Key Word Signing in adults with a moderate to profound intellectual disability: a survey

Kristien Meuris¹, Bea Maes², Dirk Lembrechts³ and Inge Zink¹,⁴


Introduction

Key Word Signing (KWS) – means of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) – key words in a spoken sentence are simultaneously supported by manual signs – advantages: unaided, limited lexicon, slows down speech rate and simplifies language input, visually close to referent (iconic), multimodality (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2005) – introduced in Flanders in ’90 by Loncke, Nij & Smet – used frequently in individuals ( indiv) with intellectual disabilities (ID), but little is known about these KWS-users

Objective

to map the use of KWS

Methods and Results: Research Question 1: Where?

Who?

a) Which individuals with ID use KWS?

- level of ID?
- amount of signs understood and used?
- criteria to select indv with ID to use KWS?
- reasons to not choose KWS as a means of AAC?

b) Who in the environment of these indiv with ID uses KWS?

- is the environment always involved (family / staff)?
- amount of signs understood and used by staff?
- attitude of staff towards KWS?

Survey completed by = 70 (80% response rate) = 6077 (87% of indiv living in KWS servcs)

Methods and Results: Research Question 2: Who?

Who?

a) How many indivs use KWS in these 70 servcs?

- mild ID
- moderate ID
- severe ID
- profound ID

b) How many servcs teach KWS to family and friends?

- amount of signs understood and used by family / staff?
- attitude of family / staff towards KWS?

Discussion and Conclusion

1. WHERE?

- 58% of servcs use KWS and 78% of clients have access to KWS

- KWS is mainly used in large institutions, where access to communication specialists is easier

- 42% of servcs do not use KWS, possible reasons: features of population, lack of knowledge of KWS, lack of motivation to get/maintain sign knowledge, use of other forms of AAC,

- Need to raise awareness on AAC in general and on KWS more specific.

2. WHO?

1) Individuals with ID

- KWS is used mainly by clients with moderate to severe ID in the questioned servcs

- group with sufficient intellectual abilities, but often insufficient verbal abilities (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2005)

- most indivs with moderate to profound ID know/use less than 50 signs

- if accurate (subsequent study): revision of KWS-systems (less signs, higher usability) Loncke, Nij & Smet, 1998

- the most frequently used criteria to select indiv with ID for use of KWS, are insufficient level of verbal communication and sufficient intellectual abilities and level of non-verbal communication

- as suggested by Loncke, Nij & Smet, 1998 and Beukelman & Mirenda, 2005

- conditions to use KWS should be described clearer/more precise

- Further research needed to improve the use of KWS in adults with moderate to profound ID.

2. WHO?

b) Environment

- in 54% of servcs, KWS is not taught to family and friends

- major issue: environmental involvement is absolutely necessary (Fitgerald et al., 1984)

- most support workers knew/use less than 50 signs

- in coordination with sign knowledge of their clients

- in 49% of servcs, attitude towards KWS is indifferent or difficult to motivate

- should be an issue of attention when training professionals

- Major challenges lie in optimizing the training of professionals on KWS.

Key Word Signing in adults with a moderate to profound intellectual disability: a survey

Kristien Meuris¹, Bea Maes², Dirk Lembrechts³ and Inge Zink¹,⁴


References


- Stien.Meuris@med.kuleuven.be

- Thanks to:

- Ben De Leenheer, for help in collecting data

- Speech and language pathologists of Instituut Delectus and Beguinage use, for help in developing survey

- Services for adults with a moderate to severe ID in Flanders, for their cooperation

- The “Visies Agentschap voor Persoonsnet” in Vlaanderen (VAPN) for provision of information

- The “Studiefonds Margaretha-Maria Delvaux”, for financial support

http://www.kuleuven.be/export/Slien.Meuris@med.kuleuven.be