The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of practicing clinicians toward the pursuit of the Ph.D. in CSD. A primary aim was to improve upon the statistical procedures of Madison et al. (2004) and expand upon their perspective of practicing SLPs.

Method

Participants

Participants were 122 licensed ASHA-certified SLPs (45% response rate; 115 females, 7 males) practicing in the field for a mean of 18 years (SD = 9.94) working in various settings, including public school systems, hospitals, private practice, and higher education.

• Only 300 students began their Ph.D. studies in CSD between 2001-2002 with 85% of all doctoral programs in CSD reporting a total of 333 vacancies for doctoral candidates the same year (Scott & Wilcox, 2002).
• Madison et al., 2004 identified several factors related to the pursuit of doctoral study but the data are difficult to interpret due to sampling, methodological, and statistical issues.
• Very limited peer-reviewed information is available on this situation from the research in communication sciences and disorders (ASHA, 2007, p. 1).

Measure

• This study employed a cross-sectional survey design using a list (n = 271) of currently licensed and ASHA-certified SLPs practicing in Vermont.
• Participants were 122 licensed ASHA-certified SLPs (45% response rate; 115 females, 7 males) practicing in the field for a mean of 18 years (SD = 9.94) working in various settings, including public school systems, hospitals, private practice, and higher education.

Table 1: A comparison between those who did and did not seriously consider pursuing a Ph.D. (items ranked by importance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Those who seriously considered pursuing a Ph.D.</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Those who did not seriously consider pursuing a Ph.D.</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. I was already satisfied with my professional goals</td>
<td>3.47 (.83)</td>
<td>I. I was already satisfied with my professional goals</td>
<td>4.14 (.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. I was already satisfied with a master’s degree</td>
<td>3.43 (.92)</td>
<td>J. I was already satisfied with a master’s degree</td>
<td>4.13 (.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. I lacked adequate financial support</td>
<td>3.34 (1.26)</td>
<td>P. The prestige of the title Ph.D. was unimportant to me.</td>
<td>3.63 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. I considered a doctoral program too costly</td>
<td>3.38 (1.16)</td>
<td>B. I lacked interest in doctoral education</td>
<td>3.51 (1.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. A doctoral degree would not have significantly increased my salary</td>
<td>3.26 (1.16)</td>
<td>H. A doctoral degree would not have significantly increased my salary</td>
<td>3.38 (1.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. I considered a doctoral program too lengthy</td>
<td>3.23 (1.20)</td>
<td>K. I had no interest in working in higher education</td>
<td>3.31 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. The prestige of the title Ph.D. was unimportant to me.</td>
<td>3.18 (.98)</td>
<td>E. I lacked adequate financial support</td>
<td>3.28 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

• Varimax rotation for independent factors yielded a four-factor solution.
  • Factor 1 Lack of Confidence
  • Factor 2 Lack of Interest in Doctoral Study
  • Factor 3 Practical Financial Issues
  • Factor 4 Practical Family Issues
• T-tests indicated that respondents who had and had not seriously considered the Ph.D. did not differ on any known demographic factors (e.g., age, experience, setting).
• Respondents who did and did not consider the Ph.D differed significantly on all items comprising Factor 2 - Lack of Interest, including interest in research.
• Descriptive analyses were used to rank responses between participants who did and did not seriously consider pursuing a Ph.D. in CSD (see Table 1 for the highest ranking results)

Discussion & Implications

• Participants who never considered a Ph.D. rated statements comprising Factor 2 - Lack of Interest, more highly and indicated that the fact that the Ph.D. was not required to practice in the field was actually an incentive in pursuing study in CSD.
• By contrast (and contrary to Madison et al., 2004), respondents who had considered a Ph.D. tended to endorse Factor 3 – Practical Financial Issues, as reasons to not pursue the Ph.D. These included: Financial aid that does not accrue debt (e.g., fellowships, stipends, scholarships, and grants) may alleviate barriers to doctoral study.
• Students considering doctoral study should obtain counseling (university financial aid office, graduate advisor, or research mentor) to be made aware of the financial resources available and also consider a variety of programs as type and amount of assistance differs across universities.
• Focusing recruitment efforts on the approximate 70% of graduate students in CSD who express no interest in doctoral study, engagement in original research activities may be particularly helpful.
• This is important for demystifying research processes and creating a sense in the student that research is an attainable and enriching activity.

Selected References


Understanding Why Students Rarely Pursue the Ph.D. in Speech-Language Pathology

Myotte, T., Hutchins, T. L., Cannizzaro, M. S., & Belin, G.

Background

• “A critical shortage and continuing attrition of Ph.D. level faculty in higher education . . . will affect preparation of professionals as well as the conduct of research in communication sciences and disorders” (ASHA, 2007, p. 1).
• Only 300 students began their Ph.D. studies in CSD between 2001-2002 with 85% of all doctoral programs in CSD reporting a total of 333 vacancies for doctoral candidates the same year (Scott & Wilcox, 2002).
• Madison et al., 2004 identified several factors related to the pursuit of doctoral study but the data are difficult to interpret due to sampling, methodological, and statistical issues.
• Very limited peer-reviewed information is available on this situation from the research in communication sciences and disorders (ASHA, 2007, p. 1).

In Press


Contact Author - Tiffany Hutchins: Tiffany.Hutchins@uvm.edu