Diagnostic Labels and their Effect on Parent Perspectives of Child Language Disorders

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Background

- Child language impairments with no known etiology and no other significant deficits have been recognized but have also been a source of controversy for many years.
- The description of these language impairments typically emphasizes both inclusionary and exclusionary criteria.
- The terminology used to label this disorder has varied, including specific language impairment (SLI) and developmental language disorder (DLD).
- Debate about the terminology has included whether to use a medical sounding term.1,2
- Researchers have hypothesized that SLIs may not use the term SLI because it focuses parents or has no meaning outside the field of speech-language pathology.6
- Recently, a panel of experts proposed that DLD is a more appropriate term than SLI.7
- Developing criteria that emphasize the seriousness of the disorder will ultimately empower parents to advocate for their child.
- From a parent perspective, having a label for their child’s disorder is important but what that label is doesn’t matter.
- Unsurprisingly, the most important thing for parents to learn from an SLP is whether their child has a language disorder.
- These findings should energize the field to move past the debate surrounding the terminology for the disorder and to resolve the controversy regarding diagnostic criteria.
- Developing criteria that emphasize the seriousness of the disorder will ultimately empower parents to advocate for their child.

Methods

- Parents completed an online survey that took 10 – 15 minutes.
- Parents did not have to have a child with a language disorder to participate.
- 304 parents participated in the survey
- 88% of participants were female
- 8% of participants identified themselves as male
- 29% of participants had a child with a disability
- Parents completed an online survey that took 10 – 15 minutes.
- Parents did not have to have a child with a language disorder to participate.
- 304 parents participated in the survey
- 86% of participants were female
- 8% of participants identified themselves as male
- 29% of participants had a child with a disability
- Parents did not have to have a child with a language disorder to participate.
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Results: Parent Priorities

- Parents’ highest priority was learning whether or not their child had a language disorder.
- Receiving a label for the language disorder was ranked most frequently as the second priority and then again as their seventh and eighth priority.
- Knowing the cause of the disorder and how it differs from other disorders were the least important to parents.
- Significant main effect of label: $\chi^2 (3, N = 299) = 19.52, p < .001$
- Significant main effect of description: $\chi^2 (3, N = 299) = 6.02, p < .05$
- Significant main effect of label: $\chi^2 (3, N = 299) = 4.32, p = .035$
- Significant main effect of description: $\chi^2 (3, N = 299) = 4.45, p = .035$

Results: Parent Perspectives

- “I can explain my child’s problem to other people.”
- Significant main effect of label: $\chi^2 (3, N = 299) = 19.52, p < .001$
- Parents given the DLD or SLI label were more likely to agree
- No label and DLD: $\chi^2 (1, N = 129) = 17.35, p < .001$
- No label and SLI: $\chi^2 (1, N = 128) = 6.45, p = .011$
- DLD and Dislingoria: $\chi^2 (1, N = 171) = 6.89, p = .009$
- Significant main effect of description: $\chi^2 (1, N = 299) = 34.92, p < .001$
- Parents given a description were more likely to agree

- “My child’s problem will be considered a real disorder.”
- Significant main effect of description: $\chi^2 (1, N = 284) = 37.28, p < .001$
- Parents given a description were more likely to disagree

- “This description seems like a medical diagnosis.”
- Significant main effect of label: $\chi^2 (3, N = 284) = 15.57, p = .001$
- Parents given no label were more likely to disagree
- No label and DLD: $\chi^2 (1, N = 124) = 8.03, p = .005$
- No label and SLI: $\chi^2 (1, N = 123) = 13.95, p < .001$
- No label and Dislingoria: $\chi^2 (1, N = 121) = 9.66, p = .002$
- Significant main effect of description: $\chi^2 (1, N = 284) = 37.28, p < .001$
- Parents given a description were more likely to disagree

- “I am ashamed to use this description to refer to my child.”
- Significant main effect of description: $\chi^2 (1, N = 288) = 4.32, p = .038$
- Parents given a description were more likely to disagree

- “I am not worried about this problem.”
- Significant main effect of description: $\chi^2 (1, N = 288) = 4.45, p = .035$
- Parents given a description were more likely to disagree

Discussion

- “I am not worried about this problem.”
- Significant main effect of description: $\chi^2 (1, N = 288) = 4.45, p = .035$
- Parents given a description were more likely to disagree

References


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