Are there any differences in attention levels between children who stammer and children who do not stammer, and what are the implications for therapy?

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Abstract

During an ongoing longitudinal study on early childhood stuttering at University Campus Suffolk, children who stammer were found to score significantly lower on verbal and performance IQ scales on the Wechsler Preschool Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI-3UK) than age matched controls (Cavenagh et al 2014, submitted). Anecdotal evidence indicated that this deficit could be due to lower attention levels in the group of children who stammer. It was decided to test this hypothesis comparing 3 groups of children taken from the cohort involved in the longitudinal study:

- Group 1: children identified as stuttering at the beginning of the study and who showed recovery after 18 months (recovered CWS)
- Group 2: children identified as stuttering at the start of the study and continued to stutter after 18 months (persistent CWS)
- Group 3: children who showed no signs of stuttering (CWNS).

Groups of children who stammer have been identified as scoring higher on certain traits linked to attention such as impulsivity, distractibility, and activity levels, and lower on attention span and attentional shifting (e.g. Howell et al, 2004, Eggers et al, 2010, Felsenfeld, 2010) and there is also a reported higher incidence of ADHD and attention difficulties in groups of children who stutter (Donaher and Richels, 2012). In this study a combination of direct testing of children and parental report was employed as suggested by Kefalianos et al (2012). The direct measure of attention used was the Test of Everyday Attention for Children (TEA-Ch), together with parental report using the Behaviour Style Questionnaire (BSQ) from Carey Temperament Scales. Fifteen participants were included in each of the above groups (recovered CWS, persistent CWS and CWNS) in the age range of 6-9 years. The results from this study will be presented and its implications to recovery and success in therapy will be discussed.
Keywords: Attention; Children who stammer

References:

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