Associations Between Peer Functioning and Verbal Ability Among Children With and Without Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Amori Yee Mikami, PhD, Lisa Pauline Münch, BA, Kristen L. Hudec, PhD

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Abstract

We examined the extent to which children’s skilled understanding and production of appropriate language (verbal ability) may relate to their peer functioning. Participants included two independent samples of children with and without Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD; Study 1, N = 124; Study 2, N = 137) who were administered a standardised intelligence test to generate verbal ability scores. Teacher ratings on the Cooperation and Assertion subscales of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), teacher estimates of peer acceptance, parent ratings of conflict and disengagement on playdates, and peer sociometric ratings of liking were obtained. In both Study 1 and Study 2, after statistical control of ADHD diagnostic status, disruptive behaviour comorbidities, and gender, higher verbal ability was associated with better peer functioning on the teacher-reported SSRS subscales and parent ratings of conflict and disengagement on playdates. In Study 2, interaction effects suggested that the positive association between verbal ability and good peer functioning existed for boys but not for girls. For children with ADHD (but not comparison children), better verbal ability was associated with higher teacher-reported peer acceptance but lower peer sociometric liking. Implications of these findings for the conceptualization of peer problems, assessment, and intervention are discussed.