Emotional Intelligence and Social Skills in Children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Knowing versus Doing

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Background Research

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- ADHD is characterized by a deficit in self-regulation capacities that leads to pervasive inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity (Barkley, 2003).
- Prevalence rates estimated at 3-7% of school-aged children (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).
- Children presenting with this disorder are at high risk for a range of negative short- and long-term outcomes including peer rejection, academic failure, substance use, and numerous comorbid psychological disorders (Barkley, 2003).

Emotional Intelligence

- Children with ADHD are more likely to be rejected by peers, experience difficulty forming and maintaining close friendships and relationships, and have difficulty understanding social and environmental cues (McQuade & Haza, 2008).

Social Skills

- Adequate social abilities are a good predictor of future life outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What is the emotional intelligence profile of children with ADHD-combined type? In what areas do they demonstrate strength or deficit?
2. What is the correlation between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and social skill ability in children with ADHD?

Method

Participants

- 41 children (82% male) aged 9-11 years (M = 10.29, SD = .80) and their families.
- All children had a previous diagnosis of ADHD-combined type (diagnosis confirmed by Conners-3 Rating Scale).
- Recruited through community newsletters and events, local media, community organizations, school boards.

Measures

Sample Items

- Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test - Youth Version (MSCEIT-YV):
  - Computed measure of ability EI (research version)
  - How much happiness (sadness, anger, ...) does this face show?
  - You have something really nice, and then someone steals it, you end up feeling...

- Bar-On Emotion Quotient Inventory - Youth Version, short (EQ-i:YV [S]):
  - I can show my feelings easily
  - I have a temper
  - “Nothing bothers me”

- Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS):
  - Measure of social skill abilities, completed by parent and child independently
  - My child loses their temper quickly when teased
  - I am able to ignore others when they act up in class

Results

Profile of ADHD-C children on two EI tasks

Self-ratings on Bar-On EQ-i:YV (S)

Performance on MSCEIT-YV (R)

Compared to the typical norm sample, children with ADHD-C scored significantly lower on the Interpersonal (t(39) = 2.64, p = .012), Adaptability (t(39) = -2.00, p = .048), and Positive Impressions (t(39) = -3.24, p = .002) scales.

Correlation between SSIS and EI measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Sample Items</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSCEIT - total score</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>413*</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar-On - total EQ</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>690**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSIS - parent composite</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>369*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSIS - self report composite</td>
<td>-</td>
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- Significant correlations exist between total scores on the MSCEIT and Bar-On measures.
- No significant correlation between MSCEIT score and either parent or self-report SSIS composite score.
- Significant correlation between Bar-On total score and self-report SSIS composite, but not parent SSIS composite.

Discussion

- Bar-On EQ-i:YV (S): children self-reported reduced ability to interact with others, and adapt to new situations.
- MSCEIT-YV (R): children demonstrated reduced knowledge regarding the understanding of feelings but better knowledge of managing their emotions (how to change moods).
- Correlations: higher performance on MSCEIT correlated positively with higher ratings on Bar-On, indicating some overlap in concepts measured.
- EI and Social Skills: no relationship between performance on MSCEIT and ratings by parent or child; Bar-On total score was strongly correlated with self-report SSIS, indicating consistent ratings between measures by the child participants.
- Children with ADHD actually know what to do in social situations but have a difficult time carrying out their knowledge in an appropriate manner.
- Intervention focus on application of knowledge in real-life situations, not teaching social/emotional information.
- Valuable information for parents and teachers - understanding the difference between knowing vs. doing.

Implications

- How might medication status, ADHD subtype, gender, or existence of co-morbidities affect the relationship between EI and social outcomes?
- How might EI profiles differ between children with ADHD-combined type and those with ADHD-inattentive type?
- How might social outcomes be predicted by EI in those with ADHD-I?

Future Direction

- Link to download copy here!

References


Special Thanks to our community partners, including CHADD Calgary, LDAA, Calgary Learning Center, and all the children and families who participated in this research. As well, thanks to the members of the Strengths in ADHD research team!