



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**Epidemiology of communication disorders in childhood
phoniatic clinical practice**☆☆☆



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KEYWORDS

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Abstract

Introduction: Language acquisition and development require an understanding of physical and psychosocial aspects during diagnosis and treatment. At this point, a partnership between phoniatic physicians and other health professionals is often a determinant for favorable prognosis. *Objective:* To identify the clinical and epidemiological characteristics of a pediatric population attending a phoniatic clinical practice.

Methods: Study design: Cross-sectional cohort. Retrospective, epidemiological study of 297 children, seen in phoniatic appointments between 1976 and 2005. Outcome variables were referral origin, gender, age, mean age, diagnosis, and treatment approach.

Results: 66% were male and 34% were female, with a mean age of 6.4 years. The largest number of referrals for phoniatic treatments came from speech therapists (38%). The predominant complaint was alteration in speech (35%); the diagnostics in speech, language, and fluency (49.5%) are noteworthy. Considering the total of the patients analyzed, 28.2% were referred for speech therapy and 11.8% for psychotherapy.

Conclusion: The studied population is predominantly male, the diagnosis points to a higher incidence in cases of impairment in speech, language, and fluency; the most common treatment was speech therapy.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Linguagem infantil;
Desenvolvimento da
linguagem;
Distúrbios da fala;
Epidemiologia

Epidemiologia dos distúrbios de comunicação na infância em clínica foniátrica**Resumo**

Introdução: Aquisição e desenvolvimento da linguagem demandam cuidados exigindo compreensão dos aspectos orgânicos e psíquicos no diagnóstico e tratamento. Assim, parceria entre foniatra e outros profissionais é, muitas vezes, determinante de um prognóstico favorável.

Objetivo: Caracterizar clínica e epidemiologicamente os distúrbios de comunicação em crianças na prática clínica.

Método: Coorte transversal histórica. Estudo epidemiológico retrospectivo de 297 prontuários de crianças atendidas em consulta foniátrica no período entre 1976 a 2005. Variáveis: origem do encaminhamento, gênero, média da idade, diagnóstico e conduta para tratamento.

Resultados: 66% foram do gênero masculino e 34% do feminino com média de idade de 6,4 anos. Maior número de encaminhamentos foi realizado por fonoaudiólogos (38%). A queixa predominante era de alterações na fala 35% e ressaltam-se os diagnósticos na área da fala, linguagem e fluência (49,5%). Do total destacaram-se os encaminhamentos para: 28,2% fonoterapia e 11,8% psicoterapia.

Conclusão: A população atendida foi predominantemente masculina, o diagnóstico aponta maior incidência em quadros de comprometimento na fala, linguagem e fluência e o tratamento mais indicado foi fonoterapia.

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Introduction

For the establishment of proper diagnosis and appropriate treatment, children with language disorders require the services of a coordinated medical and phoniatic team capable of considering that organic, psychological, and social factors can be part of the genesis of this problem.¹

Even in cases where there is an obvious functional abnormality of an organ or system, e.g., in cases of hearing loss, cleft palate, and encephalopathy, it is critical to understand that the problems that arise in patients with communication difficulties are complex and sometimes difficult to understand. Affected children and their families, when seeking help for communication difficulties look for clinical responses that appreciate the biopsychic foundations of their language disorder.²

The otorhinolaryngologist involved in phoniatics plays a key role in this complex process of human communication, not only at the time of diagnosis, but also during his/her communication with the team helping to formulate the best conduct and the most appropriate intervention for each patient.³

Similarly, due to the large number of potential diagnoses for a child with a language disorder – for example, specific language impairment, language delay, and articulation disorders, we believe that epidemiological studies are useful to help in selecting the composition of the team necessary to care for these children. In this sense, the aim of this study was to epidemiologically characterize the practice and the referrals made to a phoniatic clinic for communication disorders occurring in childhood

Methods

The study design was approved by the Ethics Committee of Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, according to Declaration no. 06919712.6.0000.5482.

A retrospective study of a historical cross-sectional cohort was conducted. From a total of 843 patients with complaints of a disorder of communication submitted to phoniatic assessment and treatment in a private clinic in the city of São Paulo between June of 1976 and January of 2005 half, were analyzed (those registered with an even number). From these medical records, only children of both genders of between ages 1 year and 11 years and 11 months were included, totaling 422 records.

Exclusion criteria: incomplete or illegible records

During the phoniatic consultation, one semi-open interview took place, where data were collected on the complaint, previous history of the complaint, family history, schooling, family routine, feeding habits, neuropsychomotor development, and social and family relationships.

In addition to an otorhinolaryngological examination, the phoniatic used games and symbolic play, drawing, and writing (depending on the child's age) to investigate aspects related to global and oral motor functions, auditory and visual perceptual functions, static and dynamic balance, and spatial orientation at body and graphic levels. The examinations provided by the child's parents during the consultation were also considered, and the physician ordered other appropriate tests to complement the data for evaluation.

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