



Parents' and teachers' beliefs about the causes of stuttering

Niki Kakourou, Christina Papaeliou, Katerina Maniadaki & Paraskevi Dalapa

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Introduction

Parents' and teachers' beliefs concerning the causes of psychopathology in children are frequently related to their feelings of self-efficacy to cope with the child's problems and may influence their responses towards him/her.

A. Causal attributions

- ◆ Research has shown that the attributions that parents make about the causes of their child's behavior are likely to influence both their immediate behavioral responses toward the child and their general choice of parenting strategies as well (Johnston & Patenaude 1994).
- ◆ Parents of children who stutter have often negative cognitions and no realistic beliefs about the nature of stuttering (Andrews & Cutler, 1974; Langlois, et al., 1986).
- ◆ It is widely accepted that teachers' beliefs and expectations about their pupils' abilities and motivation strongly affect their behavior as well as their teaching strategies (Ainscow, 1998; Poulou & Norwich, 2002).
- ◆ It has been established that teachers of children who stutter consider them as "shy", "insecure" and "quite" and often have misconceived perceptions about the causes of stuttering (Lass et al., 1992; Silverman & Marik, 1993; Yeakle & Cooper, 1986).

B. Self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1994, p.71), "self-efficacy refers to people's beliefs about their ability to successfully perform a particular behavior".

- ◆ Parents' beliefs about their own effectiveness at dealing with difficult behavior may be especially important as, in a number of studies, parental self-efficacy beliefs have emerged as a mediator of parenting quality (Tetti & Gelfand, 1991).
- ◆ Parental low sense of self-efficacy may have an important impact on both parents' reactions towards the child and the outcome of the child's difficulties as well (Maniadaki et al., 2005).
- ◆ To our knowledge, no study has examined parents' or teachers' feelings of self-efficacy towards children who stutter neither has related them to causal attributions regarding stuttering.

Aim of the study

➔ The present study examined teachers' and parents' beliefs about the causes of stuttering in relation to their feeling of self-efficacy to cope with the problem.

Method

Participants

- ◆ 100 Greek preschool educators and 100 Greek parents of preschoolers aged 4-6

Measures

- ◆ An adapted version of the *Parental Account of the Causes of Childhood Problems Questionnaire* (PACCP; Sonuga-Barke & Balding, 1993) which is designed to examine adult attributions of common childhood problems ascribed to a child described in a written vignette.
- ◆ The questionnaire included:
 - a vignette describing a hypothetical 5-year-old boy who stutters, without naming the problem
 - 70 questions grouped into 8 sections, assessing adult beliefs regarding several dimensions of the problematic behaviour described in the vignette.
 - In this paper, two sections of the questionnaire are considered:
 - 1) **Attributions about possible causes of stuttering:** This section included 21 statements of likely causes of the behavior described in the vignette. These ranged from biological to environmental factors. Mothers and teachers were required to respond on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very likely) to 5 (very unlikely), indicating their degree of agreement with the proposed statement.
 - 2) **Self-efficacy beliefs about the management of child stuttering:** This section was composed of four items, where parents and teachers were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much), how much they could do to help the child to cope with the described behaviour. A total self-efficacy score was derived from this scale.

Procedure

- ◆ The questionnaires were distributed at the children's nursery schools and kindergartens and were completed individually at home by the children's parents and teachers.

Results

Table 1: Parents' and teachers' causal attributions for stuttering

CAUSAL FACTOR	Parents (%)	Teachers (%)
Anxiety	90	92.9
Child's false belief about limited ability of speaking fluently	49	54.1
Bad upbringing methods	39.4	41.5
Heredity	13.6	20
Organic factors	5.4	11.4

According to the results, both parents and teachers believe that the main cause of stuttering is anxiety (90% and 92.9% respectively). Next possible causes are the child's belief about his/her limited ability to speak fluently (49% and 54% respectively), and bad upbringing methods (39.4% and 41.5% respectively).

Table 2: Parents' and teachers' feelings of self-efficacy to cope with child stuttering

	N	Mean	Sd	t	p
Teachers	100	12.53	2.46		
Parents	100	13.71	3.13	-2.97	.003

Both parents' and teachers' feelings of self-efficacy are shown to be moderate. However, parents seem to feel more efficacious to cope with the problem compared to teachers ($t = -2.96, p = .003$).

Table 3: Correlations between teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and their beliefs about the causes of stuttering

	Self-efficacy	Anxiety	Organic factors	Child's false belief	Heredity	Upbringing methods
Self-efficacy	----	-.090	.114	-.269**	-.054	.018
Anxiety	-.090	----	.135	.152	-.082	.305**
Organic factors	.114	.135	----	.067	.196	.514**
Child's false belief	-.269**	.152	.067	----	.324**	.091
Heredity	-.054	-.082	.196	.324**	----	.083
Upbringing methods	.018	.305**	.514**	.091	.083	----

According to the results, teachers' feelings of self-efficacy seem to diminish as far as they believe that stuttering is an outcome of the child's false belief that he/she cannot speak fluently.

Furthermore, when teachers believe that stuttering results from bad upbringing methods, they seem more likely to consider anxiety and organic factors as other possible reasons.

No such correlations were found for parents.

Discussion

- ◆ On the one hand, the findings of the present study indicate that parents' and teachers' causal attributions about stuttering, at a first sight, are in accordance with current scientific etiological theories which attribute stuttering to increased anxiety and the development of dysfunctional beliefs that lead the child to believe that his/her ability to speak fluently is limited (Bloodstein, 1995).
- ◆ However, a more profound reading of the findings reveal that these attributions are not so clear since attributions about increased anxiety positively correlate with attributions about bad upbringing methods, which also correlate positively with organic factors. Adults appear to have a vague idea about the etiology of stuttering, which might include environmental, emotional and organic factors. This finding seems absolutely understandable, since specialists' theories about the etiology of stuttering also present a confused picture!
- ◆ On the other hand, parents and -especially- teachers seem uncertain about their ability to efficiently help children to cope with their stuttering.
- ◆ Given that: 1) adults' responses to child stuttering are a key factor for the outcome of stuttering, and 2) these responses are greatly influenced by their causal attributions and their sense-efficacy feelings (Kakourou & Maniadaki, 2006; Starkweather et al., 1990), it can be concluded that parents and teachers of children who stutter should receive counseling from an experienced specialist at the very onset of the child's stuttering in order to prevent its becoming of a chronic problem.
- ◆ To conclude, the findings of this study are in accordance with those who claim that stuttering should be treated as soon as possible, at least at the level of adult counseling (Conture, 1996), and contradict the view that parents should wait for the spontaneous recovery of stuttering and delay their visit to a specialist (Curlee, 1992).

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