

# **Proposal of a new theoretical model for the pathogenesis and the treatment of stuttering**

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Stuttering is currently classified as a communication disorder in the DSM-IV and the treatment of choice is usually speech therapy. However, several features of psychological nature importantly differentiate stuttering from the other disorders included in this diagnostic category. Moreover, although several treatment approaches for stuttering have been proved effective, to a certain degree, relapse rates are so high that treatment outcomes can rarely be considered stable in the long term.

This paper aims to present a new theoretical model regarding the pathogenesis of stuttering with implications for its classification in the current diagnostic systems and its treatment as well. This model is based: a) on a synthesis of the clinical and research data currently available in the field of stuttering, b) on Bandura's social learning theory regarding self-efficacy, c) on clinical and research data of other fields of psychopathology, like anxiety disorders, and d) on the authors' long clinical experience in the diagnosis and treatment of stuttering.

The main idea of this model is that stuttering shares many important features with anxiety disorders and may better be perceived as a 'disorder of perception' since it is based on the use of cognitive mechanisms that result in distorted interpretation of internal and environmental stimuli. It is supposed that the distorted belief of the stuturer that he / she can hardly achieve fluency seems to be the core problem. The development of this belief can be attributed to the interaction of a series of constitutional (e.g. phonological difficulties, temperament characteristics, etc.) and environmental factors (e.g. demanding environment). Due to these factors, the person focus simultaneously on the fluency and content of speech, which causes an interference in the automatization of the patterning of speech, leading to stuttering. The avoidance of certain sounds and / or speaking situations that usually follows may lead to the development of pervasive stuttering.

Implications of this model for the effective treatment of stuttering are discussed and the basic principles of the multi-level approach, with the use of cognitive-behavioural techniques, are presented.

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