



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



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INTRODUCTION

Stuttering is a relatively common speech disorder in children. After the recognition of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a Pandemic, an overall increase in referrals for stuttering assessment and therapy is being observed by many speech therapists working in Turkey. The COVID-19 Pandemic and implemented precautions such as mask wearing, social distancing, and quarantining has led to a rise in anxiety, stress, fear and depression among the population in general. Parents or caregivers of children between ages 6-12 began to report an increase in frequency of dysfluencies. Studies have shown that an increased anxiety level may be a contributing factor in triggering an increase in dysfluent instances. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine per parent/caregiver report how COVID-19 Pandemic and its precautions affect the fluency of Turkish children between ages 6-12 who are diagnosed with fluency disorder and receive speech therapy according to their Individualized Education Plans in rehabilitation centers.

METHODOLOGY

Ethics committee approval was obtained from Istanbul Medipol University Non-Invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee, on November 27, 2020, with decision no.:875.

Thirty seven, 3-point Likert Scale type and close ended questions (Demographics, Fluency Disorder, Pandemic Precautions, Pandemic Period) were used to prepare a Parent/Caregiver Questionnaire.

Online questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms on social networks via speech language therapists who work in rehabilitation settings (snowball sampling).

The parents/caregivers of 32 children between the ages of 6-12 who are diagnosed with fluency disorders and receive speech therapy services in rehabilitation centres participated in the study.

Parents/caregivers reports were collected between the 26.11.2020-31.01.2021. They participated in the study voluntarily and willingly. Descriptive statistics were used to analysis the data.

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographics

Gender	Male	27 (84,4%)
	Female	5 (15,6%)
Primary Caregiver	Mother	28 (87,5%)
	Father	1 (3,1%)
	Other Family Member	1 (3,1%)
	Babysitter	2 (6,3%)

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

● Yes
● No
● Undecided

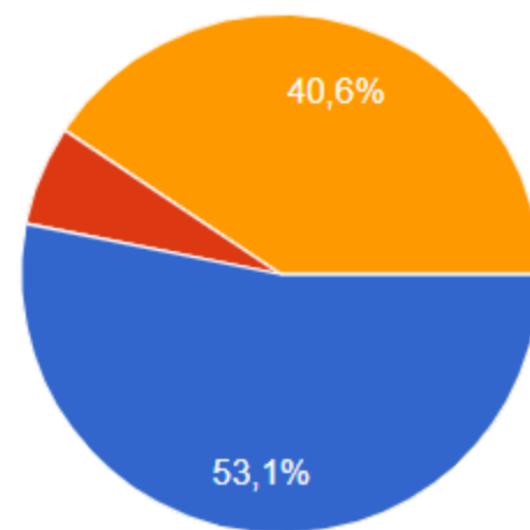


Figure 1. Does your child often express his/her unhappiness about this period?

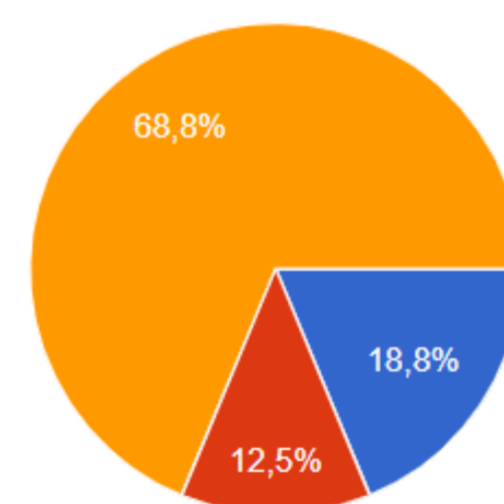


Figure 2. Do you think that as a parent or a caregiver, you can efficiently spend your time with your child at home during the pandemic period?

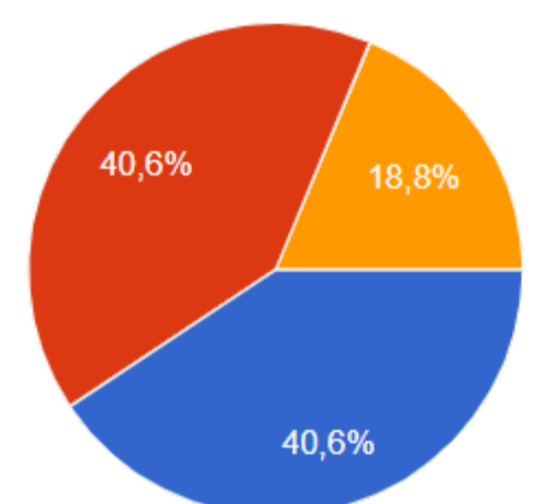


Figure 3. Do you think your child's stuttering level has increased during the pandemic period?

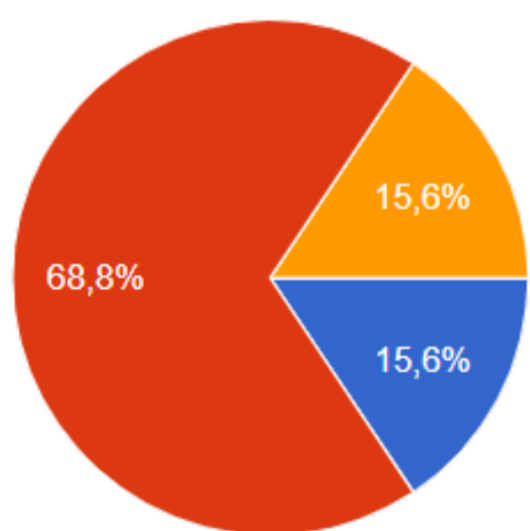


Figure 4. Do you think the use of a mask has an increasing effect on stuttering levels?

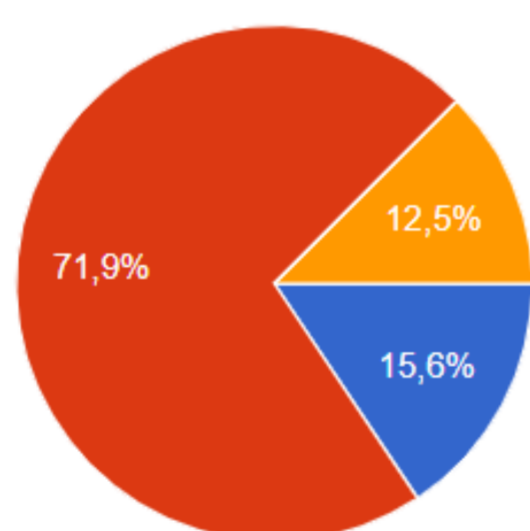


Figure 5. Do you think social distancing has an increasing effect on stuttering levels?

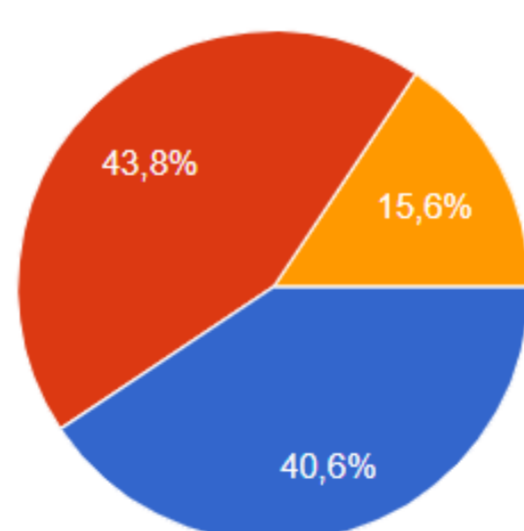


Figure 6. Do you think online education has an increasing effect on stuttering levels?

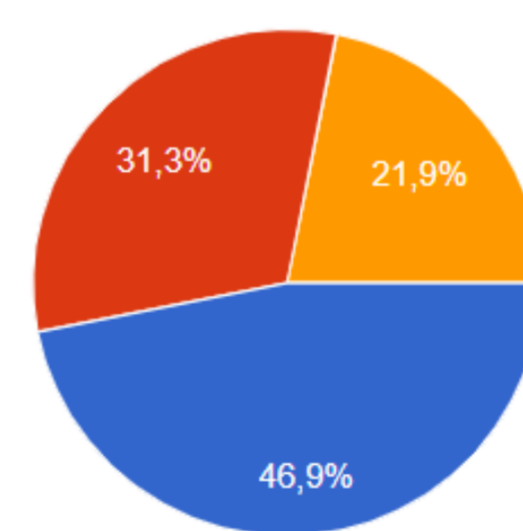


Figure 7. Do you think home quarantine has an increasing effect on stuttering levels?

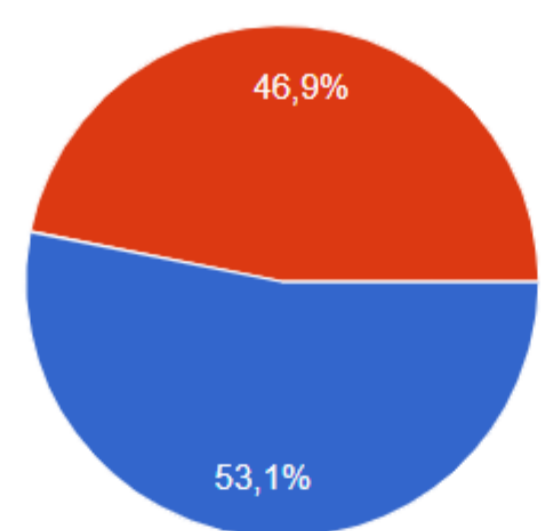


Figure 8. Does your child exhibit avoidance behavior in social gatherings during the pandemic period?

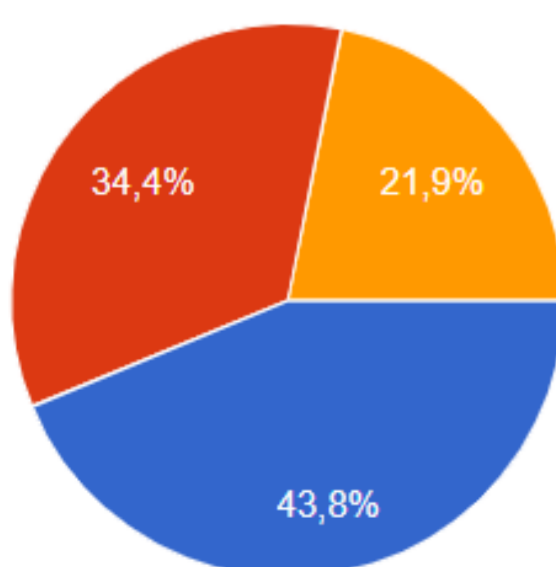


Figure 9. Do you think your child's anxiety level increases during the pandemic?

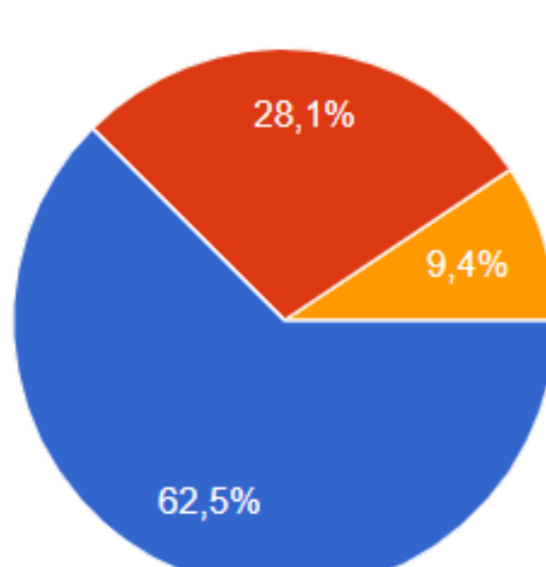


Figure 10. Do you think your child's nervous state increases during the pandemic?

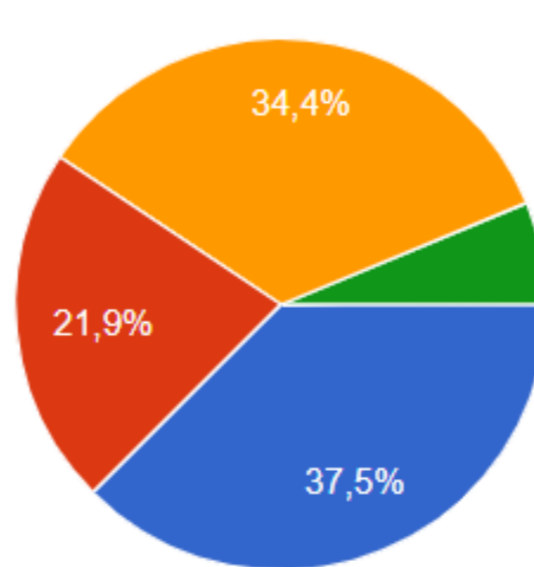


Figure 11. Have you reported your concerns to your speech and language therapist? (orange color means «I may report soon»; green color means «I do not intend to share».)

CONCLUSIONS: COVID-19 is a new condition and may have different effects on different patient groups. Studies on the effects of COVID-19 on children with stuttering are limited. Further research with a larger sample size is needed to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children with stuttering between ages 6 to 12. During the COVID-19 pandemic and its preventative measures, children with stuttering need to be carefully monitored and the necessary intensive interventions applied.