

The Awareness of Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists among Doctors

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Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this study is to survey the awareness of Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists among Medical Professionals (Doctors, Postgraduate students and Undergraduate students) and to report the preliminary survey results.

Method: A survey was carried out by administering questionnaire consisting 20 questions. The questions are designed to explore and investigate the field of Audiology and Speech Language Pathology (ASLP). The participants were divided into two groups A and B, where group B is below 35 years and group A is 35 years and above.

Result: The result of the study revealed that the overall awareness of ASLPs among Medical Professionals varied between fairly adequate knowledge to inadequate knowledge. Age does not have any influence on significant awareness on ASLPs.

Conclusion: Hence the knowledge and awareness for audiologists and speech-language pathologists need to escalate among medical professionals. Future surveys should be conducted to reduce the lack of awareness of Audiology and Speech Language Pathology among the general population and other medical professionals.

Key words: Audiologist, Speech Language Pathologist, Doctors, Awareness, Questionnaire.

Introduction

Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) are professionals also referred to as communication experts who assess and treat all age groups with communication disorders and swallowing disorders [1]. The word 'communication disorders' is a broad term which includes delay in speech and language in children, specific language impairment, motor speech disorders, neurological speech and language disorders in children, cleft of lip and palate, stuttering and cluttering, voice disorders, neurogenic communication disorders in adults, stroke or head injury, dementia, hearing impairment, and disorder or syndrome associated with delay in speech and language. They also play a vital role in the pre and post operation of laryngeal cancers

[2]. A detailed counselling regarding post operation management options and rehabilitation is carried out in the pre operation counselling [3]. Thus, speech language pathologists are apprehensive with a person exhibiting any disturbance or interruption in speech perception, processing and production.

Audiologists are health care professionals who graft with early identification, evaluation and management of hearing impairment [4]. They assess hearing related problems including balance, tinnitus, reduced hearing sensitivity, neurological condition that result in hearing loss and syndromes associated with hearing loss. They perform various test procedures on hearing and vestibular system and provide the appropriate amplification and assistive listening devices and recommendation for

implants (such as Cochlear Implants and Auditory Brainstem Implants). Audiologists are envisioned in custom selection of hearing aids, providing appropriate gain based on the patients need, profession and environment [5]. There are numerous management options available in the cases of congenital hearing impairment [6].

In the recent years, there has been an increasing requirement to promote awareness on the early identification of communication disorders in order to undertake suitable rehabilitative methods and improve the overall quality of life of the individual with disability [7]. The assessment and management of communication disorders which are followed by a visit to the SLP on a regular schedule can be executed with the help of the medical and non- medical professionals such as doctors, nurses, psychologists, teachers as well as social workers. When it comes to working with individuals with communication disorders it follows a pre-requisite to work as a team [8]. Hence the awareness is crucial when working in a multidisciplinary entity.

The study aims to enumerate the awareness of role of Audiologist and Speech Language Pathologist (ASLP) among medical professionals (Doctors, postgraduate students and undergraduate students).

The objective of the study was to determine whether age of the professionals influence their awareness (less than 35 years and greater than 35 years of age).

Methods

Material

The questionnaire contains 20 close ended questions. The questions were related to the role of ASLP and also about the disorders that are assessed and intervened by ASLPs. The questionnaire contains four response options which varied with the questions.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria for this study comprises of the minimum qualification of a doctorate degree (MBBS, BDS) or currently on an academic program of MBBS or BDS with a minimum completion of 2 years and others who are specialised in the field of medicine. The exclusion criteria include all non-medical professionals

and students who have currently enrolled in MBBS or BDS course.

Participants

A convenient sampling method was adopted. A survey using questionnaire was conducted among Medical professionals that is Doctors, post graduate students and undergraduate students who has completed 2nd year of their academic program. A total of about 327 professionals participated in the study. Out of which 57 participants were excluded because they were non-medical professionals. 270 professionals were included in the study among various medical departments of which 131 males and 139 females. The participants were then divided into two groups A and B, where group A is participants above 35 years and group B is below 35 years. Mean age and the no. of participants in each group is tabulated in table 1.

Procedure

A self-rating questionnaire was administered which contained 20 questions with 4 options in each. The questionnaires were circulated through online forms and institution-based distribution was carried out. Cross-sectional study design was used. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Prior to administration the participant was briefed about the purpose of the study and were assured of anonymity of their responses.

Results

The responses of 270 participants based on their agreement with the 20 statements and the mean scores obtained by the participants for each statement are listed . The overall awareness of ASLPs by the Medical Professionals was categorised based on the scores obtained. A score of greater than 15 was considered adequate knowledge, score of 10 to 15 was considered fairly adequate and a score of less than 10 was considered inadequate knowledge. The results revealed that out of the 270 participants 138 (51.1%) had inadequate knowledge, 126 (46.6%) had fairly adequate knowledge and 6 (2.2%) had adequate knowledge.

Mann – Whitney U test was used to compare between two groups to determine whether age influence their awareness about ASLPs. Group A (above 35 years) and group B (below 35 years) was compared and the results

revealed no statistically significant difference exist between the two groups as the p value > 0.05. In comparison with group B, group A has knowledge about the role of SLP in Voice Therapy.

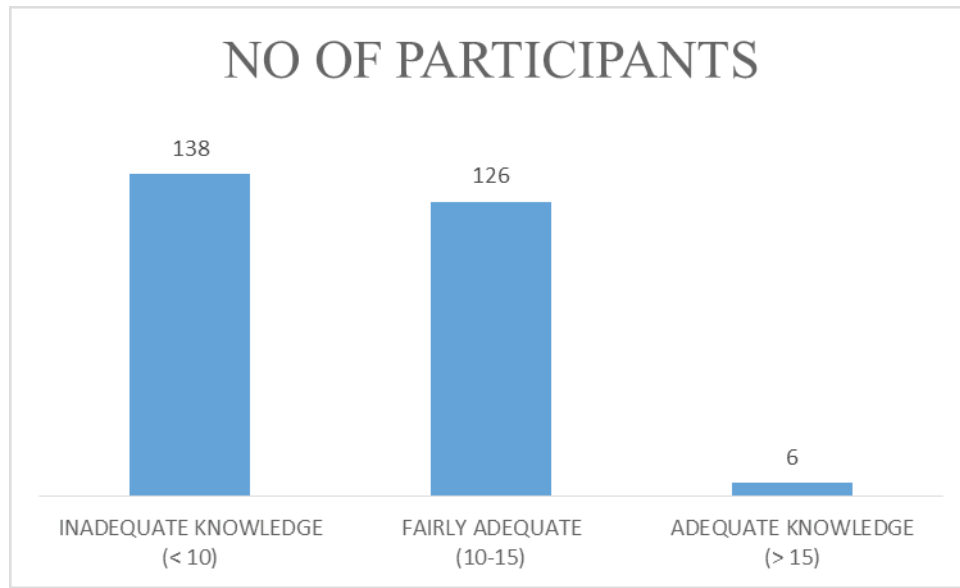


Figure 1: overall awareness of the 270 participants

Table 1: No of participants in each category

GROUPS	CATEGORY	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	MEAN AND SD	OVERALL MEAN AND SD
AGE	Greater than 35 years	109	45.02 ± 7.80	34.20 ± 10.61
	Less than 35 years	161	26.87 ± 3.80	
SEX	Male	131	-	-
	Female	139		

Discussion

The aim of the study is to enumerate the awareness of role of ASLPs among medical professionals and to determine whether age of the professionals influence their Awareness (less than 35 years and greater than 35 years of age). The study was done on 270 participants using a survey questionnaire. The results revealed that 138 (51.1%) had inadequate knowledge, 126 (46.6%) had fairly adequate knowledge and 6 (2.2%) had adequate knowledge indicating that there is a minimal awareness of this field among Medical Professionals which is contradicting to a study done on awareness of

ASLPs among college entering students which was 84% adequate in a state-supported university in Pennsylvania [9]. One of the studies in the literature done on awareness of Speech Language Pathology on the public showed 55.5% of awareness which indicated a lack of understanding on different types of communication disorders except for stuttering [10]. A study suggested that as people get older in the society, there lies a deterioration in their physical and psychological abilities and hence the need for treatment of disabilities ascends [11]. This study shows that the need for management for the geriatric population is increasing where ASLPs play

a dynamic role. A study done by Sreeraj et al (2013) on rural population reveals 6.07% of prevalence of communication disorders in India. In the conducted survey there lies a need in the awareness of the profession of ASLP among the participants (doctors). A study done on the rural population reveals 6.07% of prevalence of communication disorders in India [12]. In the conducted survey there lies a need in the awareness of the profession of ASLP among the Medical Professionals. Therefore the need for rehabilitation in communication disorders, a field of expertise for ASLPs are to be intervened [1]. Surgery is a need for the survival of the patient. To improve the quality of life the Audiologists and the Speech Language Pathologists play a major role. In case of tracheostomy, rehabilitation is needed which guides the patient to communicate [13]. If rehabilitation is not carried out which improves the quality of life the patient can end up having mental weakness and their willingness to live can be reduced. In cases of CI surgery, the subject has to undergo therapy as it stabilizes the hearing level of the subject [14]. The questionnaire included questions on increasing the awareness of Audiology and Speech Language Pathology and the need of these professionals in a hospital setting. The results revealed that there were more than 50% of positive responses from the participants.

The questions were focused on the team involved, prescribing of hearing aids, confirmation of Speech and Language delay, hearing screening in new born, patients diagnosed to have stroke, swallowing difficulties, followed by the candidacy of Cochlear Implants (CI). The result of the study reveals that there is a minimal awareness of this field among Doctors. The comparison of the two groups portrayed significant difference in the role of SLP on voice therapy as there was greater awareness in group A when compared to group B.

The major limitation of this study is the data collected only from a few hospitals. Another challenge is the time factor. The data collected was only from some parts of India. This study can be done on a larger population posted in the Medical field to increase the awareness and knowledge of this course.

Conclusion

The awareness of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists, need to escalate among

medical professionals as they serve a wide range of services in assessment and rehabilitation in the field of communication disorders and hearing impairment. Future studies regarding the awareness of this field can be carried out among the public for the knowledge of the availability of this profession [10].

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Ethical Clearance- Duly approved by Ethics committee of MERF-ISH

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