



# A Spectrum of Fluency: An Investigation of Management and Neurodiversity From the Perspective of Adults Who Stutter

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## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of adults who stutter on their experience of stuttering management, and how that may be influenced by their treatment experiences. More specifically, I compared perspectives among individuals who did not receive treatment and those who have participated in various treatment strategies (e.g., stuttering modification, fluency shaping, altered auditory feedback, etc.) during different points of their lives to understand how these experiences may have contributed to their management of the social and functional impacts of stuttering and their opinions of applying neurodiversity framework to stuttering.

## Definitions

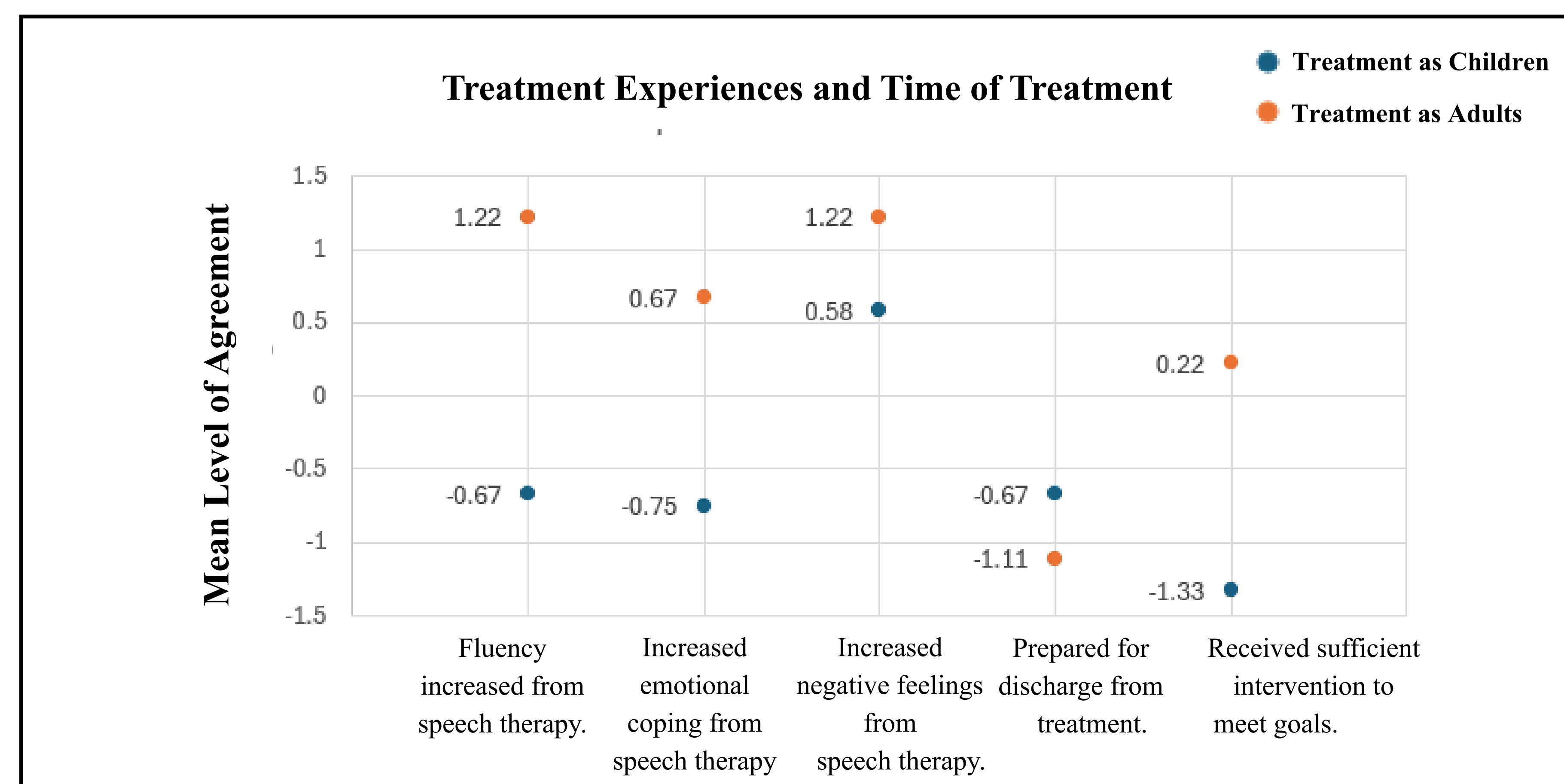
- **Stuttering:** A fluency disorder characterized by repetitions, prolongations, and blocks of airflow/speech. This differs from typical disfluency of speech due to both the frequency and nature of the disruptions (Roth & Worthington, 2019, p. 297).
- **Neurodiversity:** This term originated in autistic communities and has become influential in perceptions of disability. The goal of the movement was “redefining autism as a human specificity not to be treated but instead to be respected in the same way as other human differences, such as gender, race, and sexuality” (Ortega, 2013, p. 78).

## Participants

- An electronic quantitative survey was distributed via social media platforms and sent directly to local chapter support groups to collect data from adults who stutter.
- Questions addressed topics regarding treatment experiences, severity and quality of life, and neurodiversity.
- A total of 35 participants responded to the survey.
- 25 participants (74%) participated in treatment for stuttering, 9 participants (26%) had never participated in treatment.

<u>Perception of Treatment</u>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Experienced relapses following discharge.	21	.90	1.00	-1-2
Conversations with SLP about goals.	21	.57	1.29	-2-2
Fluency increased from speech therapy.	21	.14	1.35	-2-2
Prepared for discharge from treatment.	21	-.05	1.28	-2-2
Increased emotional coping from speech therapy.	21	-.14	1.46	-2-2
Increased negative feelings from speech therapy.	21	-.14	1.32	-2-2
<u>Received sufficient intervention to meet goals.</u>	21	-.67	1.24	-2-1

Note. Items were coded using a 5-point scale where -2 represented strongly disagree, -1 represented somewhat agree, 0 represented neither agree nor disagree, 1 represented somewhat agree, and 2 represented strongly agree.



<u>Perceptions of Stuttering</u>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
I would benefit from increased acceptance of stuttering.	27	1.33	1.00	-1-2
Stuttering is a part of my identity.	27	.89	1.31	-2-2
Stuttering is more of a diagnosis than an identity.	27	.33	1.41	-2-2
<u>I identify as neurodiverse due to stuttering.</u>	27	.33	1.30	-2-2

Note. The full wording of the items was ‘I would benefit from increased acceptance of stuttering’ and ‘Due to my stuttering, I would consider myself to be neurodiverse.’ Items were coded using a 5-point scale where -2 represented strongly disagree, -1 represented somewhat agree, 0 represented neither agree nor disagree, 1 represented somewhat agree, and 2 represented strongly agree.

## Major Conclusions

- Adults who stutter respond positively to defining stuttering as a form of neurodiversity, but are less favorable to labelling themselves as neurodiverse.
- A theme of the responses was adverse treatment experiences, particularly expressing difficulty with the termination of treatment services.
- Perceptions of treatment experiences significantly differed as a function of the level of agency the individual had in their treatment (i.e., being put in treatment as a child or pursuing treatment as an adult).

## Implications

- The recent movement towards classifying stuttering as neurodiversity is supported by individuals with lived experience with stuttering.
- Speech language pathologists could do more to support clients who stutter in feeling prepared for the termination of speech services. Resources such as referrals to support groups may address this need.

## References

- Roth, F. P., & Worthington, C. K. (2019). Treatment resource manual for speech-language pathology (6th ed.). Plural.
- Ortega, F. (2013). Cerebralizing autism within the Neurodiversity Movement. In J. Davidson & M. Orsini (Eds.). 10.5749/minnesota/9780816688883.001.0001