



AWARENESS ABOUT SPEECH AND HEARING PROFESSIONALS AMONG MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS AND PHYSIOTHERAPISTS IN GUJARAT

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ABSTRACT

Indian Speech and Hearing Association defines Speech language pathologist as a qualified professional who provides a comprehensive array of professional services related to the identification, diagnosis and management of persons with communication and swallowing disorders. Audiologist has been defined as a qualified professional who provides a comprehensive array of professional services related to the identification, diagnosis and management of persons with auditory (peripheral and central disorders), balance and related disorders, and the prevention of these impairments. **Need:** In order for allied health professionals, like ASLPs, to be effective in an inter-disciplinary setting, it is important to be aware of and have experience with other professionals who provide these services. **Aims and Objectives:** To find out awareness among various health care professionals about ASLPs as well as about various government laws for the welfare of persons with speech and hearing disabilities. **Method:** A total of 100 professionals participated in the study. Out of these, 56 were doctors, 10 were MBBS interns, 24 were physiotherapist, and 10 were interns of physiotherapy. A 20 item questionnaire was utilized to investigate related health professionals' knowledge of speech-language pathology including education, the professional organization representing speech-language pathologists, and experience with patients having speech and hearing problems. **Results:** The findings of this study suggest that a considerable number of allied health students have limited information and awareness about ASLPs.

Key Words: Awareness, Medical Professionals, Audiologist & Speech Language Pathologist.

Introduction:

According to federal regulations, the term "allied health professional" is defined as "a health professional (other than a registered nurse or physician assistant) who has received a certificate, an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, a doctoral degree, or post baccalaureate training, in a science relating to health care; who shares in the responsibility for the delivery of health care services or related services¹. A few examples of allied health professions include audiology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology etc.

The professional qualifications and associated competencies of audiologists & speech-language pathologists (ASLPs) and are clearly defined by the American Speech-Language- Hearing Association². Both speech-language pathologists and audiologists are professionals who hold either the master's or doctoral degree and are qualified to identify, assess, and provide treatment for individuals with speech, language, or hearing disorders. Speech-language pathologists and audiologists are concerned with human communication and its disorders. Indian Speech and Hearing Association³ defines Speech language pathologist as a qualified professional who provides a comprehensive array of professional services related to the identification, diagnosis and management of persons with communication and swallowing disorders. Audiologist has been defined as a qualified professional who provides a comprehensive array of professional services related to the identification, diagnosis and management of persons with auditory (peripheral and central disorders), balance and related disorders, and the prevention of these impairments.

ASLP is an independent professional such that his/her services and activities are not prescribed or supervised by another professional. However, he/she often collaborate with other professionals for provision of services. ASLPs work in a variety of settings including health care settings, regular and special schools, industrial settings, hearing aid and cochlear implant manufacturers, universities, research centers, and private settings etc.

ASLPs primarily work in a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary team comprised of many health professionals including General Physicians, Otolaryngologists, Pediatricians, Neurologists, plastic surgeons, physiotherapists, Psychiatrists, Oncologists, orthodontists, occupational therapists, Psychologists, nurse etc.

Need for the Study:

In order for allied health professionals, like ASLPs, to be effective in an inter-disciplinary setting, it is important to be aware of and have experience with other professionals who provide these services. Lack of understanding about roles and responsibilities of other health care providers can contribute to a breakdown in the continuum of care and a decline in the quality of patient care. There is limited information about allied health professional's awareness of other health care services.

Aim and Objectives:

The purpose of the study was to find out awareness among various health care professionals about ASLPs as well as about various government laws for the welfare of persons with speech and hearing disabilities.

Method:

A total of 100 professionals participated in the study. Out of these, 56 were doctors, 10 were MBBS interns, 24 were physiotherapist, and 10 were interns of physiotherapy. A 20 item questionnaire was utilized to investigate related health professionals' knowledge of speech-language pathology including education, the professional organization representing speech-language pathologists, and experience with patients having speech and hearing problems. The questionnaires were mailed to the medical as well as physiotherapy colleges in Gujarat. Data was analyzed for its qualitative and quantitative contents.

Results and Discussion:

A detailed analysis of the respondent's answers to all questions in the survey is presented in the Appendix. The following is a summary of the major findings of the survey.

The majority of the respondents (60%) were male. The respondents comprised of doctors teaching in a medical college (56%), MBBS interns (10%), Physiotherapists teaching in Physiotherapy College (24%), and physiotherapy intern (10%). Only 7% of the respondents knew that the professional who provides services to persons with speech & hearing problems are called as an audiologist & speech language pathologist.

35% respondents did not know about the services of speech & hearing professional. 30% respondent indicated they can provide services to only speech & hearing problems.

When asked about education level available in India for speech & hearing professional should have, most of the respondents (36%) thought that a master's degree was adequate, but 43% of respondents did not know about the highest degree in this profession.

Duration of the bachelor degree in speech and hearing was reported by majority (49%) of the respondents indicated that it was for 3 years, while few (31%) of the respondents indicated that it was for 4 years.

When asked about the credentials required to practice for this profession, 30% of the respondents believed that central government registration was required. However, the majority of respondents believed that state government registration (40%) was required.

51% respondent did not know about different settings in which that these professionals treat patients. 32% respondent indicated for clinical settings while 16% respondents indicated for educational settings.

34% of the respondents indicated that ASLPs provide services only to children. However, 14% of the respondents were not aware that ASLPs treat which age groups.

When asked the name of the national organization that represents professionals who provide help for people with speech & hearing problems in India, only 40% of the respondents indicated answered correctly as "The Rehabilitation council of India".

When asked about the location of the national organization, 63% of respondent did not know, only 27% respondents correctly identified the location as Delhi.

When asked about, which agency acts as governing body, only 37% respondents indicated the Rehabilitation council of India.

The majority of respondents (61%) had experience with patients who had a speech & hearing problem. Among those respondents who had experience with patients with speech and hearing problems 51% reported that these patients received professional help for their problems.

129 % respondents felt their training was neutral to work with persons having speech & hearing problems. Only 5% perceived their training as very adequate.

71 % of the respondent had no contact with the speech and hearing professionals during their training.

When asked about other professionals that might be involved in the treatment of persons with speech & hearing problems, the most frequent responses were ENT (47%). 21 % respondent did not know about such professionals.

When asked about the awareness of any Indian act for welfare of Persons with speech & hearing problems, 50% respondents were indicated about the RCI act. 15% did not know about any such acts.

67% respondent were not knowing about facilities available under different Indian acts for speech & hearing disabled persons.

When asked about Institutes which provide Speech & Hearing courses come under which ministry of Government of India. 61% respondents did not know about any such institute. 23% respondent indicated the Health ministry and 16% respondent indicated the social Justice & empowerment.

The findings of this study suggest that a considerable number of allied health students have limited information and awareness about ASLPs. Several related issues warrant further discussion.

In India, Rehabilitation Council of India is a governing body of rehabilitation professionals including ASLPs. It was constituted under RCI Act 1992 and its office is based in New Delhi. The council requires registration of ASLPs to work throughout the country (RCI act 1992)³. Different educational qualifications, available in the field of speech and hearing, range from diploma to post doc fellowship. The Bachelor degree in this field is of four years duration including internship of one year.

According to RCI, professionals associated with assessment and management of speech and hearing disorders are called "Audiologist & Speech Therapist/Speech pathologist". Only 7% of respondents knew this term correctly. This is also a common problem among speech-language pathologists; many use a variety of different titles for their profession. It may be due to factors like changes in preferred terminology. Another reason is the use of the term therapy for occupational and physical therapy.

The majority (61%) of the respondents reported experience with persons having speech and hearing problems. Speech, language, and hearing problems often co-occur. For example, stroke is associated with both speech (apraxia) and language (aphasia) problems; also hearing loss is also associated with language problems. Sometimes services are not provided in a timely fashion due to lack of awareness and understanding of the ASLP's scope of practice and guidelines for referral to ASLPs.

In India, there are mainly three laws for the welfare of persons with disability including speech and hearing disorders. The three laws are as follows:

1. Persons with disabilities equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation act 1995⁵.
2. National Trust for the welfare of persons with autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation & multiple disabilities act 1999⁶.
3. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992.

Summary and Conclusion:

In India, there is little awareness of Speech and Hearing professionals among related professionals like doctors and physiotherapists. There is a need to provide information to these professionals about speech and hearing professionals so that ASLPs may contribute effectively in a multi disciplinary team for the rehabilitation of persons with speech and hearing problems. Also, there is need to create awareness among doctors and physiotherapists about various government laws for the welfare of persons with speech and hearing disabilities.

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