Quality of Peer Relationships Among Children with Selective Mutism

Introduction

Selective Mutism

Selective mutism is classified as an anxiety disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (fifth edition) (American Psychiatric Association, 2015). A critical feature of selective mutism is a consistent failure to speak in specific social situations. Failure to speak interacts with the individual's social, emotional, or occupational functioning. Mutism occurs for at least one year and may not be caused by fear of specifically injuring or annoying another person, or effort to control others, the environment, or situations. Selective mutism occurs in 1.0-2.0% of children, and is reported more often in girls than boys. Female to male ratio ranged in the quality of friendships, and this knowledge may be used to help treatment outcome.

Anxiety and Opposition in Selective Mutism


Selective mutism occurs in 1-2% of children, and is reported more often in girls than boys. Female to male ratio ranged in the quality of friendships, and this knowledge may be used to help treatment outcome.

Behavioral Therapy


Children with selective mutism were found to have a range of close friends. Results are in Table 1.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis was that children with selective mutism will be reported by their parents as having zero or one friend. Children with selective mutism were found to have a range of close friends. Results are in Table 1.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis was that children with selective mutism will be reported by their parents as not being related to like other children, to be cruel or mean to others, to get in many fights, physically attack people, be teased a lot, and be seen as too shy or timid, and withdrawn. Children with selective mutism were more likely to be reported by their parents as being shy or timid, and withdrawn. As previously mentioned, children with selective mutism often have trouble engaging socially (Achenbach, 1991; Kristensen, 2000; Steinhausen & Juri, 1996). Additionally, social anxiety disorder is often comorbid with selective mutism and may cause a child to be shy or timid, or social situations (Ford et al., 1995). Items such as crying, bullying or meanness to others, goes in many fights, and physically attacks people were not reported as occurring often. Therefore, these behaviors may be less common for children with selective mutism and may not greatly impact peer relationships. Additionally, children with selective mutism were not reported as being cruel or mean to others, or getting in many fights, or being too shy or timid. Children with selective mutism are reportedly liked by their peers even though they may not talk as much in their classroom. Results are in Table 2.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 is that children with selective mutism will have trouble making friends, keeping friends and fear joining conversations as reported by their parents. Hypothesis 3 was partly supported. Children with selective mutism were found to have difficulty making friends but were able to keep friends and felt comfortable interacting with other children. Children with selective mutism fear joining conversations and speaking with others that are not comfortable. Speech is often necessary to get someone to do something and alone with friends who may be comfortable around another person. Children with selective mutism may be limited in their ability to develop friendships and may need to rely on those they feel comfortable interacting with.

Discussion

Previous research has reported that children with selective mutism may be reported by their peers and experience few friends (Sharkey & McNicholas, 2008). However, findings from the current study support that children with selective mutism have a range of close friends, and also tend to get along well with and are liked by other parents. However, support was not found for children with selective mutism being likely to engage in fights, or being more likely to engage in social situations in which the child feels comfortable interacting. Children with selective mutism with positive peer relationships may receive encouragement from these peers to integrate into groups, start talking and make friends. Ultimately, treatment can use the child’s trusted peers to help generalize speech.