



## Public attitudes toward—and identification of—cluttering and stuttering in Norway and Puerto Rico



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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The study sought to compare public attitudes toward cluttering versus stuttering in Norway and Puerto Rico and to compare respondents' identification of persons known with these fluency disorders.

**Method:** After reading lay definitions of cluttering and stuttering, three samples of adults from Norway and three from Puerto Rico rated their attitudes toward cluttering and/or stuttering on modified versions of the POSHA-CI (for cluttering) and POSHA-S (for stuttering). They also identified children and adults whom they knew who either or both manifested cluttering or stuttering.

**Results:** Attitudes toward cluttering were essentially unaffected by rating either cluttering only or combined cluttering and stuttering on the same questionnaire in both countries. The same was also true of stuttering. Attitudes were very similar toward both disorders although slightly less positive for cluttering. Norwegian attitudes toward both disorders were generally more positive than Puerto Rican attitudes. The average respondent identified slightly more than one fluency disorder, a higher percentage for stuttering than cluttering and higher for adults than children. Cluttering–stuttering was rarely identified.

**Conclusion:** Given a lay definition, this study confirmed that adults from diverse cultures hold attitudes toward cluttering that are similar to—but somewhat less positive than—their attitudes toward stuttering. It also confirmed that adults can identify cluttering among people they know, although less commonly than stuttering. Design controls in this study assured that consideration of stuttering did not affect either the attitudes or identification results for cluttering.

**Educational objectives:** The reader will be able to: (a) describe the effects—or lack thereof—of considerations of stuttering on attitudes toward cluttering; (b) describe differences in public identification of children and adults who either clutter or stutter; (c) describe differences between attitudes toward cluttering and stuttering in Norway and Puerto Rico.

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## 1. Introduction

Negative public attitudes toward adults who stutter have been widely documented internationally by hundreds of studies. For example Van Borsel and colleagues found that people interviewed on the streets of Belgium, China, and Brazil held views not consistent with the facts about stuttering (de Britto Pereira, Rossi, & Van Borsel, 2008; Van Borsel, Verniers, & Bouvry, 1999; Xing Ming, Jing, Yi Wen, & Van Borsel, 2001). In addition to the standard measure of stuttering attitudes and knowledge employed by these investigators, numerous investigations using the Woods and Williams (1976) semantic differential scale, or adaptations thereof, have consistently revealed that the public holds a so-called “stuttering stereotype,” i.e., that those who stutter are nervous, shy, reserved, excitable, psychologically affected, and taciturn (Betz, Blood, & Blood, 2008; Hughes, Gabel, Irani, & Schlagheck, 2010; MacKinnon, Hall, & MacIntyre, 2007; Swartz, Gabel, & Irani, 2009; White & Collins, 1984). Similar findings have been reported in different cultures among speech–language pathologists using the *Clinician Attitudes Toward Stuttering (CATS)* inventory (Cooper & Cooper, 1996; Crichton-Smith, Wright, & Stackhouse, 2003; Maviş, St. Louis, Özdemir, & Toğram, 2013). Using a newly developed measure to provide a standard measure globally, the *Public Opinion Survey of Human Attributes–Stuttering (POSHA-S)*, St. Louis and colleagues have shown that public attitudes toward stuttering do vary throughout the world but still reflect considerable stigma and negativity (Ip, St. Louis, Myers, & An Xue, 2012; Özdemir, St. Louis, & Topbaş, 2011a,b; Przepiórka, Błachnio, St. Louis, & Wozniak, 2013; St. Louis, Anadrade, Georgieva, & Trout, 2005).

By contrast, only one empirical study of which we are aware reported public attitudes toward cluttering (St. Louis et al., 2011). The authors compared attitudes toward cluttering in the USA, Turkey, Russia, and Bulgaria and found them to be remarkably similar in all four countries. This was so in spite of a number of differences between attitudes toward both conditions from country to country.

St. Louis et al. (2011) utilized an adaptation of a considerably longer experimental version of the POSHA-S (i.e., the POSHA-E2 [St. Louis, 2012b]) in their comparison of cluttering versus stuttering attitudes. Respondents in the four countries filled out questionnaires in English, Turkish, Russian, or Bulgarian that contained identical demographic and general sections. The general section asked for 1–9 ratings of overall impression, wanting to have or be, and amount known about eight human attributes ranging from positive to neutral to negative, i.e., intelligent, multilingual, good talker, left handed, old, overweight, wheelchair user, and mentally ill. Next, the respondents were asked to read written lay definitions of cluttering and stuttering because earlier research suggested that most people believe that “cluttering” refers to being messy and disorganized (St. Louis, 1999). Following the written definitions were requests to make the same ratings of cluttering and stuttering as for the previous eight attributes. Next, in detailed sections, respondents rated items pertaining to cluttering followed by all the same items for stuttering, or vice versa in counterbalanced order. The authors concluded that the public recognized cluttering and stuttering as separate fluency disorders but raised the following potentially confounding issue. Because all respondents rated stuttering, presumably a more familiar disorder than cluttering, the stuttering ratings could have influenced their rated attitudes toward cluttering. They called for additional research in which stuttering would not be mentioned or implied in studies of attitudes toward cluttering in order to disambiguate the possible effect of widespread views toward stuttering on cluttering attitudes.

In the same four-country study, respondents also were asked to identify both children and adults they knew who either cluttered, stuttered, or both. The rationale for including an awareness and identification component was explicated by St. Louis et al. (2010). The prevalence of cluttering is not known although many have speculated that it is lower than that of stuttering (Daly & Burnett, 1999; St. Louis, Raphael, Myers, & Bakker, 2003). Also, aside from the four-country study, it is not known how many individuals who clutter most people know, although speculations were that it was much lower than for people who stutter (e.g., Daly, 1996; St. Louis, 1999; St. Louis & Myers, 1997). St. Louis et al. (2010) found that respondents did identify fewer clutterers than stutterers; the combined four-country sample identified 0.3 individuals who cluttered, 0.6 who stuttered, 0.1 who cluttered and stuttered which totalled 1.0 fluency disordered individuals overall. An important criticism of the St. Louis et al., study is that they did not provide the category cluttering and stuttering combined. Identified individuals reported to manifest both disorders were those whom respondents identified with the same age, sex, and other characteristics in both cluttering and stuttering sections. This might have resulted in an underestimation of the identification of the combined fluency disorders in the same persons.

Since the St. Louis et al. (2010, 2011) studies, the POSHA-S has been completed. As explained in the next section, it has far fewer items, a different rating scale, and a few different items (St. Louis, 2011, 2012b). A parallel version, the *Public Opinion Survey of Human Attributes–Cluttering (POSHA-CI)* has also been developed. There was a need to revisit both the attitudes toward cluttering and stuttering with the new instrument as well as to address potential confounding issues in the earlier studies (St. Louis et al., 2010, 2011). Accordingly, the current study asked the following specific research questions:

- (a) To what extent do attitudes toward stuttering affect attitudes toward cluttering, i.e., are attitudes toward either condition different when rated together by the same respondents or independently by different respondents?
- (b) To what extent are attitudes toward cluttering similar to attitudes toward stuttering when rated independently by different respondents?
- (c) To what extent are measured attitudes toward cluttering and stuttering similar in two widely varied cultures and languages?

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