

Infant sucking habits may affect how baby talks

October 21 2009, Charlotte Webber



A collaborative research team from Patagonia, Chile, and Seattle, Wash., studied the effects of infant sucking habits on children's speech development. From left to right are Annette Fitzpatrick, Asterio Andrade, Juan Carlos Velez Gonzalez, Carlita Barbosa and Besie Cordova at El Centro de Rehabilitaciones Club de Leones "Cruz del Sur" in Patagonia, Chile Credit: El Centro de Rehabilitaciones Club de Leones

(PhysOrg.com) -- Pacifier, baby bottle or finger sucking may hamper a child's speech development if the habit goes on too long.

In a study that took place in Patagonia, Chile, researchers associated the persistence of these sucking habits with an increased risk of [speech](#) disorders in preschool [children](#). The children were more likely to have difficulty producing certain word sounds and to simplify their pronunciation.

The results were published Wednesday, Oct. 21, in *BMC Pediatrics*, an online, open-access medical journal.

A team led by Clarita Barbosa from Corporacion de Rehabilitacion Club De Leones Cruz Del Sur conducted the study, along with collaborators from the University of Washington (UW) Multidisciplinary International Research Training (MIRT) Program in the School of Public Health, the Department of Epidemiology, and the Department of Global Health.

Looking at a group of 128 children age 3 years to 5 years, the researchers gathered parents' reports of each child's feeding and sucking behaviors during infancy and evaluated the child's speech. The researchers found that delaying giving a baby bottle until the child was at least 9 months old reduced the risk of later developing speech disorders, while children who sucked their fingers or who used a pacifier for more than 3 years were three times more likely to develop speech impediments.

"These results suggest extended sucking outside of breast-feeding may have detrimental effects on [speech development](#) in young children," according to Barbosa. This finding is particularly relevant, as the use of baby bottles and pacifiers has increased over the past few decades. However, Barbosa is careful to note, "Although results of this study provide further evidence for the benefits of longer duration of breast feeding of infants, they should be interpreted with caution as these data are observational."

Earlier studies by other researchers have suggested that babies', toddlers' and pre-schoolers' sucking habits may influence their mouth, jaw and dental anatomy. Previous research also has suggested that [breast feeding](#) may be beneficial to developing coordinated breathing, swallowing and speech articulation.

More information: The relationship of bottle feeding and other sucking behaviors with speech disorder in Patagonian preschoolers, Clarita Barbosa, Sandra Vasquez, Mary A Parada, Juan Carlos Velez Gonzalez, Chanaye Jackson, N. David Yanez, Bizu Gelaye and Annette L. Fitzpatrick, *BMC Pediatrics* (in press), www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpediatr/

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