Prevalence of communication impairment in Australian children

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Introduction
Information regarding the prevalence of communication disorders is important for planning and evaluating service delivery. Multiple studies have investigated the prevalence of communication disorders in Australia and throughout the world, with varying results. This poster provides information from five large scale Australian studies published since 2000, that examined the prevalence of communication impairment in a total of 57,717 participants. The studies reported a range of estimates for prevalence rates, from 0.12% (voice) to 25.2% (expressive speech and language). Results varied according to the communication disorders being investigated, definition of disorders, mode of identification, age and number of participants.

Area(s) assessed = Stuttering
Prevalence = 0.72% overall, 1.44% males aged 6-10 years
Age of participants = 1-99 years
Number of participants = 12,131
Assessment method = Telephone interview and tape recording
Additional information
• Participants were selected from telephone directories to obtain a random, stratified sample of families from suburban (75%) and rural (25%) areas in the Australian state of New South Wales.
• All participants were contacted by telephone, given a standard definition of stuttering, and asked to identify any members of the household who may stutter.
• If a family member was reported to stutter, that person’s speech was taped-recorded over the telephone for up to 5 minutes.
• Frequency of stuttering (FSS) and speech rate (SPM) were then determined from this tape-recording.

Area(s) assessed = Communication disorders
Prevalence = 13.04% (wave 1); 12.40% (wave 2)
Age of participants = 5-18 years; Kindergarten - Year 12
Number of participants = 14,514 (wave 1); 14,533 (wave 2)
Assessment method = Teacher report followed by direct assessment
Additional information
• Participants in the study were all the children attending 36 primary schools in one Catholic diocese in Sydney, Australia.
• Teachers were provided with definitions to assist their identification of specific subtypes of communication impairment.
• Children identified by teachers were then assessed by a SLP.

Additional information
• This paper utilized data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) that examined the development and wellbeing of children in Australia and the impact of a range of social and cultural factors (AIPS, 2007).

Conclusion
Comparisons between studies are influenced by differences in study design (Blum-Harasy & Rosenthal, 1992). The current paper demonstrates that there are differing definitions of communication impairment and differing emphases on sub-types of communication impairment such as speech sound production and language. Additionally, the studies employed different data collection techniques (e.g., parent report, teacher report, direct assessment) that can affect the ascertained prevalence figure. Over the years multiple studies have been conducted that investigated the prevalence of communication disorders in Australia and internationally. Law et al. (2001) provided a systematic review of the prevalence and natural history literature published between 1967 and May 1997, covering studies investigating speech and language delays in children aged 16 years and younger. They found median estimates of prevalence ranged from 2.02% to 19% for language delay only, and from 2.3% to 24.6% for speech delay only, while estimates of prevalence for speech and/or language delay ranged from 4.56% to 19%. The five studies outlined in this poster add new information to the prevalence literature. Based on these recently conducted large-scale Australian studies the prevalence of communication impairments in Australian children ranges from 0.12% to 20.8%, with increased prevalence in younger children.

References

Acknowledgment
This research was supported by Australian Research Council Discovery Project DP0770978.

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Poster presented to American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Convention, 14-17 November 2007, Boston, USA.