

Sex-linked Differences in Early Communication Milestones



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Background

By 15-18 months, females have larger spoken vocabularies than males. By 4- to 5-years, communication disorder is more prevalent in males than females (Calder et al., 2022). How early is this sex-linked difference in communication skills evident-could it be apparent in young toddlers' early use of gestures such as pointing, waving, nodding, and shrugging?

Aims

1. Describe the emergence of different gestures at 10-18 months of age
2. Determine the relationship between children's use of gestures and their vocabulary scores on the OZI-SF at 10-14 and 14-18 months of age
3. Compare gesture use scores on the OZI-SF for females vs males at 10, 12, 15, and 18 months of age.

Method

Using cross-sectional Australian data from the OZI-SF (Short Form, Australian English Communicative Development Inventory) (Jones et al., 2021), descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression were used to analyse a community (population) sample (N=497) as well as a conservative, typically-developing sample of toddlers (N=256).

Females had higher gesture use than males at 12 months.

Results

- The 12 gesture types emerged unevenly by child age
- Gesture use was related to toddler vocabulary scores at both 10-14 months of age and 14-18 months
- In both samples, females had higher gesture use than males at 12-months.

Conclusion

These results represent some of the earliest findings to date on parent-reported gesture communication milestones for Australian children and suggest that this form of assessment could be usefully incorporated into early monitoring. The findings also raise implications for the potential importance of facilitating early gesture development in toddlers, with normative expectations for males and females.

References

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