

STUTTERING LEVELS AND COMMUNICATION PROFILES OF CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A PARENT/CAREGIVER QUESTIONNAIRE

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PURPOSE: Heightened anxiety levels shown to be a contributing factor in triggering an increase in dysfluent speech. The purpose of this study is to examine per parent/caregiver report how COVID-19 Pandemic and its precautions effect the fluency and communication behaviours of Turkish children between ages 6-12 who are diagnosed with fluency disorders and receive speech therapy services in rehabilitation centres.

METHODOLOGY: Thirty seven 3-point Likert Scale and close ended questions (Demographics, Fluency Disorder, Pandemic Precautions, Pandemic Period) were used to prepare a Parent/Caregiver Questionnaire and distributed through Google Forms on social networks via speech language therapists who work in rehabilitation settings.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS: Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data.

RESULTS: 32 parents/caregivers participated in the study. 41% indicated an increase in their children's dysfluent speech; 63% described their children of being nervous; 44% anxious, and 53% unhappy. Overall, the participants do not think mask use (69%) and social distancing (72%) have an increasing effect on stuttering levels. 47% of the participants think home quarantine increases the level of dysfluencies their children's speech. 53% of the children exhibited an avoidance behaviour in social gatherings, 50% avoided communicating. 38% of the participants reported their concerns to their speech and language therapists and 81% preferred to receive an intensive therapy during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS: During the COVID-19 Pandemic and its preventative measures, children with stuttering need to be carefully monitored and the necessary intensive interventions applied.

Keywords: covid-19, stuttering, children, fluency disorders