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Relationship between language development and birth conditions of children born premature

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Statement of the Problem: Delay in language acquisition is one of the disorders in premature children described in literature. The effects of prematurity, in association with such birth conditions as weight, may be considered a risk factor for the development of children's language.

Aim: This study aimed to relate weight, gestational age and length of hospital stay with the language development of children born premature.

Methodology & Theorical Orientation: Participants were 28 parents and their children aged 0 to 24 months corrected with diagnosis of prematurity who were born with weight below 1500 g and/or gestational age below 33 weeks. The children were evaluated in the post-discharge routine of the same hospital of birth, through the initial acquisition scale of speech and language, translated and published in Brazil by Lima, Gonçalves and Quagliato. The protocol used as a screening instrument for children aged 0 to 36 months, is divided into three categories: Auditory-expressive, Auditory-receptive and Visual. The evaluation data were related to the variables of weight at birth, gestational age and length of hospital stay.

Findings: The children had on average, 4.93 months of corrected age (SD=4.30). They presented on average, a birth weight of 1427 g (SD=551.24), gestational age of 30.93 weeks (SD=2.4) and length of hospital stay of 50.96 days (SD=23.3). More than half of the children achieved the expected performance for age in the Auditory-expressive (64.1%) and Visual (60%) categories. Half of them presented the same result for Auditory-receptive (50%) and overall performance (57.1%). We observed a positive correlation between birth weight and the Auditory-expressive category (c=0.462, p=0.013) and overall performance (c=0.378, p=0.047): A higher weight related to better scores in the categories. Meanwhile, a longer hospitalization time related, albeit weakly to worse test performance.

Conclusion & Significance: Although preliminary results, half of the children showed the expected performance at the corrected age. The weight variable could be an intervening birth condition in the language acquisition of preterm infants.

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