Twice-Exceptional: Parent and Child Reports of Anxiety and Social Skills Among Gifted Children with ADHD-C

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Background Research

- The majority of research on children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) emphasizes negative behaviours, deficits, and poor outcomes encountered by these children (Rashid & Ostermann, 2009).
- Recently there has been a shift focusing on strengths and the resources that may support these children in becoming resilient (Rhee, Furlong, Turner, & Harari, 2001).
- This poster takes a strengths-based approach to understanding ADHD by evaluating the role of anxiety in social skill difficulties in gifted children with ADHD and how strength-based intervention may improve these social deficits.

ADHD

- ADHD is a behavioral disorder characterized by a persistent pattern of hyperactivity-impulsivity and or inattention that is more severe than typical in individuals their age (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).
- ADHD is one of the most common diagnosed childhood disorders.
- Worldwide prevalence rates are estimated between 3 and 8% of school-aged children (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).
- The inability to regulate behaviour can lead to inappropriate levels of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, and a range of negative outcomes such as peer rejection and academic failure (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

ADHD and Anxiety

- Anxiety is commonly observed in children with ADHD: Approximately 25% of children with ADHD have comorbid anxiety (Pflifter, Calaza, & McBurnett, 2000).
- Anxiety may prevent children with ADHD from learning how to initiate peer interactions.

ADHD and Giftedness

- Two-exceptional refers to individuals with high intellectual ability who are diagnosed with a comorbid condition such as ADHD (Schultz, 2012; Barber & Mueller, 2011; Nicpon, Allmon, Stieck, & Stinson, 2011).
- Intelligence refers to the ability to solve problems, learn quickly, reason, comprehend complex ideas, think abstractly, and incorporates learning from experiences (Antshel, 2008).
- High IQ is categorized as a Full Scale IQ equal or greater to 120 (Antshel, 2008).
- Gifted children may experience anxiety from feeling different than their peers (Leroux & Levitt-Perlman, 2000).
- Having both high intellectual ability and ADHD may result in emotional and social factors that produce a heightened sense of anxiety, overreaction, and peer rejection (Leroux & Levitt-Perlman, 2000).

Methods

Participants

- 15 children (93% male) between the ages 8 and 11 with a previous diagnosis of ADHD-combined type (diagnosis confirmed by Conners-3 Rating Scale) and their parents, and 12 typical children and their parents.
- Recruited through Calgary community organizations, school boards, community newsletters, events, and local media.

Measures

- Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI) – measure of intellectual functioning based on three factor scores (Verbal Intelligence Quotient, Performance Intelligence Quotient, and Full Scale Intelligence Quotient), completed by child.
- Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) – measure of social skill abilities, completed by child and parent independently.
- Behaviour Assessment System for Children (BASC-2) – measure of anxiety levels, completed by child and parent independently.

Results

- A paired samples t-test yielded a significant difference between ADHD self-reports and ADHD parent-reports on anxiety levels t(14) = −3.94, p < .001.
- A paired samples t-test yielded no significant difference between typical self-reports and typical parent-reports on anxiety levels t(11) = 1.75, p > .001.

Discussion

- Research has found that parents of children with ADHD typically rate their children as less socially competent than their peers (Foley-Nicpon, Rickels, Assouline, & Richards, 2012).
- Children with ADHD tend to overestimate their social skills abilities and rate themselves as being as socially competent as their peers (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2012).
- Anxiety may reduce disruptive behaviours that would otherwise be present in children with ADHD, thus the potential influence of anxiety on social skills abilities may be moderated in children with ADHD (Antshel, 2008).
- Previous research suggests that gifted children are rated as more popular than their peers and that these children are more susceptible to anxiety than the general population (Frentz, Gresham, & Elliott, 1991).

Recommendations/Future Directions

- Understanding the strengths of gifted children with ADHD can help researchers to develop appropriate and successful interventions designed to decrease anxiety and increase social skills.
- It is important for interventions to reinforce existing skills that are assets to enhance other possible problem areas.
- Knowing the abilities of gifted children with ADHD would allow parents and teachers to focus on their strengths and practice them rather than focusing only on their weaknesses.