Adolescent Perceptions of Outgrowing Childhood Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Relationship to Symptoms and Quality of Life.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE:
Parental and self-perceptions about outgrowing attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) likely impact treatment decisions; however, little is known about these perceptions. The aim of this study was to assess adolescent and parent perceptions of outgrowing childhood ADHD and evaluate how these perceptions relate to ADHD symptoms and quality of life (QoL).

METHOD:
Cross-sectional survey of adolescents (13-18 years) with a childhood diagnosis of ADHD and their parents. Participants were contacted by mail and completed questionnaires about: perceptions of outgrowing ADHD, current ADHD symptoms (the Conners' Scales), and QoL (PedsQL). ANCOVAs were conducted to assess the relationship between the perception of outgrowing ADHD and: (1) current ADHD symptoms and (2) QoL, controlling for co-morbidities and medication use.

RESULTS:
115 adolescent-parent dyads were enrolled. Mean age was 15.5 ± 1.7 years, 73% were male, and 63% were taking ADHD medication. Only 16% of adolescents and 9% of parents reported outgrowing ADHD, with little correlation between parent and adolescent responses (kappa 0.3). Adolescents who reported Yes or Don’t Know to outgrowing ADHD, compared to those who reported No, had lower scores on the inattention (IA) and hyperactivity (H) scales of both parent report and adolescent self-report Conners' scales and higher scores on the adolescent self-report PedsQL.

CONCLUSION:
A majority of adolescents do not endorse outgrowing their ADHD diagnosis, but those that do demonstrate fewer ADHD symptoms and better QoL than those who don’t, suggesting that adolescents have insight about their level of impairment and should have a valued role in making treatment decisions.