Attitudes of Teachers versus Non-Teachers Towards People Who Stutter

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BACKGROUND

People who stutter (PWS) have reported that

• Classroom assignments requiring them to speak aloud to the class elicited high anxiety and fear,

• This fear limited their concentration on the lesson (Daniels, Gabel, & Hughes 2012)

• In the US, children are spending, on average, 32.45 hours at school per week (Juster, Ono, & Stafford, 2004) - their school experiences are likely to be influential

• Teachers are central figures in the school setting, so their attitudes and knowledge are important
Teacher Perceptions and Attitudes

There is an emerging body of knowledge regarding teacher attitudes and knowledge toward stuttering:

• India: Although teachers have positive attitudes towards communicating with PWS, they still stereotype them as shy (Chandrabose, St. Louis, Pushpavathi, & Raoof 2010).

• US: Many special educators’ and teachers’ perceptions of stuttering and PWS are negative (Ruscello, Lass, Schmitt & Pannbacker 1994; Yeakle & Cooper 1986).

• Australia: Teens perceive their teachers (along with parents and peers) to lack knowledge regarding stuttering (Hearne, Packman, Onslow, & Quine, 2008).
Training and Experience

• Teachers are trained to work with children, who are developing many skills and are more likely to demonstrate speech disorders.

• Teachers are likely to have more familiarity with PWS, which we predicted would engender better perceptions of PWS than people who do not teach children.

• However, to our knowledge, teacher perceptions have not been compared to non-teachers with similar education.
Purpose

• The purpose of this study was to evaluate knowledge, experience, and attitudes about stuttering and PWS, based on responses to the POSHA-S (St. Louis, 2012), in teachers compared to non-teachers with similar levels of education.

• We hypothesize that teachers will have more positive attitudes towards stuttering and PWS than non-educators.
Method

• Respondents drawn from a larger database of 6962 (the number as of January 2013), gathered across 13 countries, in 9 different languages (St Louis, 2010).

• Group assignment was primarily based on respondents’ answer to the question, “The job that I am best trained to do, or the job I worked at the longest, is (was) ________”

• Excluded from the study were respondents who
  • Indicated that they stuttered
  • Had less than 16 years of education (equivalent to a 4-year degree, which is required to teach in the US).
  • Did not identify or under-identified occupation (e.g., “administrator”).
Method: Teacher Group ($N = 586$)

• Identified occupation as primary, grade-school, secondary teacher, special education teacher or school administrator (e.g., principal, etc.)

• Excluded were
  • educationally-based occupations, requiring fewer years of training than teachers (e.g., classroom aide, tutor, child care provider)
  • college-level instructors/professors as we wanted to focus on attitudes of teachers interacting with individuals during pre-college development.
Comparison (Non-Teacher) Group ($N = 620$)

• Included respondents could have any occupation that was not related to healthcare, education, or otherwise considered a helping profession.

• Excluded were
  
  • Healthcare-related occupations (e.g., speech language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, doctor, nurse, etc.) because these individuals, as a function of their work, may have more than average knowledge of communication disorders.
  
  • Helping professions (e.g., psychological counselor, minister, social worker, special needs support staff), which may involve a higher number of encounters with individuals who have disabilities.

• A few examples of occupations represented by the non-teacher group are accountant, attorney, engineer, homemaker, interior designer, bartender, secretary, waitress, and writer.
Education

• Although we limited the sample by the number of years of education, there was a significant difference in total years of education between teachers (M = 17.7 and non-teachers (M = 17.3, t [1329]= 4.0, p < .0001, d = .28). [0.2 (small), 0.5 (medium) and 0.8 (large) (Cohen 1988)]

• This is a lesson about working with such large samples – a .4 differences in years of education ends up being largely different statistically.

• As a result, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was completed, with total years of education serving as the covariate, to compare teachers vs. non-teachers on two component subscales.
Teachers and Non-Teachers were compared on the following component scales:

- **Beliefs about PWS**
  - Traits/Personality of PWS
  - Thoughts on who should help PWS
  - Cause of stuttering
  - Potential life outcomes of PWS

- **Self Reactions to PWS**
  - Accommodating/Helping strategies when talking to a PWS
  - Social distance/Sympathy for a PWS
  - Knowledge/Experience about stuttering
  - From where does their knowledge of stuttering come
Results

Beliefs about PWS

Teachers  Non-teachers

Covariate adjusted means [0.2 (small), 0.5 (medium) and 0.8 (large) (Cohen 1988)]

Self Reactions to PWS

(F [2, 1198] = 60.5, p < .0001, d = .66)

(F [2, 1198] = 43.7, p < .0001, d = .52)
Results

- Traits/Personality
- Who Should Help
- Cause
- Life Outcome

POSHA-S Subscale Score
Subscales of Self Reactions

POSHE-S Subscale

Score

Helping PWS

Social Distancing/Sympathy

Knowledge/Experience

Source of Knowledge

Teachers
Discussion

• Findings indicate that teachers have more negative perceptions of stuttering and PWS than non-teachers with similar levels of formal education.

• This finding is unexpected as teachers are trained to work with children who are more apt to have developmental disorders impacting their educational experiences.
Discussion

• One reason for this finding might have to do with teachers’ repeated, but possibly superficial exposure to PWS. Research on the development of stereotypes indicates that familiarity with an out-group can increase pre-existing stereotypes. Familiarity can decrease stereotypes when information about the individual is more prominent (Häfner & Stapel, 2009).

• Although education of teachers on speech disorders has been shown to improve their perceptions (Yeakle & Cooper, 1986), stereotype research suggests that interpersonal contact that reaches beyond mere exposure, is also an important antidote to stereotyping (Tadmor, Hong, Chao, Wiruchnipawan, & Wang, 2012).
Discussion

Thus, speech-language pathologists, people who stutter, and other advocates of people who stutter may need to take a more active role in providing school teachers education and interaction at an interpersonal level.