

Adults' perceptions of truthfulness when hearing accounts from youth with and without Developmental Language Disorder

The aim of this research is to determine if individuals with language difficulties are more likely to be judged as being deceitful when giving accounts of events as opposed to their neurotypical counterparts, a novel topic that has not been considered by empirical research before.

Within juvenile offenders, there is an increased rate of language impairments and communication deficits relative to the general population, and many of these individuals' communication needs go undiagnosed (Bryan, Freer, & Furlong, 2007). The underlying reasons behind this phenomenon remain unclear, however, there has been speculation with some researchers suggesting that individuals with these difficulties are perceived differently, perhaps less favourably, by professionals in the justice system, including at the early stages of the system, potentially leading to higher rates of conviction. Language and communication deficits may mean that defendants' statements lack narrative competence, coherence and structure, thus they may be perceived as being more suspicious (Snow & Powell, 2008).

To answer our question, we will record young people with language disorders and neurotypical controls telling truthful or untruthful stories. These recordings will then be shown to participants, who will not be told about our story-tellers' language abilities.

Participants will be asked to judge the veracity of the stories they hear, and we will test whether participants judge stories told by individuals with language problems to be more likely to be false, compared to those told by neurotypical controls. We propose, based on relevant literature, that participants will likely judge those with language difficulties as being less truthful in comparison to the neurotypical controls (Maras, Marshall & Sands, 2013). This research fits with two of the university's research themes: Justice and Equality, and Health and Wellbeing. Language disorders such as Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) are clinical conditions at risk of reduced wellbeing, and the proposed project explores the potential discrimination those with language difficulties face within the justice system and may highlight the need for specialised training for those dealing with juvenile offenders, in order to reduce negative biases.

If the Laidlaw application is successful, I and my mentor would submit the project for ethical approval in April, with expected approval granted in May. My mentor would use her existing networks and also connection to the DLD Engage platform, a participant database of families affected by DLD who are willing to participate in research, to recruit storytellers ahead of the summer period, to ensure I can commence with video development and data collection at the start of the summer. This project can, if necessary, be conducted fully online, in the event of ongoing COVID restrictions.