

Development of a language and communication Screening test and identification of protective and risk factors associated with Communication and Language Disorders

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Resumo

With the present research, we aimed to identify the principal risk and protective factors associated with the occurrence of a developmental language disorder and to develop a specific and sensible screening instrument, easy and rapid to use.

We can understand language disorders as a condition that involves poorly developed grammatical patterns, odd conversational patterns, misuse of words with respect with their meaning, difficulty expressing or following ideas and an inability to follow directions (Matson & Neal, 2010). On the other hand, communication disorders refer to a break in the communication chain (Morris, 2005).

We know that delays in communication are the most prevalent symptoms in young children with developmental disabilities (Wetherby & Prizant 1996) and speech and language delay affects 5 to 8 percent of preschool children, often persists into the school years, and may be associated with lowered school performance and psychosocial problems (U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, 2006).

The recent investigation in this field tells us that the early identification and intervention of children with language disorders is a urgent situation, because of the related consequences of this kind of developmental disorder (reading disorders, emotional disorders, academic achievement).

Developmental delays in infants and toddlers are significantly under identified, which means that the provision of early intervention is prohibited for many children and families in need of services (Wetherby et al, 2002). In a previous investigation, we concluded that there is a gap between the early concerns of parents and the intervention of 20 months (Peixoto, 2007).

The research tells us that we can early identify language disorders through prelinguistic Predictors of Language Outcomes, and they are:

- Joint attention and intentional communication
- Language understanding
- Play
- Phonological development

Early identification of most medical problems is advantageous in that it generally provides better opportunities for successful intervention, Yet, involves several considerations as economical, ethical and methodological

However, a major problem in screening for communication and language disorder is that it implies a matter of degree. To implement a screening policy we have to decide

on a proper “gold standard” instrument, as well as deciding on cut-off scores (Eriksson et al, 2010).

Regarding this we have developed an epidemiological study, with a prospective cohort design, with 431 children between 12 and 36 months old (394 evaluated in kindergarten and 37 evaluated in child placement homes)

Children were first assessed between February and July of 2011, and 33% of the children had a second evaluation between January and March of 2012.

The children were first assessed with our screening instrument, and their parents completed a questionnaire with information about pregnancy, birth, ESE, development, temperament and occupation.

Our screening instrument gathers information about the child's abilities from multiple sources; caregivers participate in the assessment process and measures milestones that provide important information about prelinguistic and early linguistic development.

The second evaluation consisted in a *gold standard* language test. Every participant was informed of the aims and procedures of the study, and everyone agreed to participate.

Because of this study, we believe that we will be able to recognize risk groups for developmental language disorders and then propose a screening policy for risk groups for the early identification of developmental language disorders.

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