Self-esteem of 8-16 year old persons who stutter: Effects on speech behavior and therapy

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**Introduction**

- Clinical questions:
  - Is there a difference in self-esteem between stuttering and nonstuttering school-age children?
  - Does self-esteem influence therapeutic parameters like duration of therapy, avoidance behavior, use of speech techniques, psychic strain …?

**Results of former studies**

- Studies on self-esteem of children and adolescents who stutter are inconsistent:
  - Findings from the 50’s and 60’s indicate that this group has a lower self-esteem than the nonstuttering children and adolescents (Fiedler&Wepman 1951; Wallen 1960; Trombly 1965; Gildston 1967)
  - Younger studies demonstrate: the self-esteem of stuttering children and adolescents is not different from that of nonstuttering children or adolescents

- Yovetich, W.S. et al. 2000
  25 cws (7.1-11.9 years)
  Result: No differences concerning five dimensions of self-esteem compared to normative data of this age group

- Blood, G.W. et al. 2003
  48 adolescents who stutter (14-18 years)
  Result: No significant differences in self-esteem compared to control group

**Definition self-esteem**

- In psychology self-esteem reflects a person’s overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own worth.
- Self-esteem refers to a person’s disposition to evaluate him- or herself positively or negatively in a spontaneous, automatic, or unconscious manner.

- Yovetich, W.S. et al. 2000
  25 cws (7.1-11.9 years)
  Result: No differences concerning five dimensions of self-esteem compared to normative data of this age group
Method

171 school-age children who stutter (8.00-15.11)
129 male and 42 female participants
were tested during their ambulant therapy (all over Germany)
with 2 questionnaires
1. „Self-esteem-test“ for children and adolescents
2. „Questionaire Speech- and Therapy-Data Stuttering“

Method

„Self-esteem test for children and adolescents“
- is a standardized test – control sample of 520 children - for children and adolescents from 8.00 to 15.11 years
- the ALS provides data about general self-esteem and specific data concerning self-esteem in family, school and peer group

Results:

1. Self-esteem of stuttering children and adolescents compared to nonstuttering control group
categories: general self-esteem
school
family related self-esteem
peer group

2. Self-esteem of male cws compared to female cws

Results self-esteem:

self-esteem of female children and adolescents who stutter n = 42

Results of self-esteem
Self-esteem of 8–16 year old persons who stutter
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Results of t-test (n = 129):
- significant difference in all areas of self-esteem

Results of t-test (n = 42):
- significant difference in general, family related and peer group related self-esteem
- no significant difference in school related self-esteem

Self-esteem of age groups:
- General self-esteem of male cws declines with increasing age!
- School related self-esteem of male cws declines with increasing age!
- Peer group related self-esteem of male cws declines with increasing age!
Self-esteem of age groups:

**Family related self-esteem of male cws***

Results of t-test:

- significant difference for the 3 age groups 8 – 13.11 years in all areas of self-esteem

- significant difference for the 14 – 15.11 years age group only in family related self-esteem
Self-esteem of age groups
female stuttering vs. normative data

Results of t-test:
- significant difference only for the 8 - 10.11 years age group in all areas of self-esteem
- significant difference for the 14 – 15.11 years age group only in family related self-esteem

Self-esteem in school, family and peer group according to age groups:

Self-esteem of male and female cws declines with increasing age!
School related self-esteem shows the most noticeable decline of self-esteem !!!

Exception:

Family related self-esteem

Percentage of male children who stutter with low and very low self-esteem (all age groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>male all</th>
<th>female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 129</td>
<td>n = 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-esteem general</td>
<td>6 4,6 %</td>
<td>5 14,0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-esteem school</td>
<td>11 10,0 %</td>
<td>10 28,6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-esteem peer group</td>
<td>11 8,5 %</td>
<td>6 16,6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-esteem family</td>
<td>7 6,2 %</td>
<td>4 9,5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of male and female adolescents who stutter with low and very low self-esteem (age group: 13.00 – 15.11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>female</th>
<th>male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 24</td>
<td>n = 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-esteem general</td>
<td>4 17,3 %</td>
<td>5 9,0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-esteem school</td>
<td>10 41,6 %</td>
<td>8 14,5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-esteem peer group</td>
<td>6 25,0 %</td>
<td>8 14,5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-esteem family</td>
<td>3 12,5 %</td>
<td>4 7,2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

75 % of all stuttering children and adolescents with low and very low self-esteem are within the age group of 13.00 – 15.11 years

Results correlations between:
- Self-esteem and avoidance behavior
- Self-esteem and psychic strain
- Duration of therapy and use of speech techniques
- Duration of therapy and psychic strain
Avoidance behavior at school (8-15.11 years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoidance Behavior at School</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometime</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Correlation: self-esteem and avoidance behavior

For male cws with low general self-esteem, there is a significantly more avoidance behavior in school, family and peer group than male cws with higher self-esteem.

- Avoidance school: $r = -0.284^{**}$; $p < 0.01$ (Spearman bi.)
- Avoidance family: $r = -0.379^{**}$; $p < 0.01$ (Spearman bi.)
- Avoidance peer group: $r = -0.356^{**}$; $p < 0.1$ (Spearman bi.)

Comparable correlations for school, family and peer group related self-esteem!

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Correlation: self-esteem and avoidance behavior

For female cws with low general self-esteem, there is more avoidance behavior in school and peer group (not within family).

- Avoidance school: $r = -0.631^{**}$; $p < 0.01$ (Spearman bi.)
- Avoidance peer group: $r = -0.575^{**}$; $p < 0.1$ (Spearman bi.)

Comparable correlations for school, family and peer group related self-esteem!

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Correlation: self-esteem and psychic strain

Female cws with low general self-esteem show significantly higher feelings of psychic strain caused by stuttering than female cws with high self-esteem.

- Female cws: $r = -0.337^{*}$; $p < 0.05$ (Spearman bi.)

Male cws do not show this significant correlation!

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Correlation: use of speech techniques and duration of therapy

Female cws with a longer duration of therapy show a significantly higher use of speech techniques than female cws with shorter duration of therapy.

- Female cws: $r = 0.392^{*}$; $p < 0.05$ (Spearman bi.)

Male cws do not show this significant correlation!

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Correlation: duration of therapy and psychic strain caused by stuttering

Male cws with a longer duration of therapy show significantly less feelings of psychic strain caused by stuttering than male cws with shorter duration of therapy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient (r)</th>
<th>Significance (p value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male cws</td>
<td>r = -.248** ; p&lt; .01</td>
<td>Spearman Zweis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female cws</td>
<td>r = .139 ; p&lt; .39</td>
<td>Spearman Zweis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Female cws do not show this significant correlation!

Summary and discussion of results:

- The self-esteem of male cws (age 8.00 to 13.11) is significantly higher than that of nonstuttering children
- But: Self-esteem of male cws declines with increasing age! At age 14.00 to 15.11 no significant difference (except family related self-esteem)
- The self-esteem of female male cws (age 8.00 to 10.11) is significantly higher than that of nonstuttering children
- But: Self-esteem of male cws declines with increasing age! At age 12.00 to 15.11 no significant difference (except family related self-esteem)

How to explain the high self-esteem for younger children who stutter?

- „secondary gain factor“
- problem of the sample

Summary and discussion of results:

- 75% of the stuttering children and adolescents with low or very low self-esteem are within the age group 13.00 – 15.11 years
- 42% of the 13.00 – 15.11 year old female cws have a low or very low school related self-esteem
- male and female cws with low self-esteem show significantly more avoidance behavior
- female cws with low self-esteem show significantly more psychic strain induced by stuttering

Conclusion:

The group of 13 -16 year old male and female adolescents who stutter represent an outstanding problematic group and a challenge for the therapist!

What are the therapeutical interventions we should focus on?

Options for therapy

- use of standardized measuring instruments for self-esteem (and school anxiety tests) for this age group
- therapy with homogeneous age groups
- focusing on school related matters: sessions in classes; focus on transfer at school, …
- if necessary: recommend psychotherapy
Difference between male and female school-age children who stutter

- Female adolescents who stutter very often have an extremely restricted self-esteem at school (and peer group)
- The lower the self-esteem of female cws the stronger are their feeling of psychic strain caused by stuttering
- Even a longer duration of therapy does not significantly reduce their feelings of psychic strain caused by stuttering

Options for therapy with female adolescents who stutter:
- Improvement of interventions in desensitization
  - more counselling / cognitive restructuring than confrontation therapy
- Lighten the burden at school, contact school; focus on transfer of speech techniques at school;
- Build up „experience groups“ of female adolescents and young women who stutter
- If necessary: recommend psychotherapy

What we need:
More gender specific research!
More knowledge about female persons who stutter!

Thank you for your attention!

References:
Schütz, A. Psychologie des Selbsterwertgefühls, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer Verlag, 2003