

Early detection of language disorders helps children obtain right interventions, researchers find

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New screening tools in child health care are effective in identifying early language and communication difficulties in children. This is shown by

two studies based on more than 6,000 children carried out by researchers at Uppsala University in cooperation with Region Gotland.

"These studies underline the crucial role that early screening plays in identifying children who could benefit from [speech](#) and language therapy," says Anna Fäldt, researcher and specialist speech and language therapist.

In collaboration with Region Gotland, the Child Health and Parenting (CHAP) research group at Uppsala University has carried out two studies in the areas of early language development and language difficulties. Their research is based on data from the [medical records](#) of more than 6,000 children in Region Gotland between 2016 and 2022. They show the effectiveness of new screening tools in [child health](#) care.

"This research gives us important information for deciding whether these methods should be introduced. However, we also need to look at children's language abilities over a more extended period," Fäldt says.

The first study, [published](#) in *Acta Paediatrica*, evaluated the impact of introducing Språkfyrn. This is a screening of four-year-olds in which a nurse tests the child, who has to perform tasks including imitating what it hears and pointing to pictures.

The study included medical record data from more than 3,500 children and showed that the number of referrals to speech therapists increased sharply after the introduction of Språkfyrn—from 0.4 to 6.9%. Anna Levin, pediatrician and coordinator of child health services on Gotland, welcomes the results.

"This indicates that Språkfyrn can identify children in need of speech therapy at an early stage, which is very important in child health care," she says.

The second study, [published](#) in *BMJ Paediatrics Open*, evaluated the implementation of the Infant-Toddler Checklist (ITC) at the 18-month visit to child health services. The ITC is a questionnaire that asks parents to respond to questions about the way in which their child plays, expresses itself and understands language.

With a sample of more than 2,600 children, the researchers found that the implementation of the ITC led to a high screening rate of 93% and more referrals to child speech and language therapy. The research shows that the tool is an effective means of identifying communication and language disorders at an early stage.

"By implementing effective [screening](#) tools, we can make a big difference in giving children with delayed speech and language development the support they need," says researcher Anton Dahlberg.

More information: Anton Dahlberg et al, A higher proportion of children aged 4 years were referred to speech and language therapists after the introduction of a new language screening tool, *Acta Paediatrica* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/apa.17183](https://doi.org/10.1111/apa.17183)

Anton Dahlberg et al, Implementation of the Infant-Toddler Checklist in Swedish child health services at 18 months: an observational study, *BMJ Paediatrics Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjpo-2023-002406](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2023-002406)

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