

Stuttering Persistence in Children: Effectiveness of the Psicodizione Method in a Small Italian Cohort

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Abstract : Developmental stuttering affects about 10% of preschool children; although the high percentage of natural recovery, a quarter of them will become an adult who stutters. An effective early intervention should help those children with high persistence risk for the future. The Psicodizione method for early stuttering is an Italian behavior indirect treatment for preschool children who stutter in which method parents act as good guides for communication, modeling their own fluency. In this study, we give a preliminary measure to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of Psicodizione method on stuttering preschool children with a high persistence risk. Among all Italian children treated with the Psicodizione method between 2018 and 2019, we selected 8 kids with at least 3 high risk persistence factors from the Illinois Prediction Criteria proposed by Yairi and Seery. The factors chosen for the selection were: one parent who stutters (1pt mother; 1.5pt father), male gender, ≥ 4 years old at onset; ≥ 12 months from onset of symptoms before treatment. For this study, the families were contacted after an average period of time of 14,7 months (range 3 - 26 months). Parental reports were gathered with a standard online questionnaire in order to obtain data reflecting fluency from a wide range of the children's life situations. The minimum worthwhile outcome was set at "mild evidence" in a 5 point Likert scale (1 mild evidence- 5 high severity evidence). A second group of 6 children, among those treated with the Psicodizione method, was selected as high potential for spontaneous remission (low persistence risk). The children in this group had to fulfill all the following criteria: female gender, symptoms for less than 12 months (before treatment), age of onset <4 years old, none of the parents with persistent stuttering. At the time of this follow-up, the children were aged 6-9 years, with a mean of 15 months post-treatment. Among the children in the high persistence risk group, 2 (25%) hadn't had stutter anymore, and 3 (37,5%) had mild stutter based on parental reports. In the low persistency risk group, the children were aged 4-6 years, with a mean of 14 months post-treatment, and 5 (84%) hadn't had stutter anymore (for the past 16 months on average). 62,5% of children at high risk of persistence after Psicodizione treatment showed mild evidence of stutter at most. 75% of parents confirmed a better fluency than before the treatment. The low persistence risk group seemed to be representative of spontaneous recovery. This study's design could help to better evaluate the success of the proposed interventions for stuttering preschool children and provides a preliminary measure of the effectiveness of the Psicodizione method on high persistence risk children.

Keywords : early treatment, fluency, preschool children, stuttering

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