

Stuttering in a Volatile Society - Israel

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Stuttering research and treatment in Israel is a complex topic to write about. On the one hand, stuttering therapy is well developed: there are four or five highly experienced public clinics with a case load of hundreds of clients each year and there are several private clinics which specialize in stuttering therapy. On the other hand, stuttering research is still taking its first steps. For example, presently, there are only two speech-language pathologists in Israel, holding a Ph.D. degree whose main research interest is in the field of stuttering. As a result, while the stuttering treatment in Israel has made significant advances over the past years, rarely was this acknowledged internationally and only a few articles have been published by Israeli clinicians or researchers who specialize in stuttering. In that respect, the important collaboration between the Department of Communication Disorders at Tel-Aviv University and the University of Illinois' Stuttering Research Project, under the direction of Prof. Ehud Yairi should be mentioned. This joint work promotes stuttering research in Israel, and helps in drawing attention to the topic among local SLPs. Prof. Yairi is a prominent figure in the field in Israel and is very supportive and involved in research at Tel Aviv University in the masters and Ph.D. programs.

Until recently speech-language pathologists and audiologists have been educated and trained in only one academic center in Israel: Tel-Aviv University. This year has witnessed the opening of two new academic programs for the education and clinical training of speech-language pathologists and audiologists. It should be noted here that, in

Israel, there is no official separation between the two professions: speech-language pathology and audiology. Thus, a student who completes his/her studies and receives his/her certification is certified in both fields. Professionals in Israel have welcomed the establishment of the two new programs in the belief that this would promote research and treatment and serve to advance the profession locally.

Israel can be viewed as an interesting example of a multicultural society. With a population of approximately 6 million citizens, the majority of Israelis (80%) are Jewish. In addition, 14% are Muslim, 2% Christian, 2% Druse, and the remaining 2% identify themselves as practicing other religions. As such, Israel has two official languages: Hebrew and Arabic. Although no official information is available on this topic, it would be safe to say that while most Arabic-speaking Israelis speak Hebrew as a second language, the majority of the Hebrew-speaking population does not speak Arabic. Thus, Hebrew is the most commonly used language in most parts of the country.

The linguistic and cultural diversity is not only limited to religious differences. Among the Jewish citizens of Israel, many are immigrants who were born elsewhere and have come to Israel since it was established. As a result, many sub-groups within Israel speak more than one language. These sub-groups typically speak their native language (e.g., Russian, Amharic, English) as well as Hebrew.

Despite the fact that many Israelis speak more than one language, speech therapy, including stuttering therapy is conducted mainly in one language, Hebrew. In most cases, this does not limit the accessibility of treatment, since the stuttering child/adult usually speaks Hebrew (if not as a first language, at least as a second language). Speech therapy for children who speak only Arabic is limited in Israel since most Hebrew-speaking SLPs

don't speak Arabic proficiently enough. This has led to a considerable need for professional SLPs who are also native speakers of Arabic. We, in Israel, hope that his need will be addressed in the near future. While, in the present, there are only a handful of SLPs whose native language is Arabic, there are an increasing number of Arabic-speaking students who have been trained over the last few years and this trend is growing. Moreover, the two new colleges that have opened recently are located in areas that are relatively more populated by Arabic-speakers: Haifa University, in the city of Haifa and Hadassah College in Jerusalem.

In addition to trying to meet the need for Arabic-speaking SLPs, the Department of Communication Disorders in Tel-Aviv University has established a special program for certified SLPs who immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet-Union. This is an intensive one year program that is considered a basic requirement for receiving the Israeli license for practicing Speech and Language Pathology in Israel for these immigrants SLPs. It should be noted that since in the former Soviet-Union, like in many other countries, SLPs are not certified to practice audiology, this program entitles them to a license to work in the field of speech and language, but not in the field of audiology (unlike those who have completed their academic studies in Israel). In conclusion, most clinicians who perform stuttering therapy in Israel do so in their native language. In general, there is no special stuttering therapy program for bilingual stuttering children (or adults).

We feel that when we treat a person-who-stutter we interact with an individual as well as with a complex of his/her culture, language and society. We find that many of the difficulties encountered in the therapeutic process of the bilingual (or perhaps "bi-

cultural”) therapy stem from cultural differences, sets of beliefs the client carries and the difficulties both the client and the therapist might have in accepting the different person as a whole person. As clinicians, we strive to relate to the whole person we meet in the therapy room, and the fact that he speaks more than one language is but one aspect of this complex relationship.

An important, though technical problem, in stuttering therapy in Israel is the referral process for therapy. Within the public medical service, children who stutter are referred to speech evaluation via the pediatrician or the family physician. This is not the forum to discuss stuttering awareness and knowledge among these professionals. Suffice to say that, unfortunately, many of these physicians still recommend parents not to seek professional help for the stuttering child, before he/she is six years old. The different public medical care programs would usually cover most of the expenses of the stuttering therapy until the child is eighteen years old. However, they limit the total number of sessions the child can receive over this period. The public medical system in Israel is obligated to treat each child within 3 months from the initial referral. Yet, due to the limited number of SLPs in Israel, especially in the public medical system, a longer time can pass until a child is admitted to speech therapy. This problem is more crucial in the field of stuttering because some clinicians are still reluctant to treat stuttering.

Stuttering therapy approaches in Israel vary and represent different trends in the field. Different centers offer different therapy programs. There are two centers that offer an intensive three-week therapy program. One of these centers is located in Jerusalem and is basically a public center. The other is located in central Israel and is a private clinic. However, most of the therapy programs for stuttering in Israel present different

therapeutic approaches. For example, the speech clinic in the Sheba Medical Center in Tel-Hashomer, which is considered the biggest and most acclaimed speech pathology and audiology center in Israel, offers several different approaches to stuttering therapy. Therapy is conducted in individual or in group settings. Some clients are admitted for therapy programs that focus on speech shaping and fluency enhancing techniques. Other clients are admitted to therapy programs that emphasize the emotional aspects of as well as the communication skills and attitudes of the stuttering child and his/her family. A leading group of Israeli SLPs who specialize in stuttering are currently in professional and supervisory contact with several internationally recognized professional colleagues. Among these are Prof. Nitza Katz from the University of Dortmund, Germany, and Ms. Lena Rustin from the Michael Palin Center, London. These professional contacts and clinical exchanges have enriched our work in the emotional and communicational dimensions with stuttering children and their families; and have helped us learn about the cognitive-emotional aspects of stuttering therapy for adults who stutter.

Stuttering therapy is a challenging task, and more so in a multi-cultural society. The current complex political situation in Israel presents an even more entangled construct of problems. Communication, in general, is language and culture dependent and treating communication disorders need to address this diversity. We, as therapists, feel the need to further deepen our awareness and knowledge, in order to effectively treat our clients.