Examining Factors Affecting Parent/Carer Satisfaction of NHS SLT Provision for Primary School Aged Children with Down's Syndrome

Abstract

Background: This study investigated parent and carer satisfaction with National Health Service (NHS) speech and language therapy (SLT) provision for primary school aged children with Down's Syndrome (DS). Children with DS commonly experience speech, language and communication needs, yet little is known about how families experience NHS SLT provision in practice.

Aims: The study aimed to examine whether age of first support, intervention content breadth, dosage, and access to parent training predicted satisfaction. It was hypothesised that earlier support, broader intervention content, greater dosage, and access to parent training would each be associated with higher satisfaction.

Method: A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used, recruiting parents and carers online through support networks and social media. Data was collected using an anonymous survey and analysed using descriptive statistics, assumption testing, simultaneous multiple linear regression, and an exploratory model examining perceived child progress and external support factors.

Results: The final sample comprised 199 participants, the majority of whom were women, aged 35-54, and university educated. Most families reported low satisfaction with NHS SLT provision. Dosage was the strongest predictor of satisfaction, followed by intervention content and parent training, while age of first support was not a significant predictor. Higher satisfaction was also associated with greater parent-reported progress, and external support appeared to strengthen, but not replace, NHS provision.

Conclusions: These findings suggest that family satisfaction is shaped more by the consistency and breadth of current provision than by how early support began. Improving access, widening intervention content, and increasing parent training may improve family experience of NHS SLT services for children with DS.

Keywords: *Down's Syndrome; NHS speech and language therapy; parent/carer satisfaction; primary school aged children; service provision*

What this study contributes:

Children with Down's Syndrome (DS) commonly experience speech, language and communication needs requiring specialist speech and language therapy (SLT). Previous literature identifies variation in provision and concerns about service adequacy, but limited recent evidence exists on how parents and carers experience NHS SLT provision in practice.

This study finds that parent/carer satisfaction with NHS SLT provision for primary school aged children with DS is low. It shows that satisfaction is more strongly associated with dosage, breadth of intervention content, and parent training than with age of first support, and suggests that external support does not fully offset dissatisfaction with NHS provision.