

Cultural perceptions of language development in a population sample of 54-month-old children from Aotearoa New Zealand

Jayne Newbury¹, Bridget White², Noriko Panther³, Kane Meissel³, Helena Cook², Raheera Cowie^{2,4}, Elaine Reese⁵

¹University of Canterbury, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. ²University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. ³University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand. ⁴Kāi Tahu / Ngāpuhi / Ngāti Kahu, Christchurch, New Zealand. ⁵University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

Abstract

Aim: There is a dearth of information on cultural perceptions of children's language development for ethnic minorities in New Zealand to guide service provision. The current study explored differences across ethnicities in mothers' report of speech concern and child functional language within a complex cultural, social, educational and political context. **Method:** Data from the antenatal and 54-month waves of *Growing Up in New Zealand* were utilised. At the 54-month wave interviews, 5053 mothers were asked if speech concerns had been raised, and to report their child's language skills along with other measures. **Results:** Logistic regression models (including influencing variables) indicated: Chinese, Indian and Other Asian mothers were less likely to report speech concerns, whereas Māori, Pacific, Other Asian and MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American or African) children were more likely to score low on language skill. Higher maternal education was associated with higher child language, but not with speech concerns. Child multilingualism was not associated with low language, and these mothers were less likely to raise concern. **Conclusion:** This study demonstrated differences by ethnicity in mothers' speech concern and child language, which are likely to affect access to speech pathology services, as these typically rely on parent concern being expressed. Cultural bias in the language measure may also be present. Further research is needed to ask ethnic communities their views on culturally appropriate ways to identify children with communication needs and to develop culturally safe services for New Zealand children.