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2008 ASHA Researcher Survey: Executive Summary

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Written by the ASHA Researcher Survey Group

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Introduction

In an effort to better serve the interests and needs of the communication sciences and disorders (CSD) research community, a survey was fielded on August 5, 2008, to all American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) constituents who indicated their primary or secondary employment function as researcher as well as to individuals who expressed interest in participating based on their response to an advertisement in the ASHA Research Digest e-mail list ($n = 1,233$). Two follow-up reminders were sent to nonrespondents. A total of 303 responses were received, for a useable response rate of 24.6%. Note that of the 303 responses received, 209 individuals completed the entire survey; 94 dropped out of the survey prior to completing all questions.

The survey covered nine broad areas: education and preparation, areas of research, evidence-based practice, research mentoring, domestic and international research collaborations, publications and online tools, reviewer experiences, support for research (financial and institutional), and ASHA's role in supporting researchers.

This Executive Summary presents highlights from the survey results.

Respondent Characteristics

- Over a third (39%) of the respondents reported that they practiced in the area of speech, language, or hearing science; 61% in speech-language pathology; and 28% in audiology.
- Sixty-nine percent of the respondents held a research doctoral degree in the CSD discipline, and 17% held a doctorate outside of the discipline. The median year in which the doctoral degree was conferred was 1997.
- Most of the respondents (86%) had earned a doctorate from a Research I college or university, 4% had earned a doctorate from a non-U.S. university, and 40% had participated in a postdoctoral experience.
- The majority of respondents (96%) primarily resided in the United States. Individuals ($n = 9$) from Canada, Ecuador, Finland, Lebanon, and New Zealand also participated in the survey.
- Researcher was the primary current employment function of the respondents (72%), followed by educator (57%), and administrator/director/chair/supervisor (21%). Individuals were allowed to select multiple functions.
- Predictably, most of the respondents were college- or university-based (76%). Twelve percent were in a health care setting, and 5% in a research/scientific organization, foundation, laboratory, or institute.
- Of those holding an academic rank, 26% were full professors, 26% associate professors, and 20% assistant professors.
- The median number of years of experience as a researcher was 10, ranging from 1 to 54 years.
- Half (50%) of the respondents' time was devoted to research, including time dedicated to student research mentoring.

- About a third (35%) of the respondents reported that they had held a volunteer position (committee, board, council appointment, etc.) within ASHA in the past 5 years.
- Three quarters (76%) of the respondents were female and 24% male. Four percent were of Hispanic or Latino descent, and 95% reported their race as White. Comparatively, 94% of ASHA's total constituency are female, 4% are Hispanic or Latino, and 93% are White.

Highlights

Education and Preparation

- The experiences that most positively contributed to their development as a researcher included attending conferences (85%), serving as a coauthor on a scholarly manuscript (83%), lab experiences (80%), and participating in the development and/or implementation of a grant application (76%).
- The majority of survey respondents reported that they are familiar with and have accessed *The ASHA Leader* (92%) and ASHA's online scholarly journals (87%); have participated in the ASHA Convention (81%); and/or are familiar with and have accessed ASHA policy documents (67%).
- Other ASHA resources or programs offered to foster the education and preparation of researchers were less familiar to the respondents, including the Web-based Interdisciplinary Collaborations modules (83% were not familiar with them), the Lessons for Success: Developing the Emerging Scientist Conference (65%), the Grant Reviewer Training Workshop (45%), and the Grant Writing Workshop (43%).

Areas of Research

- More than half of the respondents reported that they were involved in clinical research specific to the nature of a disorder (56%), assessment/diagnosis (53%), and/or treatment (53%). A slightly lower percentage (45%) indicated that basic research had been their primary area of focus, and only 11% reported that their research focused on clinical research in the area of prevention.
- Factors cited that may limit their efforts to conduct clinical research relative to the nature, prevention, assessment and diagnosis, and/or treatment of individuals with disorders included:
 - limited access to appropriate funding streams (46%);
 - length of time required for these types of studies (44%);
 - insufficient access to subjects (38%);
 - engagement in other types of research (30%);
 - lack of perceived value for this type of research (20%).
- Interestingly, some of the same factors that limited the respondents' efforts to conduct clinical research were perceived by others to *enhance* their research depending on their personal experiences. These factors included:
 - access to subjects (53%);
 - access to appropriate funding streams (53%);
 - perceived value for this type of research (49%).
- ASHA researchers work with individuals across the entire age continuum. The 19–64 group is the largest group recruited for research (59%), followed by those in the 3–5 (46%) and 6–18 (44%) age groups.
- Colleges and universities served as the primary source of research participants (63%), followed by the community (57%) and health care settings (43%) such as clinics and residential health care facilities.

- The most popular areas of research interest, out of the 64 areas that were listed, were language disorders (36%), language acquisition (28%), language (24%), normal processes (22%), and literacy (22%). Hearing (20%), aging (19%), neurogenic communication disorders (19%), learning disabilities (18%), and cochlear implants (16%) followed.
- Eight percent of the respondents reported that they had conducted animal research within the past 5 years.

Evidence-Based Practice

- In the past 5 years, the research designs used by the respondents included group studies (91%), outcomes research (59%), case studies (48%), single-subject research (37%), and randomized controlled clinical trials (23%).

Research Mentoring

- Of those employed in a college or university setting, respondents indicated that they had directly mentored two bachelor's level, three master's level, and two research doctoral level students in the conduct of research in the past 3 years.
- Few respondents, regardless of their employment setting, reported directly mentoring professionals engaged in research (e.g., clinicians, junior researchers, or postdoctoral fellows). The median response was zero across all types of professionals.

Domestic and International Research Collaborations

- The majority of respondents (80%) reported that they had been involved in domestic research collaborations (excluding students) within the discipline and/or across disciplines during the past 5 years. Of those who had, 56% served as the principal investigator in collaborating with others within the CSD discipline, 12% with psychology, 8% each with medicine and neuroscience, and 7% each with special education and statistics.
- Approximately one third of the respondents (31%) reported collaborating on international research projects over the past 5 years. Again, most projects focused on the CSD discipline (29%), 7% with psychology, 6% each with biology and medicine, and 4% with linguistics.
- The sources of funding used for international research collaborations included internal university funds, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and private funding sources.
- International collaborations were often initiated by the respondent, faculty or research staff at universities abroad, lab directors, current or former advisors, and/or doctoral students. Sometimes the collaborations were initiated at international meetings.
- The respondents had collaborated with individuals in numerous countries, including the United Kingdom (26%), Australia (24%), Canada (23%), Germany (19%), and New Zealand (12%).
- The respondents indicated that they had attended and presented at an average (mean) of three international meetings in the past 5 years.

Publications and Online Tools

- The most common journals for publishing CSD-related research in the past 5 years included:
 - *The Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* (11% of 687 reported published research studies);
 - *The American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* (5%);
 - *Aphasiology* (5%);
 - *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* (5%).

- Searchable journal databases, such as Medline, were used by 77% of the respondents in their professional life. Other online tools used included the Association’s online peer review system, Manuscript Central (48%); the e-mail Table of Contents feature for ASHA’s scholarly journals (45%); and CiteTrack alerts (27%). Six percent were using podcasts and social network Web sites in their professional life.
- Seventeen percent of the respondents reported that they had submitted one or more manuscripts to an online-only journal.

Reviewer Experience (Scientific Journals)

- One third (33%) of the respondents indicated that they had served as a reviewer for the *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* in the past 5 years. Other journals for which they had reviewed included:
 - *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* (19%);
 - *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools* (15%);
 - *Ear and Hearing* (13%);
 - *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* (11%);
 - *American Journal of Audiology* (8%);
 - *Journal of Communication Disorders* (8%).

Reviewer Experience (Research Grants)

- A small percentage of the respondents had served in a research grant reviewer capacity in the past 5 years:
 - 14% for NIH’s National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders;
 - 13% for university, institutional, or intramural funded projects;
 - 12% for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Foundation;
 - 7% for the National Science Foundation;
 - 5% for the Department of Education;
 - 3% for NIH’s National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Support for Research

- The majority of respondents (77%) reported that they had applied for research funding within the past 5 years.
- Of those who had *not* applied for funding:
 - 32% indicated that lack of skill in grant preparation was a factor;
 - 24% reported that their research focus did not fall within a grant opportunity available to them;
 - 16% reported a lack of institutional support;
 - 14% reported a lack of access to applicable subject populations.
- The prevailing funders of CSD research projects over the past 5 years included:
 - NIH’s National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (80 funded projects);
 - university, institutional, or intramural funds (51);
 - state or local agencies (19);
 - the American Speech-Language-Hearing Foundation (19);
 - NIH’s National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (14);
 - the Department of Education (13);
 - the National Science Foundation (5).

- Approximately half (47%) of the award amounts were less than \$75,000 (across all years of funding; direct only), 8% in the \$75,000 to \$149,999 range, 10% in the \$150,000 to \$249,999 range, and 35% in the \$250,000 or greater range.
- About half (42%) of the funded awards were for a 1-year duration, 14% for 2 years, 20% for 3 years, 6% for 4 years, and 18% for 5 years.
- The majority of respondents (93%) reported that their institution had a sponsored research office. Most of them offered a full range of resources and services, including presenting educational/training opportunities on grant preparation, facilitating searches for funding opportunities, and negotiating and accepting awards.
- The most prevalent *surmountable* barriers to accomplishing one's research agenda in the past 5 years were factors inherent to the nature of the research program (71%) and inadequate funding (64%). *Insurmountable* barriers included a high volume of administrative duties, insufficient release time, and high teaching load (each at 20%).

ASHA's Role in Supporting Researchers

- The majority of respondents (82%) reported that the ASHA journals served as good or excellent venues for showcasing the discipline's research.
- In addition, the respondents indicated that the ASHA Convention (53%) and the Research Symposium at the ASHA Convention (49%) also served as good or excellent venues for presenting the discipline's research.
- The respondents placed high importance on the need for ASHA to continue to provide venues and opportunities for professional development in the areas of treatment research (77%) and clinical trials (72%).
- The respondents also placed high importance on the need for ASHA to continue to provide articles, workshops, Convention presentations, professional development opportunities, and so forth in the areas of publishing treatment efficacy research (82%), publishing clinical outcomes research (77%), and clinical research considerations (75%).
- Most of the respondents were somewhat or very interested in potential enhancements for publishing their basic and/or clinical research. Sixty-one percent were somewhat or very interested in article summaries, 58% in additional content types, 56% in structured abstracts, and 55% in an open access option.
- Overall, the respondents gave ASHA higher ratings for meeting the needs of researchers in the area of clinical speech-language pathology (45% combined "good" and "excellent" ratings) than in basic hearing, basic speech, basic language, and clinical audiology.

Additional Information

Additional Survey Reports

Companion reports are also available on the ASHA Web site:

- *Respondent Demographics*
- *Areas of Research*
- *Research Processes*
- *Support for Research*
- *ASHA Resources*

Citation

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Project Team

The project team comprised Gail Brook, Research Analyst and Technical Writer; Joanne Jessen, Director of Publications (retired); Lemmietta McNeilly, Chief Staff Officer for Speech-Language Pathology; Sharon Moss (project director), Director, Scientific Programs and Research Development (former); Loretta Nunez, Director, Academic Affairs; Jim Potter, Director, Government Relations and Public Policy (former); Margaret Rogers, Chief Staff Officer for Science and Research; and Sarah Slater, Director, Surveys and Information.

Questions?

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Thank You

Without the generous cooperation of the members who participate in our surveys, ASHA could not fulfill its mission to provide vital information about the professions and discipline to the Association membership and public. Thank you!