

# Public Awareness of Cluttering and Stuttering: Preliminary Results

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## I. Rationale

- A. Virtually no recent data on cluttering prevalence exists
- B. Speculation that cluttering is less prevalent than stuttering (Daly & Burnett, 1999; St. Louis, Raphael, Myers & Bakker, 2003)
- C. Assumed that the public, while aware of stuttering, is likely unaware of cluttering (St. Louis, 1999)

## II. Purpose

- A. Determine the extent to which the public (adults with little or no knowledge of speech-language pathology) are aware of persons manifesting the fluency disorder of cluttering
- B. Identify differences (if any) in persons identified as cluttering vs. those identified as stuttering

## III. Method

### A. Questionnaire

1. Lay-oriented definitions of cluttering and stuttering
2. Awareness of children and adults who stuttered or cluttered
  - a. Provided space to list up to 7 individuals in all four categories
  - b. Requested info on sex, relation (blood or marriage), severity, and "other problems" for each person identified
3. General and detailed sections from research on public attitudes toward stuttering, cluttering, and other human attributes...
  - a. Mental illness, Overweight, Wheelchair use, Old, Left handed, Good talker, Multilingual and Intelligent
  - b. Not reported here

## IV. Lay-oriented definitions

- A. *"Cluttering is a speech problem in which a person's speech is either too fast, too jerky, or both. Most people who clutter seem to run their words or sentences together, and they often have many more fillers, hesitations, revisions, or other breaks in their speech than normal speakers do. Their speech sounds "cluttered" as though they do not have a clear idea of what they want to say, and they are often not aware that they have a speech problem."*
- B. *"Stuttering is a speech problem in which a speaker typically repeats or prolongs (draws out) parts of words, or gets stuck or blocked on words. Sometimes stuttering consists of strategies that try to reduce or avoid repeating, prolonging, or blocking. Stuttering is often associated with psychological stress or unpleasant feelings. Finally, the person who stutters often experiences a loss of voluntary control in saying certain words."*

## V. Respondent characteristics

- A. 59 of 108 returned surveys (55%)
  1. 19-75 yr; mean = 26 yr; 83% female; 17 % male
  2. 58/59 regarded self as "White" and "Not Hispanic"
  3. Mean yr of education = 15; 78% unmarried
  4. 61% gainfully employed; 17% college students
  5. None were SLPs or had attended a support group
  6. 2 (4%) had been in speech therapy (but not for stuttering or cluttering)
- B. Cluttering and stuttering in respondents
  1. 2 clutterers (both female)—3.4%
  2. 1 stutterer (female)—1.7%
  3. 1 stutterer-clutterer (male)—1.7%

## VI. Results

- A. 31/59 (53%) of respondents identified 51 individuals who stuttered (ST), cluttered (CL), or both stuttered and cluttered (ST-CL)
  1. Number identified ranged from 0 - 4
  2. Percent of 51 total fluency disorders identified by disorder and age
    - a. ST: Children = 14%; Adults = 43%; Total = 57%

- b. CL: Children = 12%; Adults = 19%; Total = 31%
      - c. ST-CL: Children = 2%; Adults = 10%; Total = 12%
    - 3. Sex ratio (males:females) of those identified
      - a. ST: Children = 5:2; Adults = 20:2; Total = 25:4
      - b. CL: Children = 4:2; Adults = 4:6; Total = 8:8
      - c. ST-CL: Children = 1:0; Adults = 3:2; Total = 4:2
  - B. Relatives and severity (information provided by some respondents)
    - 1. Identified fluency disorders as relatives and nonrelatives (blood:marriage:nonrelative)
      - a. ST: Children = 3:0:5; Adults = 0:2:22; Total = 3:2:27
      - b. CL: Children = 1:1:6; Adults = 4:1:8; Total = 5:2:14
      - c. ST-CL: Children = 0:0:1; Adults = 2:0:4; Total = 2:0:5
    - 2. Severity of fluency disorders identified (mild:moderate:severe)
      - a. ST: Children = 2:2:3; Adults = 8:12:2; Total = 10:14:5
      - b. CL: Children = 3:3:0; Adults = 3:5:2; Total = 6:8:2
      - c. ST-CL: Children = 0:1:0; Adults = 2:0:3; Total = 2:1:3
  - C. Coexisting disorders (not listed for some persons)
    - 1. Percent of fluency disorders and "Disorder descriptions"
      - a. ST: Children = 7%; Adults = 17%; Total = 24%
        - (1) "Autistic; articulation of words; ADHD (twice); frantic; talkative"
      - b. CL: Children = 6%; Adults = 25%; Total = 31%
        - (1) "ADHD (three times); depression (twice); inappropriate laughing"
      - c. ST-CL: Children = 0%; Adults = 17%; Total = 17%
        - (1) "Blocks; accessory behaviors; mild mental retardation"
- VII. Implications and conclusions
- A. Accurate prevalence estimates cannot be generated from anonymous surveys of untrained respondents
    - 1. However results from young adults unfamiliar with speech-language pathology are intriguing
  - B. Six findings
    - 1. Given definitions, people can and do differentiate cluttering from stuttering in themselves and others
    - 2. On average, a young adult can identify one person who either stutters, clutters, or both
      - a. Important: stuttering and cluttering was *not* provided as a category on the questionnaire!
    - 3. Cluttering may be more prevalent than literature suggests (e.g., St. Louis et al., 2003), with cluttering and stuttering-cluttering almost as prevalent as stuttering
    - 4. Lay persons know far more males than females who stutter but as many females as males who clutter
    - 5. Overall, more mild or moderate than severe fluency disorders identified, but severity levels are different for different ages and groups
    - 6. Stutterers known to respondents were about as likely to have coexisting disorders as clutterer
  - C. This preliminary study of public opinion...
    - 1. Supports several professional opinions about cluttering, for example...
      - a. Cluttering and stuttering are different fluency disorders
      - b. Cluttering and stuttering run in families
      - c. Cluttering and stuttering often coexist
    - 2. Contradicts some professional opinions, for example...
      - a. Cluttering is considerably less common than stuttering
      - b. Sex ratio for stuttering and cluttering are similar
      - c. Clutterers are more likely to manifest coexisting disorders than stutterers
  - D. Authors submit that public perceptions and knowledge can provide useful information for SLPs

## References

- Daly, D. A., & Burnett, M. (1999). Cluttering: Traditional views and new perspectives. In R. F. Curlee (Ed.), *Stuttering and related disorders of fluency* (2nd ed) (pp. 222-254), New York: Thieme Medical Publishers.
- St. Louis, K. O. (1999). Person-first labeling and stuttering. *Journal of Fluency Disorders*, 24, 1-24.
- St. Louis, K. O., Raphael, L. J., Myers, F. L., & Bakker, K. (2003, November). Cluttering updated. *The Asha Leader*, 21, 4-5 & 21-23.