The link between language communication and social disadvantage: consequences in adolescence and adulthood

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Outline

• Language and communication affect a range of outcomes:
  – Literacy and educational attainment
  – Employment and training opportunities
  – Mental health and emotional difficulties
  – Behavioral problems and criminality

• Trajectories towards negative outcomes are affected by:
  – Direct and indirect impacts of impairment
  – Experiences of disability
Literacy and educational attainment (1)

• Sustained and cumulative impact on academic performance:
  – difficulties in literacy, including reading, spelling and writing, classroom communication, and language-based subjects (Dockrell et al, 2007)
  – poor outcomes throughout school careers, including at age 11, 14 and 16 (Dockrell et al, 2007)

• Take fewer examinations at end of compulsory education:
  – entered for an average of 4.08 exams at 16 rather than the national average of 8.72 (Snowling et al, 2001)
  – 24% of a sample of adolescents with SLI not entered for any examinations (Conti-Ramsden et al, 2009)
Poorer outcomes in exams at end of compulsory education:

- obtained 1.04 ‘good’ exam results compared to an average of 5.76 (Snowling et al, 2001)

- obtained a mean of 5 GCSEs at 16 years, though typically graded D - G (Dockrell et al, 2007)

- 73% gained a GCSE in Maths and 42% gained a GCSE in English, but just 15% at grades A*-C in each subject (Dockrell et al, 2007)

- 44% obtained at least one GCSE, compared to 88% of ‘typically developing’ young people – an improving position (Conti-Ramsden et al, 2009)
Employment and training opportunities

• 50% of those with persistent SCLN stay in education post-16 compared to 75% of general population (Snowling et al, 2001)
• 50% of young people not in education, employment or training (‘NEETs’) had language levels more than 2 years below their chronological age (Lanz, 2009)
• 54% of ‘NEETs’ were assessed as having a severe communication disability (Lanz, 2009)
• 88% of a sample of young unemployed men were described as ‘presenting with language impairment’ (Elliott, 2009)
• In their mid-thirties, those with a developmental language disorder are significantly more likely to have had ‘2 or more years unemployed’ or to have ‘never been employed ’ (Clegg et al, 2005)
Mental health and emotional difficulties

- Up to a third of children with untreated SLCN develop mental health issues (Clegg et al, 1999)
- Higher rates of anxiety and depression based on both parental and self-report (Conti-Ramsden and Botting, 2008)
- Significantly more likely to report low self-esteem (Jerome et al, 2002)
- Higher likelihood of ‘limited range of friendships’ or ‘love partners’, and reporting of being ‘limited or awkward when making social contact’ (Clegg et al, 2005)
- 61% of adolescents with SLI have friends with shared interests
- 64% have ‘one or more relationship involving sharing and seeking contact’ (Durkin and Conti-Ramsden, 2007; Conti-Ramsden et al, 2013)
## Independence in adolescence
(Conti-Ramsden and Durkin, 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Parental SLI</th>
<th>Parental TD</th>
<th>Self-report SLI</th>
<th>Self-report TD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remembering a doctor’s appointment</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>90.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the telephone to talk and text</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>94.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going out on own or with friends</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
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Behavioral problems and criminality (1)

- Young people with SLCN are often misdiagnosed as having behavior problems:
  - Very young children with undiagnosed SLCN perceived as being more delinquent / difficult by mothers (Cohen and Lipsett, 1991)
  - Children with undiagnosed SLCN are often misdiagnosed as having a conduct disorder (Lanz, 2009)

- Two-thirds of seven to 14 years olds with severe behavior problems have communication needs (Cohen et al, 1998)
Behavioral problems and criminality (2)

Young offenders on *community programs* have below average language skills compared to the typical development for their age:

- over 50% had significant deficits in abstract language, sentence repetition and narrative language skills (Snow and Powell, 2008)
- 65% screened as having ‘language and communication difficulties’ (Bryan and Gregory, 2011)
- 74% with ‘below average communication skills’, including 42% with a ‘high level of severe communication difficulty’ (Crew and Ellis, 2008)
- almost half had a significant discrepancy in their verbal and performance IQ scores (Chitsabesan et al, 2007)
Behavioral problems and criminality (3)

- Young people in custody commonly have language skills below the typical levels of development for their age (Bryan et al, 2007):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Below average</th>
<th>Poor or very poor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Custody</td>
<td>General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking grammar</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening vocabulary</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- No young people in custody scored as age equivalent in relation to receptive vocabulary: a mean age-equivalent score of 11.5 compare to a mean chronological age of 17 (Bryan et al, 2007)
Cost consequences  
(Audit Commission, 2004)

• Using a fictitious case study based on two juvenile custodial terms, the Audit Commission calculate the financial cost of not effectively intervening to support SLCN as £153,687

• Costs associated with speech and language support, an educational psychologist, family support, preventative behavioral interventions, etc. are estimated at £42,243

• This is a saving of £111,444 in criminal justice costs is made through early diagnosis of learning difficulties and intervention
Understanding trajectories towards poor outcomes

*Impairment* is the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment.

*Disability* is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers

(Barnes, 1991: 2)
Impairment related risk factors

Impaired language and communication skills directly impact upon a range of ‘criminogenic risk factors’, including:

- social communication (Adams et al, 2012)
- social regulation (Brownlie et al, 2004)
- mediating interpersonal exchanges (Brownlie et al, 2004)
- the development of coping strategies for conflict (Beitchman et al, 1999)
- perspective taking (Brownlie et al, 2004)
Impairment related risk factors

Impaired language and communication skills *indirectly* impact upon a range of other risk factors, including:

- early behavioral difficulties
- educational disengagement
- poor self esteem
- social isolation, bullying and negative peer group influences
The social model of disability

• ‘It is not individual limitations, of whatever kind, which are the cause of the problem but society’s failure to provide appropriate services and adequately ensure the needs of disabled people are fully taken into account in its social organisation.’
  (Oliver, 1996: 32)

• The social model of disability ‘demands an identification and analysis of the social, political and economic conditions that restrict the life opportunities of those suffering from an impairment.’
  (Mulvany, 2000: 584)
Experiences of disability

• Clinical diagnoses as rules governing (non-)entitlement
• Failings of the education system to respond to learning needs
• A failure of criminal justice agencies to identify and appropriately support SLCN
• Greater risk of breach of criminal justice interventions that assume verbal and cognitive competence
• Barriers to effective engagement in legal processes
• Language difficulties mistaken for rudeness and non-compliance