Communicative skills in Spanish children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Analysis through parents’ perceptions and narrative production

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Abstract

Background
Communicative skills are one of the main deficits experienced by children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The differential diagnosis is a complex issue that clinicians often face. For this reason, this study has two objectives: 1) to analyze the similarities and differences that children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and children with ASD present in their linguistic and communicative skills, through parents’ perceptions and narrative production; 2) to identify the relative importance of the skills analyzed in discriminating children with ASD versus children with ADHD, as well as the classification power of each of the two measurement methods used.

Method
Participants were 37 children with typical development (TD), 52 with ASD, and 35 with ADHD. Their communicative competence was assessed through The Children's Communication Checklist Second Edition (CCC-2) (Bishop, 2003) and a narrative task.

Results
The results of the family ratings indicated that the difficulties were not as severe in ADHD as in ASD, where the deficit was much more pronounced in the interpretation of the context, non-verbal communication, and stereotyped language. On the narrative task, both groups displayed difficulties on expressing relevant information and inferential comprehension, and they differed on erroneous interpretations, with the children with ASD presenting worse performance. These variables showed a greater capacity to classify participants in the diagnostic categories studied.

Conclusions
These findings have direct clinical implications for optimizing the assessment process, making it possible to identify which specific language aspects can best differentiate between groups.