Social Communication in High School Students on the Autism Spectrum: Examining Profiles, Correlations, and Subgroups

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Background

- Adult outcomes for individuals on the autism spectrum are poor relative to peers with other developmental disabilities with low levels of employment, post-secondary education, friendships, and community involvement (Howell et al., 2012; Rosenthal et al., 2012; Steinbrenner et al., 2011). Social-communication skills are a core area of need for individuals with ASD (APA, 2013) and are critical for success in adulthood (Koegel et al., 2014).
- Knowing the range of social-communication characteristics and profiles of high school students on the autism spectrum could help to develop and identify effective treatments.

About the CSESA Study

The Center for Secondary Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (CSESA) is a 5-year research and development project that focuses on developing, adapting, and studying a comprehensive school- and community-based education program for high school students on the autism spectrum. The data for the current study is from the pretest data from a large randomized controlled trial study. More information at http://cessa.fpg.unc.edu/

Research Aims

1. To examine the social-communication profiles of high school students with ASD
2. To explore subgroups of high school students with ASD in relation to receptive and expressive communication, functional skills, and social abilities
3. To examine relationships of social-communication skills with other skills and behaviors

Methods

Student Sample

- 545 total students
- Recruited from 60 schools in 3 states (CA, NC, WI)
- Educational label of autism (primary or secondary)
- Receiving IDEA services with an IEP

Student Demographics

- Age: 13-21 years (mean=16.2)
- Gender: 86% male
- Ethnicity: 20% Hispanic

Assessments

- Completed during fall semester of study entry
- Include direct assessments, parent report, & teacher report

Results: Language & Social Profiles (Aim 1)

- Descriptive statistics of measures related to language, communication, and social characteristics

Results: Examining Subgroups (Aim 2)

- Model based estimates of the key measures

Results: Relationships of Language/Social Profiles to Other Skills/Behavior (Aim 3)

- Cognitive, Adaptive & Academic Skills
- Social Participation

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