

How far have we advanced this decade in understanding reading disorders?

By Dr. Jessica Edwards



Earlier this year, Margaret Snowling and Charles Hulme at the University of Oxford compiled an Annual Research Review for the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* on reading disorders. Their review provides a timely update on their earlier review published in 2012,¹ offering a perspective on how expert understanding of children's reading disorders has changed since this time. We asked the researchers to summarise their key findings:

"Perhaps the clearest change we identified was the critical importance of oral language", say Snowling and Hulme. "Since 2012, it has become abundantly clear that early difficulties in oral language development (typically occurring before school entry) presage later problems in learning to read. Furthermore, language difficulties seem to have important causal influence on the later development of both decoding (reading aloud) and comprehension skills". Another theme Snowling and Hulme identified was the very high rate of comorbidity between reading disorders and other cognitive disorders – particularly language disorders and mathematics disorders.

The researchers explain that reading disorders can be broadly split into problems in learning to decode print (usually referred to as dyslexia) and problems in learning to comprehend what can be decoded (usually referred to as reading comprehension impairment). "These two forms of reading problem seem to arise from different forms of language difficulty and require different forms of treatment", explain the researchers. "Fortunately, evidence suggests that both of these forms of reading disorder can be ameliorated by suitable specialist teaching."

Snowling and Hulme outline several of the evidence-based interventions for decoding. These interventions typically promote word reading by integrating training in phonological awareness with reading practice using books. They also highlight the evidence-based interventions for reading comprehension. These interventions are generally language based and promote comprehension through vocabulary instruction, oral narrative and reading comprehension strategies. Research over the coming years now needs to focus on resolving issues surrounding the implementation of such interventions if they are to be more successfully embedded in practice, as well as the timing and frequency of reading interventions for at risk children.

Referring to:

Snowling, M. J. et al. (2020), *Annual Research Review: Reading disorders revisited – the critical importance of oral language*. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatr.* doi: 10.1111/jcpp.13324.

References:

¹ Snowling, M. J. et al. (2012). *Annual Research Review: The nature and classification of reading disorders – a commentary on proposals for DSM-5*. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatr.* 53, 593–607. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-7610.2011.02495.x.