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Attitudes of University Students, Faculty, and Staff Toward Stuttering

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Purpose and Background

- People who stutter can experience negative reactions and judgment from people who do not stutter. They are stigmatized and threatened with social exclusion, placing them at risk for compromised quality of life (Przepiorka et al., 2013).
- It is imperative to evaluate attitudes of university faculty and students relative to stuttering because it will identify negative attitudes that could be harmful to people who stutter. In Werle and Byrd (2021) results highlighted that PWS reported that they experienced more negative perceptions and reduced comfort in approaching professors.
- By identifying negative attitudes in specific populations, efforts can be made to improve attitudes toward stuttering through education and awareness.
- Daniels et al. (2011) explored the attitudes of 328 university instructor participants across a variety of disciplines at two Midwestern universities and found that increased knowledge of stuttering is associated with positive attitudes toward students who stutter. Overall, results indicated that participants possessed limited knowledge of stuttering and the participants with an increased knowledge regarding stuttering produced more positive perceptions.
- St. Louis et al., (2014) sampled undergraduate and graduate students in the USA and Poland. Participants were classified as either SLP majors or non-SLP majors. The Public Opinion Survey of Human Attributes-Stuttering (POSHA-S) was used to identify the students' attitudes toward stuttering. The results indicated that students majoring in SLP held more positive attitudes toward stuttering than non-SLP students who do not have the background knowledge or training.
- The purpose: to identify beliefs and attitudes students, faculty, and staff have towards stuttering and people who stutter. Identifying harmful beliefs, attitudes, and reactions will provide information in order to enact change, awareness, and education to improve the lives and experiences of PWS.

Research Questions

1. Are there differing beliefs regarding stuttering or people who stutter between faculty and students?
2. Are there differences between beliefs across different colleges?
3. Are attitudes toward stuttering related to the amount that someone reports knowing about people who stutter?
4. Are there differences in beliefs between people who know someone who stutters and a person who does not know someone who stutters?

Methods

- This project focuses on pre-POSHA responses from a larger study: Cannon, Shattuck & Singer (2022), which evaluated change in attitudes toward stuttering between participants that were randomly assigned to watch *When I Stutter* or *2e: Twice Exceptional*.
- **Summary:** This study recruited university faculty, staff, and students to complete the -POSHA questionnaire, which assesses attitudes and beliefs about stuttering and people who stutter..
- **Participant Eligibility:** Included GVSU staff/faculty members and enrolled students who were at least 18 years old or old, had not previously watched either *When I Stutter* or *2e: Twice Exceptional*, and had sufficient visual and hearing ability to watch a documentary
- **Recruitment (August 2021- March 2022)**
 - o Email blasts via Office of Institutional Analysis were sent to 5,000 recipients
 - o Email blast via the Frederik Meijer Honors College were sent to 1,300 recipients
 - o Facebook GVSU class pages, NSSLHA page, personal Facebook pages, and personal Snapchat
- **Study Procedures**
 - o **Pre-interest survey:** to ensure participants met inclusion criteria; collected status at GVSU (undergraduate student, graduate student, faculty, or staff) and GVSU college
 - o **Informed consent/POSHA-S:** participants consented prior to completing the POSHA-S)

Participant Demographics

- **Participants:** 68 GVSU faculty/staff and students
 - o 60 students; 8 faculty/staff members
 - o 59 participants self-reported as non-hispanic white and 9 participants reported as Hispanic/Latino or two or more races
 - o 56 participants self-reported as female, while 12 participants self-reported as male
 - o 2 participants reported that they are a person who stutters
 - o Mean age = 23.57 years(Standard Deviation = 7.24 years)

Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and results from Wilcoxon Sign Rank Tests for the four primary research questions Scores for Beliefs about Stuttering, Reactions to Stuttering, and Overall Attitudes range from -100 to +100 with more positive and desirable scores closer to +100 and more negative scores closer to -100.

Research Question	Groups	Beliefs about Stuttering Median [LQ, UQ]	Reactions to Stuttering Median [LQ, UQ]	Overall Attitude Median [LQ, UQ]
RQ 1	Faculty/Staff (n=8)	51.04 [31.25, 68.75]	2.64 [-1.67, 10.42]	30.31 [13.75, 37.78]
	Students (n=60)	55.21 [41.67, 63.54]	13.47 [-0.28, 28.89]	33.13 [25.28, 44.86]
	Comparison	S = 270.0 p = 0.4582	S = 185.0 p = 0.0425	S = 216.0 p = 0.1287
RQ 2	Health Professions & Education College (n =29)	58.33 [50.00, 66.67]	17.50 [0.28, 29.44]	36.53 [28.19, 44.86]
	Other Colleges (n=39)	50.00 [35.42, 60.42]	9.44 [-1.39, 26.11]	31.46 [19.44, 40.14]
	Comparison	S = 1150.5 p = 0.0317	S = 1089.5 p = 0.1362	S = 1137.0 p = 0.0459
RQ 3	Knows None / A Little (n=40)	54.17 [37.50, 66.67]	7.64 [-1.81, 17.50]	29.27 [20.94, 37.78]
	Knows Some (n=20)	54.17 [36.46, 60.42]	23.19 [8.06, 37.08]	38.33 [23.92, 45.07]
	Knows A Lot / Great Deal (n=8)	62.50 [57.29, 65.63]	32.36 [5.14, 51.81]	47.43 [35.38, 55.45]
	Comparison	S = 1114.5 p = 0.0793	S = 1145.0 p = 0.0371	S = 1158.0 p = 0.0258
RQ 4	Doesn't Know Someone (n=24)	52.08 [35.42, 60.42]	4.31 [-1.81, 16.53]	26.84 [17.64, 35.42]
	Knows Someone (n=44)	57.29 [45.83, 66.67]	22.08 [1.53, 33.75]	36.42 [28.44, 46.28]
	Comparison	S = 700.5 p = 0.0513	S = 634.0 p = 0.0065	S = 610.0 p = 0.0026

Conclusions

- Students were found to react more positively to stuttering than faculty/staff members. Similarly, Dorsey & Guenther (2000) found that student participants rated the hypothetical PWS more positively than faculty participants.
- Participants with more training or background knowledge about stuttering or PWS hold more positive attitudes. Participants in the Colleges of Health Professions and Education held more positive beliefs, reactions, and overall attitudes about stuttering in comparison to participants from other colleges. Daniels et al., (2011) and Crowe and Walton (1981) both identified a similar trend when exploring university faculty and teachers, respectively. St. Louis et al., (2014) found that non-SLP students held more negative attitudes than SLP majors.
- A positive relation was found between perceived knowledge about stuttering and positive reactions and overall attitudes toward stuttering. Walden and Lesner (2018) found that familiarity with stuttering related to more positive attitudes.
- Participants that knew a PWS held more positive attitudes toward stuttering than participants who reported not knowing someone who stutters. Those who knew someone who stuttered scored more positively across all three measures compared to those who reported not knowing a PWS. Hughes et al., (2017) found a positive correlations between participants' rating of PWS' traits and the quality of the relationship with the known PWS.

Implications

- The implications of our findings suggest that more education and awareness surrounding stuttering and PWS may yield more positive beliefs, reactions, and attitudes toward stuttering, and perhaps improve the quality of life of students who stutter.
- University faculty and students in fields outside of health professions and education may particularly benefit from additional education about and exposure to stuttering.
- The POSHA-S may be useful in assessing the attitudes of university faculty and students and identifying groups that may benefit from more education related to stuttering.

Limitations

- A limitation of this study is the small sample size of faculty/staff (n = 8) and the small proportion of males (n= 12). These small sample sizes decrease generalization of findings related to attitudes and beliefs toward stuttering.
- It is possible that those who volunteered for the study yield more positive attitudes toward stuttering than the attitudes of the general population.
- Only explicit attitudes and perceived knowledge of stuttering were explored in the present study. Future studies may also explore implicit bias and assess participants' knowledge.

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