

TRANSITIONING TO HIGHSCHOOL: THE PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS WITH ASD AS OPPOSED TO THEIR PEERS



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Introduction

The transition from elementary school to junior High involves routine and structural changes as well as exposures to novel environments, curricula and people, all of which may act as stressors for the transitioning students. In addition to transitioning stressors, students must also cope with pubertal changes, such as hair growth and voice mutation. They must also develop a sense of self and become more autonomous. This process is often influenced by group opinion and peer pressure. Such a life period, which is considered difficult for most teenagers (Lohaus, Elban, Ball, & Klein-Hessling, 2004) can be even more challenging for students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Hannah & Topping, 2012) as the ASD population is highly sensitive to any form of change and transition (APA, 2003). It is thus crucial to offer the necessary resources to support and facilitate this time in their lives. Since teenagers with ASD tend to be more socially isolated, this transition period may prove difficult for them (Myles & Adreon, 2001).

Methodology

➤ Sample and procedure

The sample comprised of 24 students. Twelve 6th graders (2 girls and 10 boys) with ASD were selected to be part in the group 1; inclusion criteria required that they be students who were integrated in a regular classroom. Twelve other students, who did not present an ASD, were then matched to students of group 1 example; the last question identifies the usefulness of a specific situation or according to age and gender.

➤ Measures

This study is based on semi-structured interviews (60 questions). Several themes are explored for object that may aid in facilitating a proper transition. This question was answered using a pre-established scales from not at all (0), a little bit (1), average (2) to a lot (3).

All 24 students completed a homemade semi-structured interview that was validated by three experts. It required approximately 45 to 60 minutes to answer all 60 questions. The researcher or a trained colleague conducted the interviews at the participant's house

The interviews were first transcribed and then coded with Nvivo 10 with 85% interrater reliability. The qualitative aspects of the interview were analyzed with a McNemar, a non-parametric test has been designed to determine whether a change of binary state yields statistical significance between both groups ($p < 0,05$).

Objective

The aim of this study was to compare ASD students' perception of the transition to highschool as opposed to that of their peers without ASD.

Results

Results show that student with ASD are more likely to be well prepared if they have the school plan with them, if they have a friend to eat lunch with and if they know where their locker is and how to open it. Student without ASD displayed some of the same fears as ASD students, however the level of these were considerably lower. Students with ASD displayed fears of being bullied: "Sometimes, I don't know if people are bullying me or if they are just kidding", "I know that it happens that people bully others; I am afraid that it can happen to me". They appeared to be more bullied than their peers in elementary school, which can explain why they anticipate being bullied.

Students without ASD are more likely to enjoy their transition highschool because of sports and activities available as well as all the new people they will encounter: " I look forward to going to highschool... it's a new environment". In contrast, students with ASD prefer to avoid change: "Beurkk, I don't wanna go to highschool; I don't want to leave elementary school; I don't want to grow up".

Conclusion and discussion

The identification of coping methods for this stressful part of life may help improve well-being and reduce psychological stress for students. Moreover, this study may guide teachers and school psychologists in their future interventions for their students with special needs.

This study shows the importance of different educational settings. Indeed, students with ASD who are integrated in regular classrooms are equally prepared then their peers for this transition. This study shows that despite the fact that the ASD students function well in the regular classrooms, they may require special preparation due to their specific needs.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, this case study comprised a small sample size. Second, the sample represents children from the Montreal isle and can therefore not be generalized to the entire ASD population.

References

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