The Relationship between Social Anxiety and Loneliness among Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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BACKGROUND

- Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) often exhibit social deficits that may negatively impact their psychosocial functioning and interpersonal relationships.
- Research suggests impaired social functioning in children with ASD may be associated with a higher incidence of social ridicule and peer rejection (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000) and greater risk for experiencing social anxiety as compared to typically developing youth (Bellini, 2004).
- Overall, these social impairments may lead to greater self-perceived loneliness and isolation.
- While the majority of research literature in this area has focused on school-aged children on the spectrum, there is less research examining correlates of social functioning among adults with ASD.
- The present study aims to examine the relationship between self-perceived social anxiety and feelings of loneliness in young adults with ASD without intellectual disabilities.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

N = 17 young adults with ASD presenting for social skills treatment
- Age: M = 21.3; SD = 2.78; Range = 18 to 27 years of age
- Gender: Male 82% (n = 14), Female 18% (n = 3)
- Ethnicity: Caucasian 64.7% (n = 11); Latino/Hispanic 5.9% (n = 1); African Amer 5.9% (n = 1); Asian Amer 17.6% (n = 3); Other 5.9% (n = 1)
- Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS; Constantino & Gruber, 2005) Total Score: M = 87.71; SD = 12.035

MEASURES

- Social Anxiety Scale (SAS; La Greca, 1998)
- Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale for Adults (SELSA; DiTomasso, & Spinner, 1993)

PROCEDURES

- Baseline data was drawn from participants enrolled in PEERS for Young Adults, an evidence-based social skills program for young adults with ASD.
- In order to examine the relationship between social anxiety and subjective loneliness, participants completed the SAS and SELSA prior to treatment.
- Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the relationship between total and subscale scores on the SAS and SELSA

RESULTS

- Relationship between Social Anxiety and Loneliness within Friendships (p<.04)
- Relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Loneliness within Friendships (p<.001)
- Relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and Overall Loneliness (p<.03)

REFERENCES


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