



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

New Pediatrics Study Reveals Dramatic Increase in Speech Problems in Children Over Past Decade

Hearing Problems Also on the Rise; Early Intervention Critical to Child Development, Academic and Social Success, Says ASHA

(Rockville, MD - August 21, 2014) A new study published this week in the journal *Pediatrics* reported a 63% increase in disability associated with speech problems from 2001–02 to 2010–11 among U.S. children, along with a more than 15% increase in disability associated with hearing problems. The data underscore the importance of early intervention for rising numbers of children who are experiencing communication disorders, according to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

On a broader level, the new study, *Changing Trends of Childhood Disability, 2001–2011*, showed that the percentage of children with disabilities rose 16% between 2001 and 2011. While childhood disability due to physical conditions has declined, a significant increase in disabilities due to neurodevelopmental or mental health problems was reported. Children in poverty experienced the highest rates of disability, but children from wealthier families experienced the largest increase (28%). The data was based on parent reports of disability, gathered from the government-conducted National Health Interview Survey.

Authors of the study note the causes of the increases in neurodevelopmental or mental health problems are likely based on multiple factors, including biologic, familial, social and cultural factors. They additionally state that the increase in neurodevelopmental or mental health conditions was especially high among young children, a finding that may be attributed to increased awareness as well as the need for a specific diagnosis to receive services such as

early intervention. Furthermore, they point out that although causes of autism are not identifiable in the data, it is likely that the increasing prevalence of autism may explain some of the rise in neurodevelopmental or mental health problems.

"While the reasons behind the marked increase in speech and hearing problems may not be fully clear, the data argue for continued improved awareness among parents and the larger public about these disorders as well as speedy intervention at their earliest warning signs," said Elizabeth McCrea, PhD, CCC-SLP, ASHA 2014 president. "Unlike many other conditions, early intervention often has the potential to prevent or reverse a communication disorder—or at least dramatically reduce the negative consequences it has on children's academic and social success as well as their overall development. This is why ASHA urges parents to educate themselves about the signs and seek an assessment from a speech-language pathologist or audiologist if they have any concern at all."

In late 2013, ASHA launched the Identify the Signs campaign, which uses public service announcements and a variety of other approaches to inform parents about these disorders. By visiting the website, parents can learn the early signs, find help, and share this critical information with their friends and families.

"Through this campaign, we want to encourage parents to avoid the 'wait and see' approach that is all too common with speech and hearing disorders," continued McCrea. "The earlier we reach a child, the more successful, the less expensive, and the shorter the course of treatment. By delaying an assessment and/or treatment to see if a child outgrows a potential disorder, parents may be missing a key window of opportunity. The new study released this week further reaffirms the need for public awareness about these disorders so all children can be best positioned to meet their full potential."

For more information, visit <http://IdentifytheSigns.org>.

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