

**Attention problems and false beliefs
as underlying etiological mechanisms of stuttering**

Efthymios Kakouros & Katerina Maniadaki

Stuttering constitutes a disruption in the normal fluency and time patterning of speech. According to the current classification systems (DSM-IV and ICD-10), stuttering is included in the broader category of communication disorders. To date, several theoretical models have tried to shed light to the etiology of stuttering and diverse techniques have been proposed for its therapy. Although there have been many advances in our knowledge, stuttering still appears as one of the most controversial problems in psychopathology.

In this presentation, a new theoretical model for the development of stuttering is proposed, based on the principles of cognitive – behaviour theory and our clinical experience with a great number of children and adults stutterers. The basic assumption of this model is that stutterers share many common characteristics with persons who present anxiety disorders, the most striking of which are: a) the use of cognitive mechanisms that result in distorted interpretation of internal and environmental stimuli, and b) the expression of avoidance behaviour in face of stressful conditions.

We propose that the core of stuttering may be an attention deficit that makes the person focus simultaneously on the fluency and content of speech for a longer period than the one needed in the normal development of speech. The struggle to focus on both the fluency and content of speech may delay and, therefore, make problematic the automatization of the patterning of speech. As a result, the person may develop the false belief that speaking fluently can be attained only with hard effort, which may lead to the avoidance behaviour of either stuttering or speaking situations in general. As known, avoidance behaviour leads to increased fear of the avoided stimulus, thus, to increased stuttering.

The implications of this model for future research on stuttering are discussed and some basic treatment approaches are proposed.