Perceptions of People Who Stutter About Occupational Experiences

Scott Palasik, MS-CCC-SLP
Rodney Gabel, Ph.D., CCC-SLP, BRS-FD
Bowling Green State University
Communication Disorders Department

ASHA Convention, November 21, 2008
Abstract

Research has explored the perceptions that people who stutter (PWS) report about work experiences and discrimination. This study surveyed 70 National Stuttering Association members regarding their work experiences. Each participant completed a questionnaire that included thirteen Likert-scale type questions. Participants reported that their stuttering affected occupational experiences and that some employers may have made judgments during job interviews, promotional opportunities, and allowing the employee who stutters to keep a job based on stuttering. Further research is needed to investigate the perspectives of employers and colleagues of people who stutter.
Past Research

- Rice and Kroll (1994):
  - Surveyed 282 People Who Stutter (PWS) in Canada.
  - Explored participants’ perceptions of challenges, experiences and discrimination in work experiences with 10 Likert scale questions.
  - Results indicated that PWS reported experiencing discrimination and challenges in their work and while acquiring a job.
Statement of the Problem

- Stuttering is a multifaceted disorder that can impact the person in many aspects of their life (Yaruss & Quesal, 2004).
  - For those who stutter into adulthood, stuttering might affect their occupational experiences.
Past Research

- Rice and Kroll (1997):
  - 586 PWS in North America were asked to answer Likert scales, dichotomous, and open-ended questions.
  - The study explored: employment opportunities, job promotion, job responsibilities, performance evaluation, feelings of social alienation at work.
  - Results suggested that PWS reported challenges in all aspects of employment experiences. These challenges appeared to be more difficult for those who had greater stuttering severity.
Past Research

Klein and Hood (2004):

- The researchers explored the impact of stuttering on employment opportunities and job performance.
- 232 PWS completed a questionnaire that included 17 Likert type items that measured the respondents beliefs about their own issues with employment and their beliefs about the difficulties that all PWS have with employment.
- Results:
  - 70% reported that stuttering interferes with being hired.
  - 69% think stuttering hinders job performance.
  - Majority think that employers think negatively about PWS.
Past Research

Rice and Kroll (2006):
- Participants: An international sample (e.g. Britain, US, Canada, Australia, India etc.) of 412 PWS responded to web-based survey that asked them to share their experiences related to employment. Results reflected the following:
  - Respondent Self-Beliefs:
    - 85.9% think “Stuttering has, at times, interfered with my job performance”
    - 74.7% think “Overall, I would be better at my job if I did not stutter.”
    - 63.8% think “I have, at times, sought employment which requires little speaking.”
    - 59.5% think “I would be more likely to be promoted if I did not stutter.”
    - 57.5% think “I would earn more money if I did not stutter”
  - Potential Discrimination:
    - 67.9% think “I believe my capabilities, at times, have been misjudged by my supervisors”
Purpose

- The purpose of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the impact stuttering has on occupational and work experiences.
  - Do PWS report more difficulties related to their work?
  - Do PWS report more difficulties in finding and being successful in their work?
Methods

Participants Demographics:

- 85 NSA Members from Central USA returned surveys, 70 of the completed surveys were usable.
- Gender: Male 75.7% and Female 24.3%
- Age: Range 18-82, Mean: 43, SD: 16 years
- Ethnicity: 85.7% Caucasian, 5.7% African-American, 3% Hispanic, 1.4% Asian, 4.3% Other
- Employment Status: 55.7% Full Time, 20% Students, 12.9% Retired
- Income/Year: Most participants reported earning between $30,000-39,000 per year.
Participants

- History of Stuttering and Therapy:
  - Past therapy: 87% had past therapy.
  - Presently in therapy: 16% were presently in therapy.
- Self severity Ratings:
  - Mild 47%
  - Moderate 47%
  - Severe 6%
Procedures

- NSA Chapter Leaders (Central North and Central South USA) were contacted via email and asked for their assistance in recruiting participants.
- The leaders emailed the researcher and requested a certain number of surveys.
- The researcher then mailed surveys to the leaders with a self-addressed stamped envelope for the participants to return their responses to BGSU’s Department of Communication Disorders.
Survey

- The survey included an invitation letter, a consent page describing the study, and several demographic questions that provided information about the participants’ background. There were 13 Likert scale questions (altered from Rice and Kroll, 1997) that explored the effects that stuttering had on employment experiences.

- Each item utilized a five point Likert-type scale:
  - 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3- Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree
Analysis

- Frequency Counts were produced for each of the thirteen questions and separated in three groups:
  - Strongly Disagree + Disagree = Disagree
  - Neither Agree nor Disagree = Neutral
  - Strongly Agree + Agree = Agree

- Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed with the following:
  - Independent Variables: Gender and reported severity
  - Dependent Variables: The thirteen questions
  - p=.05
Results – Frequency Counts

1. I believe I could have a better job if I didn't stutter.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 35.7
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 12.9
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 51.4
   
   “The majority of participants believe they could have a better job if they didn’t stutter.”

2. I believe I have been discriminated against in or obtaining and holding a job because of my stuttering.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 32.9
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 20.0
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 47.1

   “Nearly half feel they’ve been discriminated against when trying to get a job and/or maintain one because of stuttering.”
Results – Frequency Counts

3. I have sought employment which required little speaking.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 41.4
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 10.0
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 48.6
   “Nearly half of respondents have looked for jobs with limited speaking responsibilities”

4. I believe stuttering has limited my ability to get promoted.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 34.3
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 27.1
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 38.6
   “Over a third feel that stuttering limited their promotional opportunities”
5. On occasion, I believe I have not been granted a promotion due to my stuttering.

- Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 38.6
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 24.3
- Strongly Agree + Agree: 37.1

“Just over a third of participants believe they have not been granted a promotion due to stuttering.”

6. I have, at times, not been asked or required to perform speaking tasks which were typically required of someone in my position.

- Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 35.7
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 20.0
- Strongly Agree + Agree: 44.3

“Over a third of PWS think they haven’t been asked to perform the same speaking tasks that they should be for a person in their job position”
Results – Frequency Counts

7. I believe I have not been asked to complete supervisory activities because of my stuttering.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 51.4
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 28.6
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 20.0
   “Over two and half times as many people feel that their stuttering has not affected whether their employers asked them to complete supervisory activities at work.”

8. I believe supervisors have underestimated my abilities because of my stuttering.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 34.3
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 14.3
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 51.4
   “The majority of participants feel that supervisors have underestimated their abilities because of their stuttering.”
9. Stuttering has negatively affected my performance appraisals at work.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 50.0
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 32.9
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 17.1
     “Three times as many people felt that stuttering did not effect performance appraisals in a work environment.”

10. I believe that co-workers have excluded me from social activities because I stutter.
    - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 72.9
    - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 15.7
    - Strongly Agree + Agree: 11.4
      “Nearly seven times as many people felt that co-workers have not excluded them from social activities because of their stuttering.”
Results – Frequency Counts

11. I have been advised to avoid certain careers because of my stuttering.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 58.6
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 15.7
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 25.7
   “Over twice as many participants didn’t think they were advised to avoid certain careers due to their stuttering.”

12. I believe that job interviews have been negatively affected by my stuttering.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 22.9
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 20.0
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 57.1
   “Over twice as many PWS believe that job interviews have been affected by their stuttering.”

13. I am limited in my abilities to perform jobs that require a significant amount of communication ability.
   - Strongly Disagree + Disagree: 42.9
   - Neither Agree Nor Disagree: 15.7
   - Strongly Agree + Agree: 41.4
   “A large portion of PWS believe they are limited when performing jobs with large amounts of speaking.”
Results - MANOVA

- There was not a significant main effect for gender.
- Self-reported stuttering severity had a significant effect for the question: Stuttering has negatively affected my performance appraisals at work. (F=5.089, p<.05, partial Eta Squared=.139).
  - People who stuttered severely had more difficulty with performance appraisals.
Discussion

- PWS reported that their stuttering impacted their job experiences negatively with respects to choosing a job and feeling that stuttering limits promotional opportunities, types of jobs chosen, and job responsibilities.

- Unlike past studies, PWS do not feel a level of general discrimination with job responsibilities, employment opportunities, and job promotion.
Discussion

- As with other research, these participants reported that employers play a role in not allowing them to perform more speaking tasks, attaining jobs, holding jobs, and promotions (Hurst & Cooper, 1983 and Rice & Kroll, 1994).

- PWS believe that co-workers maybe more accepting of their stuttering than employers.

- This is part of an ongoing line of research with a newly developed online version of this survey (currently 74 PWS have returned the online version in the past three weeks).
Interesting Directions for Future Research

- PWS feel that their employers play a major role in limiting speaking responsibilities, promotional opportunities, and possible discrimination, yet PWS don’t strongly feel that performance appraisals have been affected by the views of employers. Yet, the employees were still asked to perform supervisory activities.
Interesting Directions for Future Research

Thus, there appears to be some disagreement in how PWS view limitations in careers and how this may or may not be related to discrimination.

- A study incorporating qualitative interviews or a mixed-method type design with PWS may allow for an explanation regarding this important issue.
- Qualitative interviews with employers and co-workers may complete the picture of perspectives about occupational experiences with PWS.

The concept of “what is occupational success?” is another question that could be invested with both PWS and PWDS.