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Types of Situational Fears in Adults Who Stutter
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Purpose

The general purpose of this research study was to identify and update common situational fears adults who stutter experience. Having updated information in this area will benefit speech-language pathologists because they will be able to implement these situations in the therapy setting and work on reducing the fears and changes in fluency levels that go along with them. The specific research question being investigated is as follows: What types of situational fears are present in adults who stutter?

Literature Review

Current literature demonstrated a lack of information in this area, contained outdated information on situations, and focused heavily on speaking situation fears in relation to comorbidities. Such comorbidities included anxiety, social phobias, and related disorders (Iverach & Rapee, 2014).

Avoidance behaviors are a key characteristic of stuttering and such avoidances can include speaking situations. Situational avoidances can stem from shame, fear of negative evaluation from others, or from anticipating a situation that had previously been associated with increased stuttering (Brundage et al., 2017).

Speech-language pathologists frequently target avoidance behaviors during therapy sessions, which can include hierarchically approaching situational avoidances (Kamhi, 2003). However, there is little to no information regarding what these situations can be. The paucity of research in this area highlights the need for this study in order to support evidence-based practice.

Methods

Participants
30+ persons who stutter from the Chicagoland area who were English-speaking, 18+ year olds completed the survey. Participants were current and former NSA group members and/or members of various closed group Facebook groups with varying levels of stuttering severity.

The majority of the participants were/had:
•Male (73%)
•25-34 years old (50%)
•White (73%)
•Single (73%)
•Moderate stuttering severity (50%)

Materials
Materials included a researcher-generated survey containing a list of common situational fears that are present in adults who stutter. The survey was comprised of four areas: general information and demographics, characteristics of stuttering, a list of situational fears, and open-ended situational responses.

Procedures
A within group survey design was utilized for this study. Surveys were administered through paper and electronic formats. Digital surveys were distributed to closed group Facebook support groups. Participants rated each of the speaking situations on a 7-point scale using the following scoring system: 1 indicated, "I would not approach this situation at all" and 7 indicated, "I have no problem approaching this situation." A "Not applicable" option was also provided. The collected data were analyzed to determine possible trends.

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|----|----|----|----|----|----|
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    N/A
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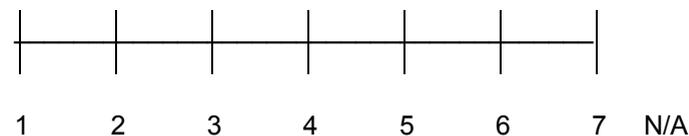
Results

Participants rated 39 speaking situations. Out of the 39 situations, 5 situations that participants found to be easily approachable were chosen based off of high averages and 5 situations that participants found to be unapproachable were chosen based off of low averages. The situations and averages are listed below.

Approachable Situations

Situation	Average Rating
Calling a familiar person	6.5
Casually speaking to coworkers	6
Speaking to family/friends	7
Speaking to a health professional	6.5
Situations that require limited talking	7

Unapproachable Situations

Situation	Average Rating
Leaving a voicemail on an unfamiliar person's phone	2.5
Recording a presentation video	2
Giving presentations in person	1.5
Ordering food in a drive-through	3
Asking questions in class	3

Conclusions

Generally, survey results revealed inconsistent ratings amongst participants. Of the 39 situations, more situations were rated to be more approachable than unapproachable. A number of participants created situations of their own to include in the survey, such as "Praying in a small group" and "Repeating your name." A general trend observed amongst the approachable situations was that they all involved speaking to familiar people. The unapproachable situations tended to include those situations in which AWS had to speak to unfamiliar people, speak for an extended period of time, speak in front of large groups, or utilize technology to speak.

Due to the wide range of ratings, it can be concluded that SLPs and clients should work together to determine which speaking situations should be targeted in therapy sessions for that individual client.

References

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