

The affect the provision of AAC has on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people with complex communication difficulties

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Introduction

Some children and young people (CYP) who are not able to communicate verbally are also unable to use alternative methods of communication, such as writing, due to cognitive or physical disabilities. For these children expressing needs, wants, and particularly emotions can be very difficult. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems have the potential to enable these children and young people to communicate with those around them.

There have been a limited number of studies looking at the mental health and wellbeing of those using AAC and particularly CYP using AAC



Study Aims

Through working with CYP, their parent(s)/carer(s) and a key professional (e.g. speech & language therapist, teacher) this pilot study aims to identify the impact the provision a communication aid has on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people who have limited verbal communication.

Study Design

Phase 1

- Achieve stakeholder agreement of an appropriate verified psychological questionnaire and to develop the interview schedule.
- Themes for the interview schedule taken from the work of Broomfield et. al. 2022²



Phase 2

- Semi-structured interviews with CYP, their parent(s)/carer(s) and key professional (e.g. speech & language therapist, teacher)
- Interviews to take place at the before or just after provision of a communication aid and 6 months later.
- At the same time points parent(s)/carer(s) to complete the Psychosocial Impact of Assistive Devices Scale (PIADS)¹ on behalf of their CYP. (identified in Phase 1)
- Interviews with CYP to be in-person in the best location for the CYP (e.g. home or school).
- Interviews with parent(s)/carer(s) and key professionals to be in-person in the best location for them or on Microsoft Teams.
- Qualitative analysis of interviews
- Statistical analysis of questionnaire results

Initial Findings

- 2 families have been recruited to the study and interviews and PIADs have been completed with the parents of one child and one parent of the other.
- Interview with 1 Speech & Language Therapist
- Initial themes include
 - Frustration at not being understood which can result in throwing things or shutting down/ will stay where they are with a blank expression
 - Unfamiliar people wouldn't understand them
 - Unlikely to communicate with those they don't know
 - All the parents struggle to understand their children at times
 - Makaton taught at school is helping communication at home
 - Children more confident in areas and with people they know
 - Use total communication (gestures, pointing, signing)

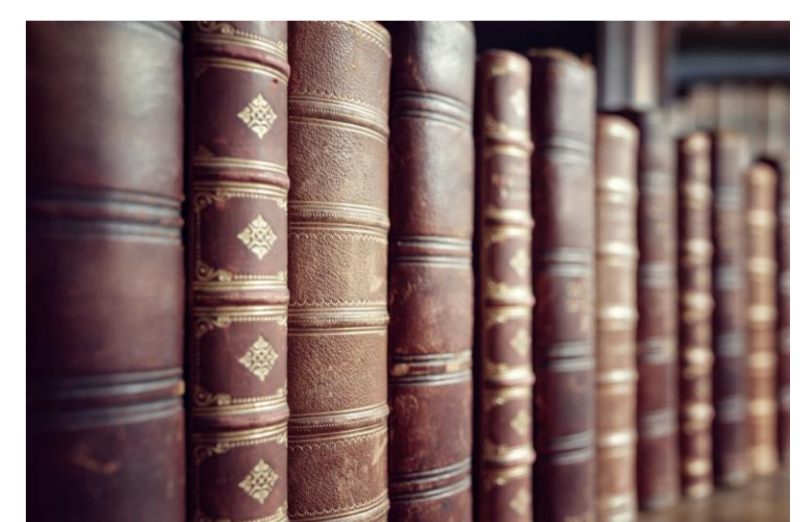
Both families aspire for their children to communicate how they want to and to be able to interact with more people

One child who had just received their communication aid, but not had training was using it to communicate some things with their parents

Contribution to Knowledge

The findings of this pilot study will:

- Inform the need for research in this area of healthcare
- Inform the design of future studies in this area
- There is the potential for further research in this area could inform the need for healthcare provision



Future Plans

- Complete second set of interviews and questionnaire
- Write up study
- Scope potential and funding opportunities of developing study to recruit more families and different age groups over a longer recruitment period using a similar study design
- Scope other study designs for potential to look at the impact the provision of AAC has on mental health and wellbeing.
- Use data to inform/highlight service/health need

References

1. Day H, Jutai J. The psychosocial impact of assistive devices scale: PIADS manual. Toronto: Authors; 1996.
2. Broomfield K., Harrop D., Jones G., Sage K., Judge S., (2022), "A qualitative evidence synthesis of the experiences and perspectives of communicating using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)", Disability and rehabilitation: Assistive Technology, 1-15