



A country-wide probability sample of public attitudes toward stuttering in Portugal



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ABSTRACT

Background: Negative public attitudes toward stuttering have been widely reported, although differences among countries and regions exist. Clear reasons for these differences remain obscure.

Purpose: Published research is unavailable on public attitudes toward stuttering in Portugal as well as a representative sample that explores stuttering attitudes in an entire country. This study sought to (a) determine the feasibility of a country-wide probability sampling scheme to measure public stuttering attitudes in Portugal using a standard instrument (the *Public Opinion Survey of Human Attributes–Stuttering [POSHA-S]*) and (b) identify demographic variables that predict Portuguese attitudes.

Methods: The POSHA-S was translated to European Portuguese through a five-step process. Thereafter, a local administrative office-based, three-stage, cluster, probability sampling scheme was carried out to obtain 311 adult respondents who filled out the questionnaire. **Results:** The Portuguese population held stuttering attitudes that were generally within the average range of those observed from numerous previous POSHA-S samples. Demographic variables that predicted more versus less positive stuttering attitudes were respondents' age, region of the country, years of school completed, working situation, and number of languages spoken. Non-predicting variables were respondents' sex, marital status, and parental status.

Conclusion: A local administrative office-based, probability sampling scheme generated a respondent profile similar to census data and indicated that Portuguese attitudes are generally typical.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Attitudes toward stuttering

The current study was motivated by a growing number of investigations over several decades that have investigated public attitudes toward stuttering and have documented that the general public attributes negative traits to people who stutter (c.f. reviews by Hughes, 2015). Studies have sampled people from different ages (Doody, Kalinowski, Armson, & Stuart, 1993; Evans, Healey, Kawai, & Rowland, 2008; Griffin & Leahy, 2007; Hartford and Leahy, 2007; Kirsch, 2006), varying family status (Al-Khaledi, Lincoln, McCabe, Packman, & Alshatti, 2009; Crowe & Cooper, 1977; Özdemir, St. Louis, & Topbaş, 2011b), and different professional groups (Crowe & Cooper, 1983; Crowe & Walton, 1981; Dorsey & Guenther, 2000; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Ruscello, Lass, Schmitt, & Pannbacker, 1994; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986), including speech and language therapists (SLTs) (Cooper & Cooper, 1996; Lass, Ruscello, Pannbacker, Schmitt, & Everly-Myers, 1989; Yairi & Williams, 1970). Findings from these studies indicate that anxiety, shyness, nervousness, introversion, and unassertiveness are among those negative traits commonly attributed to people who stutter and are referred to as the “stuttering stereotype” (MacKinnon, Hall, & MacIntyre, 2007; Yairi & Williams, 1970). The purpose of this study was to determine POSHA-S results using a probability sampling approach. As described in the Method (see Section 2.2), the country of Portugal was chosen for this research because the country’s government is organized in such a way that a novel approach to probability sampling was feasible.

Stigma, which can include prejudice (e.g., stuttering stereotype) and discrimination, relate to a “spoiled identity” (Goffman, 1963). Stigma typically begins with negative attitudes of the public (i.e., public stigma), but can become internalized by individuals (i.e., self-stigma) (Boyle, 2013). Given the pervasiveness of public and self-stigma related to stuttering, and their consequences, calls for actions, e.g., public awareness campaigns, to mitigate public stigma are common. The assumption has been that providing compelling, accurate, and up-to-date information regarding stuttering will increase the likelihood that people who stutter can grow up and live without the burden of stigma (Flynn & St. Louis, 2011).

A major initiative, the International Project on Attitudes Toward Human Attributes (IPATHA), was inaugurated to compare public attitudes toward stuttering in different populations and then to develop a science of improving such attitudes. Both purposes required a standard survey instrument that could be translated and used internationally. Accordingly, the *Public Opinion Survey of Human Attributes–Stuttering* (POSHA-S explained in detail below in Section 2.1.1) was developed (St. Louis, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2015a, 2015b) and has been used since 2001 to collect information related to attitudes toward stuttering in 42 different countries and in 26 different languages (circa March, 2016). Excluding experimental versions of the instrument and samples composed entirely of stuttering individuals, SLTs, or Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) students, 11383 respondents from 141 different samples comprise the public database. The USA is most highly represented in the database, but American respondents account for 29% of the samples. Because the database samples vary, based on such selection variables as country, age, level of education, profession, socio-economic status (SES), or languages known, the median of the 141 sample means is taken as the “average” for each POSHA-S rating. The rationale is that, compared to the mean of all 141 sample means, the median value minimizes influence of “outlier” samples, i.e., samples with extremely positive (high) or extremely negative (low) attitudes. Currently, the median of the “Overall Stuttering Score” (OSS, described below) is 17 for public samples. On the POSHA-S –100 to +100 scale, this means that values below 17 are below average and those above 17 are above average.

Most of the studies have employed various methods of convenience sampling. Typically, these involved investigators asking friends, acquaintances, family members, students, or colleagues to both fill out the POSHA-S and to distribute other questionnaires to their friends, acquaintances, family members, students, or colleagues. Many of these studies have excluded SLTs or SLT students (except those seeking to sample only these populations) since clear evidence exists that their attitudes are more positive than those of people in other professions (e.g., St. Louis, Przepiórka, et al., 2014). A few studies have used a form of probability sampling. These range from random sampling from a list of the population to sampling from a randomly selected cluster of potential respondents.

1.2. Stuttering attitudes in various countries

Whereas, studies of public attitudes toward stuttering have been carried out in numerous countries, no systematic research has been reported that has sought to collect a representative sample that would allow generalization of findings to an entire country. Following is a review of selected studies that measured attitudes in samples across different regions of a country or sampled comprehensively enough to generate an impression of attitudes in a specific country. Most of the studies used convenience sampling. The few that used probability sampling are highlighted.

1.2.1. Comparative country studies with a short questionnaire

Van Borsel and colleagues (Pereira, Rossi, & Borsel, 2008; Van Borsel, Verniers, & Bouvry, 1999; Xing Ming, Jing, Yi Wen, & Van Borsel, 2001) carried out parallel studies in Belgium, China, and Brazil with an orally-presented questionnaire composed of 12 questions (different from the POSHA-S questionnaire). The three studies were similar enough such that the authors have reported inter-country comparisons. Questions related to respondents’ knowledge about stuttering as well as thoughts about stuttering in other races and treatment of stuttering children. The studies were carried out with a form of convenience sampling, but with constraints designed to reduce bias that may be inherent in typical samples of convenience. Eligible

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