An Employment Interview Desensitization Program Addressing Speech, Attitudes, and Avoidance Behaviors of People Who Stutter

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Introduction:

• Substantial literature reports on the difficulty many people who stutter experience in obtaining their preferred profession (Crichton-Smith, 2002; Hayhow, Cray, & Enderby, 2002; Klein & Hood, 2004; Rice & Kroll, 2006).

• Common themes within these studies include people who stutter not pursuing a desired career, avoiding jobs that require significant verbal communication such as telephone correspondence or presentations, and missing promotions due to avoidance and/or discrimination.

• With the job interview being an essential part of the employment process, people who stutter may need support in overcoming any anxiety and resulting avoidance behaviors they may present when preparing for an interview.

• Little research has investigated the support given to PWS in the employment interview and the outcomes of such support (Brundage, Graap, Gibbons, Ferrer, & Brooks, 2006; Reynolds, 1968; Schloss, Espin, Smith, & Suffolk, 1987). Additionally, the intervention within these studies focused exclusively on the participants’ fluency and did not address the participants’ emotions and avoidance behaviors regarding employment interviews.

• Thus, it was determined that PWS need a more comprehensive therapy program that addresses their fluency, negative emotional responses, and any negative attitudes they may possess as they prepare for and participate in an employment interview.

Program Development:

• To address the need of people who stutter in the job interview context, an experimental curriculum was developed using the Taba (1962) curriculum development model.

• The curriculum aimed to foster three main learning outcomes which were:
  1. To reduce moments of disfluency during job interviews
  2. To reduce the severity of any emotional response that manifests as stress and negative comments during job interviews
  3. To reduce the severity of any negative attitude and consequent avoidance behaviors regarding participating in a job interview
After reviewing the literature regarding successful treatment of stuttering and the literature regarding employment interviews, six steps were developed in an attempt to foster the three main learning objectives. These six steps included:

1. Identifying and practicing preferred stuttering modification and fluency generating techniques
2. Identifying numerous occupations people who stutter currently hold or have held in the past
3. Identifying personal communication strengths and weaknesses and brainstorming for ways to capitalize on strengths and lessen the effects of weaknesses
4. Understanding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and how it applies to PWS
5. Participating in a systematic desensitization hierarchy for working up to the interview
6. Participating in a mock interview

Methods:

Participant

- The participant was an English-speaking, Caucasian male aged 18 with a history of stuttering since early childhood.

- The participant was recruited from the Eckelmann-Taylor Speech and Hearing Clinic at Illinois State University where he had received fluency therapy from 2000 to 2002 and then again from 2007 onward.

Measures

- Multiple measures were used to collect data regarding the curriculum’s efficacy including:
  1. Disfluency analysis (Yairi & Ambrose, 2005)
  2. The Locus of Control of Behavior Scale (Craig, Franklin, & Andrews, 1984)
  3. A 28 item, Likert-type questionnaire investigating the participant’s opinions and feelings regarding stuttering and the job outlook for people who stutter
  4. A close-ended questionnaire regarding the participant’s opinion of the program
  5. Content analysis of the participant’s statements throughout the program
  6. A review of the program from the perspective of the facilitating speech-language pathologist

Procedures

- Six 45-minute intervention sessions were conducted in which the six curriculum steps were facilitated.

- Step One: The participant’s preferred stuttering modification and fluency generating techniques included slow rate of speech, cancellations, and easy onsets. These techniques were incorporated into the remaining five program steps.
• Step Two: Role model exposure activities included exploration of stuttering websites and a mentorship program with a successful person who stutters.

• Step Three: The SWOT analysis (Dosher, Benepe, Humphrey, Stewart, & Lie, 1960-1970) was used to facilitate discussion regarding communication strengths and weaknesses.

• Step Four: A general discussion and exploration of the ADA website was implemented.

• Step Five: The systematic desensitization hierarchy was not facilitated due to discomfort displayed by the participant; however, role playing was used to practice employment interview questions.

• Step Six: A mock interview was conducted at the Career Center at Illinois State University.

External Review
• External validation was sought from experts in three separate disciplines who may work with people who stutter in the employment interview context. These areas included (a) speech-language pathology with an expertise in stuttering therapy (b) communications, and (c) career counseling.

• Reviewers were asked to provide their opinions regarding the efficacy of the program as well as suggestions for improving the curriculum.

Results:

1. Will a research-based therapy curriculum addressing the fluency, attitudes, and emotions of PWS reduce the moments of stuttering of PWS as they prepare for and participate in a job interview?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Disfluency</th>
<th>Visit 1</th>
<th>Visit 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[PW] Part Word Repetition</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[WW] One Syllable Word Repetitions</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[DP] Disrhythmic Phonations</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuttering Index (PW+WW+DP Instances)</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>6.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[I] Interjections</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>11.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[R] Revision + Abandoned Phrases</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal Disfluency Index (I+R+M+P Instances)</td>
<td>12.21</td>
<td>15.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Disfluencies (PW+WW+DP+I+R+M+P Instances)</td>
<td>20.39</td>
<td>21.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition Unit (PW+WW Units/PW+WW Instances)</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition, internality increased by 2.3% as measured by the Locus of Control of Behavior Scale (Craig et al., 1984)

2. Will a research-based therapy curriculum addressing the fluency, attitudes, and emotions of PWS reduce any negative emotional responses of PWS as they prepare for and participate in a job interview?

- The participant experienced a 0.2 increase in agreement with positive statements and a 0.3 decrease in agreement with negative statements from pre- to post-test on the Likert-type questionnaire

- The content analysis revealed a decrease in the number of negative statements from the first to fifth session. An increase in positive statements was also noted including increased awareness of communication strengths and increased feelings of control over fluency.

3. Will a research-based therapy curriculum addressing the fluency, attitudes, and emotions of PWS reduce any avoidance behaviors of PWS as they prepare for and participate in a job interview?

- The content analysis revealed a decrease in the number of negative statements from the first to fifth session. An increase in positive statements was also noted including increased self-disclosure, increased openness in discussing stuttering, and an excitement regarding participation in mock interviews.

External Review

- The three external reviewers judged the overall quality of the program to be “very good,” “average,” and “excellent.”

- The following strengths were identified within the program: (a) the organization of the curriculum guide, (b) the provided charts of counseling techniques and fluency therapy techniques, (c) the role model exposure activities, and (d) the systematic desensitization hierarchy.

- The following suggestions for improvement were made: (a) provide a resource section with fewer websites, (b) include additional information regarding employment interview anxiety in the general population, (c) provide more stringent guidelines for facilitating role model exposure, (d) clarify the description of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and (e) include more information regarding typical interview questions.
Discussion:

- Results of this study indicate that the curriculum was effective in fostering the three learning objectives of reducing moments of stuttering, negative emotional response, and avoidance behaviors in a job interview context.

- Feedback from the external reviewers and thoughts and opinions expressed by the participant and facilitating clinician indicate, however, that improvements should be made to improve its overall quality.

- Suggestions for further research include investigating the program’s efficacy with a larger population of people who stutter. Additionally, the level of long-term maintenance of any gains made should be assessed.

References:


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