Positive Self-Esteem as a Predictor of Decreased Problem Behaviors in Adolescents with ASD following the UCLA PEERS® Intervention

David Diaz¹, Cecilia Costa, M.A.¹, Jessica Hopkins¹, Shannon Bates, M.A.², Meagan Cronin¹, and Elizabeth Laugeson, Psy.D.¹, ³

1. UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior
2. Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology
3. The Help Group – UCLA Autism Research Alliance

BACKGROUND

• Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are known to have social deficits and elevated problem behaviors (Macintosh & Dissanyake, 2006).
• Problem behaviors may be categorized as either externalizing (e.g., aggression or hyperactivity/inattention) or internalizing (e.g., social withdrawal, anxiety, or depression) (Gresham, Elliott, & Kettler, 2010), both of which are frequently observed in youth with ASD (Bauminger et al., 2010).
• Self-esteem or self-concept during adolescence has been found to protect against internalizing and externalizing behaviors in non-clinical samples of adolescents (Piers et al., 2002; Ybrandt, 2008), suggesting possible treatment implications.
• The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS®) is an evidence-based, parent-assisted social skills intervention shown to improve social skills and decrease problem behaviors in adolescents with ASD (Laugeson et al., 2009; Laugeson et al., 2012).
• Although PEERS® has been shown to effect in improving social skills, the influence of self-esteem on problem behaviors following treatment has yet to be investigated.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To examine the impact of baseline self-esteem on problem behaviors following the UCLA PEERS® intervention.

PARTICIPANTS

• N = 83 adolescents with a confirmed ASD diagnosis and their parents
• Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS; Constantino & Gruber, 2005)
  Total T-Score: M = 78.9; SD = 11.8
  Age: M = 14.7; SD = 1.70; Range 11 to 18 years of age
  Gender: 60.2% Male (n = 50); 39.8% Female (n = 33)
• Ethnicity: 57.3% Caucasian (n = 48); 19.3% Latino/Hispanic (n = 16); 9.1% Asian (n = 8); 4.4% African American (n = 4); 4% Middle Eastern (n = 3); 1.2% Native America (n = 1); 4.7% Other (n = 3)

MEASURES

Adolescent Self-Report Measure
• Piers Harris Self-Concept Scale Second Edition (PHS-2; Piers, Harris, & Herzberg, 2002)
• Measures general self-concept
• Examines six domains of self-concept, which include behavioral adjustment, intellectual & school status, physical appearance & attributes, freedom from anxiety, popularity, and happiness & satisfaction.
• Parent Measure
• Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS; Gresham & Elliot, 2008)
• Assesses prosocial behaviors and problem behaviors which include externalizing, bullying, hyperactivity/inattention, internalizing, and autism spectrum problem behaviors.

PROCEDURES

• Eighty-three adolescents with a confirmed ASD diagnosis and their parents participated in weekly 90-minute group treatment sessions for 14-weeks as part of the UCLA PEERS® for Adolescents social skills intervention, which involves:
  • Teaching ecologically valid rules of social etiquette
  • Modeling and role-playing demonstrations
  • Behavioral rehearsal exercises
  • Weekly parent-assisted socialization homework assignments
• Adolescents completed the PHS-2 at pre-intervention to assess baseline self-esteem.
• Parents completed the SSIS at pre- and post-intervention to assess changes in problem behaviors.
• Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between baseline PHS-2 and change in SSIS-Problem Behaviors following participation in PEERS®.

RESULTS

PEARSON CORRELATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)</th>
<th>Self-Concept (Piers Harris-2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Externalizing</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperactivity/inattention</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Problem Behaviors</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Results indicate that higher baseline standard scores on the PHS-2 Behavioral Subscale significantly predict a decrease in the instances of bullying others per parent report on the SSIS Bullying Subscale (p<0.05) following treatment.
• Results also reveal that higher baseline PHS-2 Behavioral Subscale scores predict a decrease in parent-reported overall problem behaviors on the SSIS Problem Behaviors Scale (p<0.01) and Externalizing Behaviors Subscale (p<0.01) at trend levels following treatment.
• Results did not reveal any other significant relationships between baseline PHS-2 subscales and change in scores on the SSIS Problem Behaviors subscales.

DISCUSSION

• Findings suggest that adolescents with ASD reporting higher self-esteem prior to treatment may exhibit greater decreases in problem behaviors following the PEERS® intervention.
• In particular, adolescents endorsing more positive behaviors prior to treatment may engage in fewer bullying behaviors towards others following intervention.
• Additionally, better behavioral adjustment prior to treatment may result in fewer externalizing and problem behaviors for adolescents with ASD.
• These findings emphasize the benefit of identifying predictors of treatment outcome in order to pinpoint who is most likely to benefit from social skills treatments, and in turn, foster the evolution of more targeted social skills interventions for adolescents with ASD.

REFERENCES


CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information about this study, please contact David Diaz at peersclinic@ucla.edu or call us at 310-26-PEERS

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