STUTTERING AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS
The perception of people who stutter

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I have no relevant financial or nonfinancial relationships to disclose
Introduction

For some adolescents and young adults who stutter romance constitutes a problem area.

Anecdotal reports (see for instance St. Louis, 2001) personal clinical experience
Introduction

Systematic investigation of stuttering as a possible hindrance for forming romantic relationships is almost non-existent.

A recent study (Van Borsel, Brepoels, & De Coene, 2011) investigated the possible impact of stuttering on romantic relationships from the perspective of non-stuttering adolescent and young adults.
Introduction

Results showed that to some extent non-stuttering adolescents and young adults consider peers who stutter less attractive than non-stuttering peers are less likely to engage in a romantic relationship with peers who stutter
Introduction

Purpose of the present study:

to further investigate to what extent stuttering may be a hindrance for forming romantic relationships from the perspective of persons who stutter
Method

Participants:

People who stutter

Recruited with the help of self-help organizations for people who stutter and clinicians treating people who stutter
Method

Each participant filled out a questionnaire that had been posted on a web-site

The questionnaire consisted of three parts
Method

The first part:
demographic data and information about the relational status and stuttering (onset, severity, therapy) of the participants
Method

The second part:
personal experiences of the participants
participants in a relationship
singles
Method

Participants in a relationship
questions about the role that stuttering had played in
the formation of their relationship in the past and the
role stuttering played currently
Method

Singles

questions about the role of stuttering in their search for a partner and establishing a relationship
Method

The third part: the opinion in general of the participants about the impact of stuttering on the formation of romantic relationships
Results (part 1)

Demographics:
110 participants (76 males, 34 females) aged between 18 and 64 years (median 27 years)

74 (i.e. 67.3%) in a relationship
36 (i.e. 32.7%) were single.
Results (part1)

Onset

In 101 (i.e. 91.8%) before the age of 12

In 9 (8.2%) between 12 and 18 years of age
Results

Severity (self-report)
44 (i.e. 36.3%) very severe or severe
66 (i.e. 60%) mild or moderately severe
4 (i.e. 3.6 %) only very mildly

57 (i.e.51.8%) enrolled in speech therapy at the moment of the study
Results (part 3)

The majority of the participants (89, i.e. 80.9%) were of the opinion that it is more difficult for a person who stutterers to find a partner than for a person who does not stutter.
Results (part 3)

A large number (71, i.e. 64.5%) also thought that stuttering in an individual may withhold someone who does not stutter to start a relation with that individual.
Results (part 3)

When asked to take the perspective of a person who does not stutter

76 (i.e. 69.1%) would be willing to start a relationship with a person who stutters

86 (i.e. 78.2%) would be willing to marry someone who stutters
Results (part 3)

When asked to take the perspective of a person who does not stutter, some participants chose “yes if…”

13 (i.e. 28.2%) would be willing to start a relationship with a person who stutters if …

19 (i.e. 17.3% ) would be willing to marry someone who stutters if……
Results (part 3)

If: relationship/marry

Stuttering not too severe: 28.6%/43.8%
Love each other: 21.4%/6.2%
Have confidence, to be able to deal with own stuttering: 21.4%/25%
Willing to work on stuttering: 17.9%/18.8%
Results (part 2)

Participants in a relationship (N=74)

43 (i.e. 58.1%): finding a partner would have been easier if not PWS

Significantly higher (p= 0.022) in severe and very severe stutterers than in those who reported very mild, mild or moderate stuttering.
Results (part 2)

Participants in a relationship (N=74)

Stuttering not a problem at all in relationship
28 (i.e. 37.8%)

When asked to take the perspective of their partner:
53 (i.e. 71.6%)

But: more severe stutterers significantly more often (p =0.031) thought that their partner found the stuttering a problem
Results (part 2)

Participants in a relationship (N=74)

22 (i.e. 29.7%): relationship with partner would have been different if not PWS

Significantly higher ($p= 0.014$) in severe and very severe stutterers than in those who reported very mild, mild or moderate stuttering.
Results (part 2)

Participants in a relationship (N=74)

In 55 (i.e. 74.3%) the partner was aware of the stuttering before starting the relationship

35 (i.e. 47.3%): informed the partner themselves
34 (i.e. 45.9%): the partner found out

None of them had a partner who was a PWS
Results (part 2)

Participants not in a relationship (N=36)

19 (i.e. 52.8%): stuttering as a problem in finding a partner

Significantly more often ($p = 0.009$) in more severe stutterers

25 (i.e. 69.4%): it would have been easier to find a partner if they had not stuttered

Significantly more often ($p = 0.006$) in more severe stutterers
Results (part 2)

Participants not in a relationship (N=36)

16 (i.e. 44.4%): try to hide that they are a person who stutters when they go to places where they might possibly meet a partner
Results (part 2)

Participants not in a relationship (N=36)

14 (i.e. 38.9%): at times been considered less attractive because of stuttering

8 (i.e. 22.2%): stuttering the reason why someone did not want to go out or have a steady relationship with them
Discussion

People who stutter experience their fluency disorder as a hindrance in romantic relationships

forming a relationship
living in a relationship
Discussion

Seems to be especially true for persons with more severe stuttering
Discussion

When asked to take the perspective of a person who does not stutter

69.1% willing to start a relationship with a person who stutters

People who do not stutter (Van Borsel et al. 2011): 66.4%
Discussion

**Suggestion:**

*apparently PWS have realistic view on their chances of engaging in a relationship*

*but...*
Discussion

Participants not in a relation (N=36)

Only 8 (i.e. 22.2%): stuttering the reason why someone did not want to go out or have a steady relationship with them

Compare to Van Borsel et al. (2011): NO: 52.2% (18.6% (date) 33.6% (steady))
Discussion

Participants in a relationship (N=74)
Stuttering not a problem at all in relationship
28 (i.e. 37.8%)

When asked to take the perspective of their partner: 53 (i.e. 71.6%)
Discussion

Explanation?
(1): PWS don’t judge their partner correctly?
(2): Partners don’t show their concern?
(3): ...
Conclusion

Clinicians need to be aware of the obstacles that adolescent and young adult clients may have to face in their social development and of the impact that stuttering may have in a relationship.