
Stuttering: A preliminary study of the female perspective

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Abstract

Gender differences in attitudes and experiences of adults who stutter have been studied to a small degree. Qualitative analyses of adults who stutter have included women as part of their sample; however, no such analysis to date has specifically explored the experience of women who stutter at different points in their lifetime. This pilot study was designed as a preliminary look at the experiences of three women who stutter in adolescence, early adulthood, and middle adulthood. Ethnographic interviews were conducted, and transcripts were culled for emergent themes. Specific identified themes included those related to outcomes of communication avoidance, preferences for listener reactions to stuttering, and shifting cognitive perceptions of stuttering with age. Interview transcripts were further analysed for comments related to defined characteristics of covert stuttering. Results indicated that the number of covert characteristics identified by each woman differentiated preferences for listener reactions and outcomes of communication avoidance. Responses occurred along a continuum. Women who identified more covert characteristics in their interview placed greater responsibility on the listener for knowledge of appropriate reactions to stuttering. Women who identified fewer covert characteristics placed more responsibility on themselves for listener education. Likewise, women with more covert characteristic responded to significant instances of communication avoidance with more avoidance. Women with fewer covert characteristics used communication avoidance as a motivator to approach future challenging situations. Numbers of covert characteristics identified by each participant were further compared to quantitative scores on the four subtests of the Overall Assessment of the Speaker’s Experience of Stuttering (Yaruss, Quesal, & Coleman, 2010). Results revealed that higher impact scores on the “Reactions to Stuttering” and “Communication in Daily Situations” were seen among women who identified more covert characteristics in interviews. Implications of findings for assessment, treatment, and future study of gender in stuttering will be presented.

Keywords: Women; Stuttering; Qualitative; Covert