ELSEVIER

Arab school teachers' knowledge, beliefs and reactions regarding stuttering

Fauzia A. Abdalla [a,*], Kenneth O. St. Louis [b,1]

[a] *Department of Communication Sciences, College for Women, Kuwait University, P.O. Box 5969, Safat 13060, Kuwait*
[b] *Department of Speech Pathology & Audiology, West Virginia University, 805 Allen Hall, P.O. Box 6122, Morgantown, WV 26506-6122, USA*

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Stereotypes toward stuttering and people who stutter (PWS) are widespread in the general public irrespective of age, level of education, culture, geographic location and profession. Negative attitudes held by persons of authority like teachers can lead to social, economic and educational obstacles in the lives of PWS.
Method: The current study used an Arabic translation of an adapted version of the *Public Opinion Survey of Human Attributes-Stuttering* (*POSHA-S*) to explore Arab teachers' knowledge and attitudes toward stuttering as well as strategies they adopt to cope with the problem in class. The participants were 262 in-service and 209 pre-service public school teachers in Kuwait. The results are contrasted to those of Arab parents in Kuwait reported earlier.
Results: Although many of the teachers knew a person who stutters well and were sensitive in their interactions with PWS, major findings of this study suggest that many were misinformed about the causes of stuttering and held stereotypical views about PWS, comparable to those reported in the literature. Very few differences were noted between opinions of teachers who were still in training and those who were practicing for an average of 11 years.
Conclusion: The study underscores the need for awareness campaigns that target not only teachers who are currently working but also those still in training to dispel misconceptions about stuttering and ensure a better educational environment for PWS.

 Educational objectives: At the end of this activity the reader will be able to: (1) describe knowledge of stuttering and attitudes toward students who stutter and classroom strategies perceived to be helpful by pre-service and in-service teachers in Kuwait; (2) identify stereotypes toward stuttering across cultures, professions and geographic locations; and (3) list similarities and differences in attitude and knowledge of stuttering between parents and teachers.

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. Stereotypes and stuttering

 Stuttering has been identified universally in people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Cooper & Cooper, 1993). A plethora of research studies has provided evidence that the public view of stuttering is generally unfavorable and that

---

 * Corresponding author. Tel.: +965 2498 3179; fax: +965 2530461.
  E-mail addresses: f.abdalla@ku.edu.kw (F.A. Abdalla), kstlouis@wvu.edu (K.O. St. Louis).
 [1] Tel.: +1 304 293 2946; fax: +1 304 293 2905.

listeners often ascribe negative traits like *anxious*, *shy*, *nervous*, *unassertive* or *introverted* to people who stutter (PWS) (e.g., Blood, Blood, Tellis, & Gabel, 2003; Craig, Tran, & Craig, 2003; Doody, Kalinowski, Armson, & Stuart, 1993; Klassen, 2001; Özdemir, St. Louis, & Topbaş, 2011b; St. Louis, 2005; Van Borsel, Verniers, & Bouvry, 1999).

These perceptions appear to hold true for listeners of varying ages, e.g., children as young as four years (Ezrati-Vinacour, Platzky, & Yairi, 2001), adolescents (Flynn and St Louis, 2011), college students (Dorsey & Guenther, 2000) and for lay people and parents of children who stutter (CWS) (e.g., Crowe & Cooper, 1977; Ham, 1990; Mayo, Mayo, Jenkins, & Graves, 2004). Evidence also supports that similar perceptions exist in various professional groups, e.g., teachers, school administrators, special educators and vocational counselors (Crowe & Walton, 1981; Hurst & Cooper, 1983; Lass et al., 1992, 1994; Ruscello, Lass, Schmitt, & Pannbacker, 1994; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986) and even speech language clinicians (e.g., Cooper & Cooper, 1996; Yairi & Williams, 1970).

Another prevalent public belief is that stuttering has psychological causes (e.g., Boyle, Blood, & Blood, 2009). Despite considerable research that demonstrates that the alleged "stuttering stereotype" has no basis (Bloodstein & Ratner, 2008), these stereotypes persist. Interestingly, previous reports suggest that listeners' exposure to or familiarity with PWS does not seem to influence these perceptions (Craig et al., 2003; Doody et al., 1993). Investigators have also documented that many PWS experience negative effects like depression and discrimination as a result of their stuttering (Corcoran & Stewart, 1998; Crichton-Smith, 2002; Plexico, Manning, & Levitt, 2009).

A review of the literature points to some theories that explain how stereotyping arises and what its effects are. According to the anchoring-adjustment theory, people often form stereotypes about stuttering based on their own experiences with normal disfluencies (MacKinnon, Hall, & McIntyre, 2007). For example, when people who do not stutter are nervous and experience normal disfluencies, they may associate such negative feelings (nervousness) with the stuttering exhibited by PWS.

In his well-known work on stigma, Goffman (1963) explains that a stigmatized person experiences "spoiled identity" due to deviant labels others associate with a single characteristic that the person may possess. Because of this single difference, the person is viewed as being defective in every aspect of his or her life. Wright (1983) calls this the "spread phenomenon" whereby undesirable perceptions of a particular disability (e.g., stuttering) spread or generalize to beliefs about the whole person (e.g., the person's other characteristics like competence, intelligence and personality). Perceptions such as these may contribute to negative stereotyping of PWS and lead to behaviors that may discriminate and create social, educational and occupational obstacles for the stigmatized individual (Gabel, Blood, Tellis, & Althouse, 2004; Smart, 2001). This in turn may result in PWS beginning to believe that they possess the unbecoming characteristics ascribed to them by a limited number of people and thus contributing to negative self-concept (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Manning, 2010).

1.2. Measures of attitudes toward stuttering

Attitudes, knowledge and beliefs about stuttering have been measured using diverse techniques, e.g., face-to-face or telephone interviews (de Britto Pereira, Rossi, & Van Borsel, 2008; Ham, 1990), semantic-differential scales (Burley & Rinaldi, 1986), self-administered written questionnaires consisting of open or closed-ended questions (St. Louis, 2011; Yairi & Williams, 1970). Surveys vary in scope, purpose and topics covered. Some, like the *Parental Attitudes toward Stuttering Inventory* (*PATS*; Crowe & Cooper, 1977) sample parental attitudes, while the *Teachers' Perceptions of Stuttering Inventory* (*TPSI*; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986) examines beliefs of teachers and yet another, the *Clinicians Attitude toward Stuttering Inventory* (*CATS*; Cooper & Cooper, 1985) measures professional opinions regarding the nature and treatment of stuttering. While these inventories have been published in peer-reviewed journals, their reliability has not been formally ascertained (Snyder, 2001). Researchers have recommended using a mixed quantitative and qualitative model to gain a broader understanding of the attitudes and stereotypes held by respondents (Panico, Healey, Brouwer, & Susca, 2005).

The *Public Opinion Survey on Human Attributes-Stuttering* (*POSHA-S*) is a well-designed, standardized instrument that measures public attitudes toward stuttering internationally (cf. St. Louis, 2011 for detailed descriptions). *POSHA-S*, like many other instruments in the literature surveys a variety of behaviors, beliefs, reactions and emotions to identify stigma and societal knowledge of stuttering (Blood et al., 2003; Gabel et al., 2004; Hulit & Wirtz, 1994; Klein & Hood, 2004). However, *POSHA-S* is unique in that it is designed to elicit attitudes toward stuttering, without explicitly stating that stuttering is the targeted attribute and thereby minimizing response bias. Recent research has documented that *POSHA-S* has internal consistency, is practical, reliable, valid, translatable and is not adversely impacted by modifications in rating scales or order (Al-Khaledi, Lincoln, McCabe, Packman, & Alshatti, 2009; St. Louis, Hancock, & Remley, 2010; St. Louis, Lubker, Yaruss, Adkins, & Pill, 2008; St. Louis, Lubker, Yaruss, & Aliveto, 2009; St. Louis, Reichel, Yaruss, & Lubker, 2009; St. Louis & Roberts, 2010). Additionally, *POSHA-S* is sensitive in detecting changes in attitudes following an awareness campaign (e.g., Flynn & St Louis, 2011) as well as differences emerging from convenience versus probability sampling (Özdemir et al., 2011b). The instrument has been translated into and administered in several languages including Arabic (e.g., Al-Khaledi et al., 2009; St. Louis, 2005).

1.3. Culture and perceptions of people who stutter

Although stuttering is known to exist worldwide, research on attitudes and knowledge of stuttering has predominantly focused on Western culture (particularly Caucasians in the United States). More recently the research base has expanded to