Distinct Perceptions of Social Functioning and Treatment Outcome Across Parents and Adolescents Following the UCLA PEERS® Intervention

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Background

- Adolescents with ASD tend to report higher social competence than their parents, although previous research has not uncovered the reasons for these discrepancies. Possible reasons for perceptual discrepancies may include poor adolescent self-awareness and insight, poor social cognition, and less social competence exhibited in the family environment as opposed to the social world. Moreover, parenting stress caused by adolescent externalizing behaviors may also contribute to perceptual differences regarding social functioning (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2009).
- The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS®) is an evidence-based, social skills training intervention for adolescents with ASD, ADHD, anxiety, depression, and other socioemotional problems (Laugeson & Frankel, 2010). Previous research suggests significant improvement in adolescent social functioning (Laugeson et al., 2009; 2012); however, the extent to which adolescent- and parent-reports of social functioning following treatment has yet to be investigated.

Research Objective

The purpose of this study was to examine the distinct perceptional differences of social functioning and treatment outcome across parent- and adolescent-reports following the PEERS® intervention.

Methods

PARTICIPANTS:
- 333 adolescents and their parents participated in the study
- Adolescent gender: 76% male (n=254); 24% female (n=79)
- Adolescent age: M=13.9, SD=1.8; range of 11-18 years

PROCEDURES:
Adolescents and parents attended weekly 90-minute PEERS® social skills groups over a 14-week period. Treatment sessions focused on making and keeping friends and handling peer conflict and rejection. Skills were taught using didactic instruction in a small group format which included role-playing demonstrations, behavioral rehearsal activities, weekly homework assignments.

Measures

Social functioning was assessed through parent and adolescent self-report at pre- and post-treatment using:
- Social Anxiety Scale (SAS; La Greca, 1999) to assess adolescent anxiety
- Quality of Socialization Questionnaire (QSQ; Frankel & Mintz, 2008) to assess adolescent social communication and engagement
- Empathy Quotient (EQ; Baron-Cohen, 2004) to assess adolescent empathic abilities

Results

Paired sample T-tests were conducted to examine differences in perceptions of adolescent social functioning across parent- and adolescent self-report both before and after treatment.

- Social Anxiety Scale (SAS)
- Quality of Socialization Questionnaire (QSQ)
- Empathy Quotient (EQ)
- Distinct Perceptions of Adolescent Social Skills and Total Empathy following PEERS

Discussion

- These findings reveal significant differences in perceptions of adolescent social functioning among parent- and adolescent self-reports.
- Both parents and adolescents observed improvements in social functioning following treatment, but at different rates.
- This suggests the need for multiple informants in the assessment of social skills and treatment outcome.
- The gap between parent and adolescent perceptions of adolescent social functioning appears to lessen over time and treatment, suggesting a trend toward better mutual understanding of social functioning post treatment.

References