

## **COUNSELING IN SPEECH THERAPY: INSIGHTS FROM INDIAN SPEECH- LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the perspectives and experiences of speech-language pathologists in India regarding counseling in speech therapy. The researchers developed and administered a questionnaire to 116 speech therapists, which assessed their views on counseling and its application in treating communication disorders. The results show that speech therapists recognize the importance of counseling and feel comfortable providing it. They primarily rely on discussions with colleagues and friends for counseling information. While they consider all aspects of counseling crucial, they find issues related to reading and writing disorders to be the most challenging to counsel on. Key Findings: - Speech therapists in India value counseling and feel at ease providing it. - Colleagues and friends are their primary source of counseling information. - All components of counseling are considered significant by respondents and Reading and writing disorders are the most challenging areas for counseling.

Keywords: Counseling, Speech Therapy, Speech-Language Pathologists, India.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The word 'counsel' encompasses a wide range of advice, opinions, or recommendations related to decision-making, as well as discussions regarding future options. Counseling is vital for enhancing the relationship between clients and clinicians. Research in Speech-Language Pathology has identified various purposes and key elements of counseling. These include active listening, preventing or lessening disorder severity, providing information, addressing the emotions of clients and their families, offering support, empathy, motivation, fostering independence, and presenting various intervention alternatives. Counseling serves as the foundation for all interactions, helping to solve clients' issues, pointing out their errors,

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and suggesting ways to promote positive changes in their lives. Therefore, it is crucial to integrate counseling into regular intervention practices.

Speech therapists are responsible for counseling clients and their families regarding speech, language, and communication disorders, including information about diagnoses and treatment options. The objective of counseling for Speech Therapists is to assist clients in exploring and discovering their own solutions, gaining a sense of control, and developing a fresh outlook and confidence in self-care. During counseling sessions, Speech Therapists must possess knowledge of the anatomy and physiology of the various structures involved in speech, language, and hearing. Additionally, comprehending the condition, its impact on the client and their family, and their coping mechanisms is critically important.

Skills such as active listening, the appropriate use of open-ended and closed questions based on context, the ability to manage individuals' negative emotions, and the inclusion of non-verbal communication are deemed essential during counseling. Clinicians should strive to be effective communicators, recognizing that those with communication challenges often face emotional issues that need to be validated. It is also essential for Speech therapists to respect and embrace the cultural values of clients, remaining optimistic and adaptable throughout the counseling process. Healthcare professionals in India must take into account various multicultural factors during counseling, particularly the significance of family members, as they play a crucial role in a client's decision-making process. There is a lack of information concerning the perceptions and experiences of practicing speech-language pathologists with regard to counseling in India. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the viewpoints and experiences of speech-language pathologists working in India about counseling by creating, validating, and administering a questionnaire across various age groups, genders, levels of experience, and types of work environments.

## **METHOD**

An online survey using a cross-sectional questionnaire was conducted to examine the views and experiences of SPEECH THERAPISTS practicing in India regarding counseling. The study received approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee at Kasturba Medical College, Mangalore (IEC KMC MLR 03–2021/99). The sample size was determined using

the population proportion estimation formula, which is  $n = (Z_{1-\alpha}^2(p)(1-p))/d^2$ . Based on these calculations,  $n = (1.96)^2(0.93)(0.067)/(0.05)^2$ , the required sample size calculated was 97 Speech Therapists, where  $d = 5\%$ ,  $p = 0.93$  according to the literature,<sup>14</sup>  $q = 1-p = 0.067$ , and  $z$  represents the value at a 5% significance level. The study was conducted in two phases.

Phase one - questionnaire development and validation. A questionnaire was created based on prior literature<sup>10,14</sup> and expert insights. Five experienced Speech Therapists, each with over ten years of practice, validated the questionnaire. Respondents rated each question on a four-point scale: not relevant, somewhat relevant, quite relevant, and relevant.<sup>15</sup> The Scale Content Validity Index was computed to assess content validity.<sup>16</sup> Items rated as relevant and quite relevant were included in the final version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed and administered in English. The finalized 36-item questionnaire comprised demographic information, perceptions about counseling, the significance of different counseling aspects, and experiences related to counseling. The final questionnaire can be requested.

Phase two - data collection and analysis Speech therapists with at least one year of professional experience post their final degree, practicing in India, were included in the study. Exclusions were made for undergraduate and postgraduate students pursuing degrees in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. Speech therapists who had studied in India but were currently practicing in other countries were also excluded. The questionnaire, developed and validated in phase one, was transformed into an online Google Form, which was distributed via email to participants. Contact information for the participants was sourced from the Rehabilitation Council of India and/or the Indian Speech-Language and Hearing Association. Approximately 500 Speech therapists contacts were contacted and invited to take part in the survey. Out of this, 116 Speech Therapists agreed to participate. Data was collected in April 2021 using Snowball sampling. To ensure anonymity, no personal identifying information, such as names or contact details, was collected. The Google Form began with a brief overview of the study's purpose, followed by inclusion and exclusion criteria. A formal informed consent form was provided afterwards. Only those speech therapists who consented were allowed to participate in the study. Each participant took around 10–12 minutes to complete the questionnaire. All responses were stored in Google Drive and were accessible solely to the investigators.

## STATISTICAL EVALUATION

Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize the demographic characteristics. Continuous variables were assessed using the mean  $\pm$  standard deviation and range, whereas categorical data were examined using frequency and percentages. The survey also featured one open-ended question, and the responses were organized into categories to determine frequency and percentages. The internal reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The statistical analyses were conducted using Jamovi 2.0.0.0 17. 3.

## RESULTS

Results In total, 116 Speech therapists completed our online survey. The demographic information, including age, years of experience, gender, degree, and work environments of the Speech therapists, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic details of all the participants (n = 116).

Empty Cell		Mean $\pm$ SD	Range
Age (in years)		29.76 $\pm$ 5.36	23–50
Years of experience (in years)		6.37 $\pm$ 5.22	1–26

  

Empty Cell	Empty Cell	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	96	82.8
	Male	19	16.4
	Prefer not to tell	1	0.9
Degree	Masters	82	70.7
	Bachelors	23	19.8
	PhD	11	9.5
Work setting	Clinical	69	59.5



Empty Cell	Empty Cell	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
	Hospital	43	37.1
	Academic	42	36.2
	NGO	10	8.6

**3.1. Perceptions of Speech therapists towards counseling**

This section included 15 statements where the participants were asked to express their opinions using one of the 5 options offered. The responses provided are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceptions towards counseling.

Statements	Responses				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
I think counseling is an important aspect while treating clients	115 (99.1)	1 (0.9)	–	–	–
Listening to the client or their family member is an important aspect in counseling	108 (93.1)	8 (6.9)	–	–	–
I believe that my role as a speech-language pathologist involves counseling patients with speech-language and communication disorders	108 (93.1)	7 (6)	1 (0.9)	–	–
Good interpersonal communication skills are important while counseling	95 (81.9)	18 (15.5)	3 (2.6)	–	–
I feel comfortable providing counseling services to my clients/family members	93 (80.2)	21 (18.1)	1(0.9)	–	1 (0.9)

Statements	Responses				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
More emphasis is needed on counseling skills in the curriculum of graduate programs	91 (78.4)	20 (17.2)	4 (3.4)	1 (0.9)	–
I should be fully attentive emotionally and mentally during counseling	78 (67.2)	33 (28.4)	5 (4.3)	–	–
Understanding the clients/family members temperament is an important aspect in counseling	70 (60.3)	35 (30.2)	4 (3.4)	3 (2.6)	4 (3.4)
Empathy while counseling is an important aspect of professional practice	70 (60.3)	27 (23.3)	15 (12.9)	1 (0.9)	3 (2.6)
Non-verbal modes of communication are as important as verbal mode of communication during counseling	62 (53.4)	39 (33.6)	12 (10.3)	2 (1.7)	1 (0.9)
Effective counseling has no role in the client's prognosis	5 (4.3)	1 (0.9)	8 (6.9)	18 (15.5)	84 (72.4)
I feel clients should not be encouraged to ask questions during counseling	2 (1.7)	1 (0.9)	12 (10.3)	22 (19)	79 (68.1)
During counseling, the client need not be provided with an	11 (9.5)	8 (6.9)	13 (11.2)	33 (28.4)	51 (44)

Statements	Responses				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
opportunity to reflect on his/her feeling or problems					
Unrealistic expectations can be included during counseling	14 (12.1)	13 (11.2)	23 (19.8)	21 (18.1)	45 (38.8)
I have my own pre-decided judgements while counseling my client/their family	12 (10.3)	30 (25.9)	26 (22.4)	29 (25)	19 (16.4)

### SIGNIFICANCE OF COUNSELING

This section included 6 statements and the Speech therapists had to indicate their opinion using a 5 point rating scale. Table: 3 shows that all the statements included in this section were considered to be extremely important by majority of the Speech therapists. The Speech therapists were asked to indicate their primary source of knowledge about counseling. Out of the given 4 options, majority (84.5%) of the SPEECH THERAPIST s reported obtaining knowledge by discussing with their colleagues/friends. Further, 69% of the Speech therapists obtained knowledge from their graduate coursework, 65.5% from seminars/workshops/conferences and 57.8% from journals/books.

Table 3. Importance of various aspects during counseling.

Statements	Responses				
	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
have a holistic approach	3 (2.6)	3 (2.6)	3 (2.6)	26 (22.4)	81 (69.8)
understand the level of	2 (1.7)	1 (0.9)	2 (1.7)	33 (28.4)	78 (67.2)

Statements	Responses				
	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
acceptance towards the condition					
know expectations of the client/family	2 (1.7)	2 (1.7)	2 (1.7)	38 (32.8)	72 (62.1)
respect the sociocultural diversity of the patient/family	2 (1.7)	2 (1.7)	5 (4.3)	35 (30.2)	72 (62.1)
explain technical terms in simple language	2 (1.7)	6 (5.2)	5 (4.3)	35 (30.2)	68 (58.6)
restate the clients/family's expression in own words	5 (4.3)	2 (1.7)	21 (18.1)	44 (37.9)	44 (37.9)

## EXPERIENCES OF SPEECH THERAPIST S TOWARDS COUNSELING

This portion of the questionnaire comprised 5 statements, and Table 4 presents the responses from the Speech therapists based on a 5-point rating scale. A significant majority (71.6%) of the Speech therapists stated that they permitted their clients or family members to voice their questions, while 50% of the Speech therapists indicated that they referred their clients to other professionals. Fewer than 50% of the Speech therapists mentioned soliciting the opinions of clients or family members, discussing their emotional states, and asking clients or family members to restate or repeat points to ensure understanding. The Speech therapists were offered 11 elements that could be integrated into a typical counseling session. Figure 1 illustrates that over 90% of the Speech therapists shared information regarding the disorder, highlighted the significance of involving patients and their families for an effective prognosis, and provided intervention options and home-based activities to their clients. Overall, it was determined that 24.1% of the Speech therapists reported including all 11

recommended counseling components drawn from the literature, while 22.4% to 17.2% of the Speech therapists indicated that they incorporated 9 to 10 components, respectively.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This research contributed to a better understanding of the current views and experiences of speech-language pathologists in India regarding counseling. The questionnaire was created and validated following established procedures. The calculated S-CVI index was 0.97, indicating that the questionnaire exhibited excellent content validity. The internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.78 for the questionnaire, reflecting good internal consistency. Participants in this study reported working in various settings, including clinical, academic, hospital, and NGO environments. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI, 2015) outlines several work environments for Speech therapists, which encompass health care settings (such as hospitals, clinics, and medical rehabilitation centers), multidisciplinary rehabilitation centers, academic institutions, both government and private sectors, and research facilities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study aimed to explore the views and experiences of Speech-Language Pathologists (Speech therapists practicing in India regarding counseling through a developed and validated questionnaire. The Speech therapists consider counseling to be a crucial component where they play a vital role. Skills such as active listening, empathy, and strong interpersonal abilities are regarded as essential for effective counseling. They recognized its significance for client outcomes and emphasized the need for its inclusion in the training curriculum. According to the survey results, it is noteworthy that a smaller proportion of Speech therapists utilized visual aids or involved others who share similar experiences. They encountered challenges when counseling clients with specific communication disorders, including reading and writing difficulties, swallowing issues, and motor speech disorders in children. Overall, the Speech therapists expressed comfort in delivering counseling and reported integrating most aspects highlighted in the survey. There is potential to enhance the confidence, skills, and knowledge of Speech therapists through training within their work environments, which would also assist in refining their counseling abilities with experience. Increasing the focus on counseling in educational programs will contribute to boosting the

confidence and competence of future graduates in effectively counseling clients.

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