

Beyond Speech: Assessing Parent's Awareness of the Wide Scope of Speech Language Pathology Services in Nagaland

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the awareness of parents on the wide scope of services a speech and language pathologist provides. A total of 200 survey data was collected through a checklist questionnaire on the varieties of disorders a speech and language pathologist treats as a profession. The awareness and knowledge of the parents were limited; the findings highlighted a need for further public awareness and parents education programs.

Keywords: Parents education programs, Speech Language Pathologist, Awareness

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Introduction

Speech and language development is an essential part of a child's entire development, impacting their academic, social, emotional and cognitive abilities (Owens, 2020). Communication difficulties that are left untreated can greatly leave a negative impact on a child's capacity to engage with people and surroundings and may result in a long term social and educational difficulties (Law et al., 2000). Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) are professionals who are trained in the field of speech and hearing sciences or communication science. They assess, diagnose and manage a wide range disorders along with speech and language such as voice, fluency, cognition and swallowing (ASHA, 2020). Despite the fact that SLPs offer a wide range of services, parents are often unaware of these services, while overlooking important areas such as language disorders, cognitive communication impairments, feeding and swallowing difficulties and neurological or development conditions. Many parents tend to link speech language pathology services primarily to speech related difficulties like misarticulation and stammering (Roulstone et al., 2011). This limited awareness and knowledge may cause delay in early identification and intervention, which could have a detrimental effect on the progress and development (Guralnick, 2011).

Nagaland, a northeastern state in India is rich in culture and linguistically diverse. Children in these settings are frequently exposed to several languages at once which might affect the pace and pattern of language acquisition. Although exposure to many languages offers cognitive benefits, it can also cause parents to mistake communication delays for typical developmental variances (Paradis et al., 2011). As a result, there may not be much awareness regarding the diverse range of disorders managed by a Speech Language Pathologist among the parents.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand parent's awareness on the variety of disorders that a speech language pathologist treats in order to encourage early identification and intervention. The present study is aimed to find the knowledge gaps that might hinder help seeking behavior and to evaluate parental awareness of various conditions related to Speech Language Pathology services.

Method

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire is a self structured questionnaire which is based on previously published articles and studies. The questionnaire consists of the demographic data section which includes participant's information and a checklist on the services provided by a speech language pathologist which is a close ended question, adapted from a questionnaire developed by Breadner et al., (1989).

Procedure

The questionnaires were given out to 200 parents of children in preschool section in Nagaland. A convenience sampling method was employed to recruit participants to allow feasibility and easy access (Etikan et al., 2016). Parents from diverse educational and socio-cultural background were included for a comprehensive finding. Informed consents of all the participants were collected and the nature of the study was explained in detail. A descriptive statistic was used to analyze the findings using frequency and percentage distribution.

Results

Demographic of the participants

A total of 200 surveys were collected. Majority of the participants were female (75.5%). 48.5% of the parents were aged 35-44 making it the majority. The educational qualification was highest for a bachelor's degree (32%) followed by master's degree (20%). Nearly half of the parents were employed (48%) and a majority of 37.5% with an income above 60,000 per month. A huge majority of the parents were willing to learn more about the field of speech language pathology 98.5%. The data from the demographic findings highlights that most of the respondents were middle aged married mothers with moderate to high levels of educational qualifications, varying level of employment income and a high willingness to learn about the speech language pathology service area.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	Less than 25	1	0.5
	25–34	37	18.5
	35–44	97	48.5
	45–54	49	24.5
	55–64	12	6.0
	65 or above	4	2.0
Gender	Female	151	75.5
	Male	49	24.5
Marital Status	Married	184	92.0
	Divorced	10	5.0
	Widow	6	3.0
Educational Qualification	Below 10th	28	14.0
	10th	28	14.0
	12th	35	17.5
	Bachelor's Degree	64	32.0
	Master's Degree	40	20.0
	M.Phil	1	0.5

	PhD	4	2.0
Employment Status	Employed Full Time	96	48.0
	Employed Part Time	15	7.5
	Unemployed	87	43.5
Total Family Income (per month)	Less than ₹10,000	11	5.5
	₹10,001–₹20,000	27	13.5
	₹20,001–₹40,000	48	24.0
	₹40,001–₹60,000	39	19.5
	₹60,000 and above	75	37.5
Are you willing to learn more about speech language pathology	YES	197	98.5
	NO	3	1.5

Awareness on the services provided by speech language pathologist

A list of disorders was provided to the parents and asked to tick or select the disorders that they think should be treated by a speech language pathologist. The findings from the collected data reveal a varying response from the parents on the knowledge of services provided by a speech language pathologist as presented in the figure 1 and table 2. Autism was the disorder with the highest level of awareness (50%), followed by cleft lip and palate (36%), intellectual disability (34%) and hearing loss (33.5%). These findings highlights the parent's knowledge on visible conditions or conditions that are frequently discussed in clinical and public settings, compared to those conditions that are invisible.

Patients with strained voice (28%), vocal fold removal (24.5%), disease or injury to the brain (25%) and stroke patient (21.5%) were the conditions found to have a moderate awareness among the respondents. This indicates that while parent's awareness is not as good as it is for the developmental disorders, parents are aware of the role speech language pathologist play in treating voice and neurological issues.

The findings also revealed a selection on certain conditions such as memory deficit (13%), tonsillitis (7%), blindness (6%), muscle diseases (5%) and leukemia (2%). These findings reveal that parents may misidentify unrelated medical conditions with speech language pathology services and have little knowledge on the more general medical and cognitive conditions that may require speech language pathology intervention services.

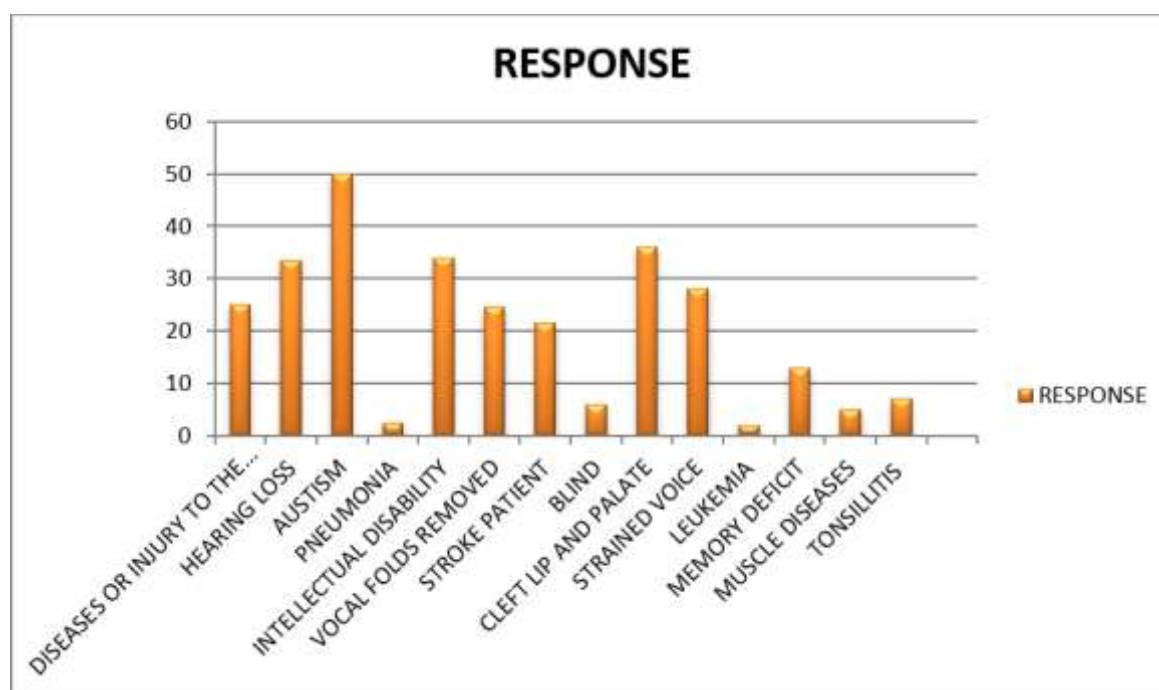


Figure 1: Graphical representation of parent's response on the services provided by speech language pathologist

Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of the parents responses on the services provide by speech language pathologist

	Frequency	Percentage
Diseases or Injury to the Brain	50	25
Hearing Loss	67	33.5
Austism	100	50
Pneumonia	5	2.5
Intellectual Disability	68	34
Vocal Folds Removed	49	24.5
Stroke Patient	43	21.5
Blind	12	6
Cleft Lip and Palate	72	36
Strained Voice	56	28
Leukemia	4	2
Memory Deficit	26	13
Muscle Diseases	10	5
Tonsillitis	14	7

Discussion

The present study examines the parent's awareness on their knowledge of the services provided by a speech language pathologist professional in Nagaland. The findings revealed mixed responses with parents showing to have an inadequate comprehension of the wider range of speech language pathology services but a relatively better recognition of developmental and visible conditions.

The results imply that parents are more aware of the conditions that are easily visible or frequently discussed in public and clinical settings. The awareness for widely recognized developmental problems are found to be higher, a similar findings from a study done by Roulstone et al., (2011). The findings for better awareness for such conditions may be a result of media coverage and awareness.

Parents were found to be aware of the services for voice related and neurological conditions, while the comparatively low percentages as compared to the developmental disorders suggest the gap in knowledge of SLP involvement in medical and rehabilitation settings. This aligns with the more general perception that speech language pathology services are only limited to speech disorders (ASHA, 2020).

The selection of unrelated medical conditions with speech related pathology services such as tonsillitis, blindness, muscle deficit, pneumonia and leukemia, highlights limited understanding and misconceptions. Parents demonstrated a limited understanding about cognitive communication disorders which include the higher level language abilities, attention and memory (Turkstra et al., 2016). The inclusions of the unrelated conditions like leukemia and pneumonia raises the possibility of misconceptions, where parents could link general medical conditions with speech language pathology services. Thus, revealing a lack of understanding and misconceptions on the specific scope of a Speech Language Pathologist services.

Implications

Importance should be given on the voice and neurological conditions and those conditions that are not easily visible to the eye, when planning for public awareness and parent education programs. In the context of Nagaland, educating the public and parents through local dialects and platforms can enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of the program. The findings also suggest a more comprehensive and community involvement of the SLP professionals beyond the clinical settings to help bridge the knowledge gap and provide comprehensive understanding of the services they provide. The general doctors play a very important role in early identification and intervention, increasing the knowledge and awareness of healthcare professionals on SLP services can reduce the gap of delayed intervention.

Limitation and Suggestions

There are some limitations in the study. This study is limited to the parents in Kohima. The responses were collected from parents of children in preschool level. Further studies suggestions will be to include the data from rural population for boarder classification, longitudinal study can be conducted to find the effectiveness of training programs and an open ended question can be included in the tool to get a comprehensive finding qualitatively.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings from the present study reveals that although parents are aware of the disorders commonly associated with SLPs, there still remains a huge knowledge gap on the entire spectrum of disorders and conditions that SLPs treat. This partial awareness highlights the limited view of the profession and the need for more awareness and parent education programs.

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