

P01-289

EFFECTS OF A SOCIAL RECREATIONAL PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS - PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

T.J. Goh¹, M. Sung¹, Y.P. Ooi¹, C.M. Lam², A. Chua², D. Fung¹, P. Pathy¹

¹Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health, Singapore,

²Autism Resource Centre, Singapore, Singapore

Introduction: Social impairments form one of the major deficits of Autism Spectrum Disorders and are frequently associated with anxiety in school-going children. Social skills programs have been most well-validated to address the issue but components of the programs require further examination.

Objectives: The study aims to develop and evaluate a group-based Social Recreational program that encourages interaction and behaviour regulation among children with High-Functioning Autism through their participation in activities that address meaningful and functional skills in a naturalistic social setting. The components of the program are described.

Methods: 30 children were enrolled in the 16-sessions weekly program. Attending psychiatrists rated the children on the Clinical Global Impression - Severity scale (CGI-S) at pre-, post-, 3-month, 6-month and one-year follow-up. Anxiety levels of the children were measured by self-reports on the Spence Child Anxiety Scale - Child (SCAS-C) and parent-reports on the Spence Child Anxiety Scale - Parent (SCAS-P).

Results: Clinician ratings on the CGI-S showed significant improvements in the children upon completion of the program (Friedman, $X^2 = 22.69$, $p = .000$) and the gains were maintained at follow-ups. Repeated measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction showed lower self-reported anxiety in children after the program, $F(2.89, 72.26) = 4.07$, $p = .004$. Post-hoc pair-wise comparisons suggested that the children were significantly less anxious at the 6-month follow-up.

Conclusion: The program suggests promising benefits although there are no active anxiety remediation components. Its value lies in its applicability in wider community settings.

Implications of its effectiveness are discussed.