

KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES OF A GROUP OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN SRI LANKA ABOUT CHILDREN WHO STAMMER

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Stammering is reported to occur in 5.0% of pre-school children, 1.2% of school children and 1.0% of adults. The incidence is 3 to 4 times more often in boys than girls. Majority of children who stammer recover spontaneously or with speech therapy by the age of 16 years. Those who continue to stammer towards adulthood are found to be at a greater risk of having profound negative psychological and social impact on their lives. School children spend a considerable amount of time in classrooms and teachers have a significant influence on their lives during these formative years. Exploring teachers' knowledge and attitudes about stammering will provide us with an insight on how they deal with students who stammer in the classroom. This study aimed at exploring the level of knowledge and attitudes of a group of primary school teachers about children who stammer.

A self administered, pretested, structured questionnaire was administered among 100 primary school teachers in Lyceum International School in Colombo in July 2012. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square test.

Eighty four teachers had responded and all were females. The results showed that, many teachers (57%) believed that stammering does not affect child's IQ level. Nearly half (47%) of the sample was in the opinion that many students who stammer are shy and quiet. A majority (90%) did not agree that punishing will help to improve a child with stammering behaviour. Fifty percent, however, thought that teachers should make children repeat words until they can speak fluently. Many teachers thought that children with stammering have potential to overcome the problem (86%) and child's living environment is an important factor in reinforcing or reducing his or her stammer (90%). Sixty five percent believed that a teacher should not exempt a child who stammers from talking in front of the class. A majority (96%) also believed that they should avoid making children who stammer aware that they are different from other children. A majority (83%) also felt that children are more fluent when a teacher puts the child at ease before speaking. Teachers who had taught 3 or more students with stammering in the past have marked significantly higher number of desirable responses than the others in the sample ($P = 0.03$).

The teachers' responses to majority of the statements were desirable. However, inadequate knowledge and undesirable attitudes about the disorder still remains. The findings of this study are important to plan a training program to eliminate myths and undesirable attitudes among teachers and to make them effectively help children with stammering.