5-, or 6-year-old with or without the statement ''He stutters''. A factor analysis of the semantic differential scale showed a three-factor solution comprised of 17 of the 25 bi-polar adjective pairs. The factor labeled personality showed significantly more negative ratings for 2-, 4-, 5-, or 6-year-old children based on the inclusion of the ''He stutters'' sentence. There were no differences between male and female raters. A significant difference was found between raters who were knew someone who stuttered and raters who did not know someone who stuttered on the personality factor. Raters who were knew someone who stuttered were significantly more likely to assign more positive ratings to the children.

Learning outcomes: Readers should be able to learn and understand: (1) the research describing the negative stereotypes associated with stuttering; (2) the vignette method used to evaluate stereotypes in children and youth; (3) the negative perceptions of the sentence ''He stutters'' on raters' perception of personality, sociability and speech for children as young as 3-, 4-, 5-, or 6-year-olds; and (4) the familiarity with a person who stutters and raters' perceptions of children who stutter.

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1. Introduction

For more than 4 decades, researchers have reported on the negative perceptions and attitudes toward individuals who stutter. As early as the 1970s, authors were sharing their research findings on the negative perceptions of boys and men who stuttered (Woods & Williams, 1971, 1976; Yairi & Williams, 1970). Since that time, dozens of studies have confirmed the original hypotheses that educators, administrators, speech language pathologists (SLPs), employers, peers, medical personnel, family members, and university students perceive persons who stutter (PWS) as more negative simply because of the presence of a communication disability (Bebout & Bradford, 1992; Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Crowe & Cooper, 1977; Crowe & Walton, 1981;Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; Ham, 1990; Kalinowski, Armson, Stuart, & Lerman, 1993; Lass et al., 1994; Turnbaugh, Guitar, & Hoffman, 1979; Woods & Williams, 1971). PWS are stereotyped as more insecure, withdrawn, introverted, fearful, anxious, tense, nonassertive, and more afraid to talk than people who do not stutter. This pervasive negative stereotype has implications for assessment, treatment, and quality of life for PWS. Daniels and Gabel (2004) noted that PWS have difficulty constructing a positive identity, in part because of their social interactions with others who uphold the stuttering stereotype.

Bloodstein (1995), Guitar (2005), Shapiro (1999), Sheehan (1970), Van Riper (1982) and others suggest that negative stereotypes and prejudices toward PWS may be formed early in childhood. Researchers suggest that an integration of these negative stereotypes in the social identity of the PWS may contribute to the ''stigma'' of stuttering (Blood, Blood, Tellis, & Gabel, 2001; Daniels & Gabel, 2004; Van Borsel, Verniers, & Bouvry, 1999; Whaley & Parker, 2000; Yovetich, Leschied, & Flicht, 2000). Other researchers report PWS are exposed to job discrimination (Hurst & Cooper, 1983; Klein & Hood, 2004; Rice & Kroll, 1997) and also suffer role entrapment in the form of vocational stereotyping (Gabel, Blood, Tellis, & Althouse, 2004). Their data suggested that negative stereotypes, low expectations and negative attitudes toward PWS may have deleterious educational, social, and vocational impact. The question of when these negative stereotypes or attitudes develop in both PWS and their conversation partners is still uncertain.

Early intervention has become the backbone of services provided by SLPs. Facilitation and enhancement of language, speech and fluency skills can be achieved at very early ages. According to Becker, Place, Tenzer, and Frueh (1991) once a negative stigma is placed on a child, he or she is less likely to receive the services he needs in order to cope with and/or rectify his difficulty, placing him at an academic and social disadvantage when compared to his peers. Young children who stutter (CWS) are often identified with the negative stigma associated with their speech difficulties. Davis, Howell, and Cooke (2002) examined peer stereotyping of CWS and their non-stuttering classmates. Four hundred and three children, ranging from 8 to 14 years of age, were participants in the study. All participants had a classmate who stuttered and asked to select the three children they liked the most and three children they liked the least. The participants were then asked to choose three children from the class who best fit each of the eight behavioral descriptions: ''shy, assertive, cooperative, disruptive, leader, uncertain, bully, and bully victim.'' They reported