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The Effects of an Autism Spectrum Disorder Anti-Stigmatization Program

What is this research about?

Many children and adolescents with ASD are educated in mainstream classroom; they are taught in education settings with typically developing peers. Recently, it has been found that these typically developing youth commonly hold negative attitudes toward peers with ASD, resulting in stigmatization. Although inclusive education for individuals with ASD is common, there are few anti-stigma programs developed to help children or adolescents form positive attitudes towards ASD. The present study examined an intervention to address stigma in high school by educating students and fostering positive interactions with peers with ASD.

What did the researchers do?

The sample consisted of 395 7th, 8th, and 9th grade boys who attended a suburban Catholic school in Australia. Classrooms were assigned to one of 3 conditions: 1) the anti-stigma intervention, 2) no-intervention but other classes in the same grade were receiving the anti-stigma intervention, and 3) no-intervention and no classes in grade were receiving the intervention. In the intervention condition, students received six weekly 50-minute sessions, which consisted of education and contact with peers who were diagnosed with ASD. The educational component included descriptions of similarities to peers

What you need to know:

Youth with ASD can often experience stigmatization in mainstream classrooms. A multi-session anti-stigma program was shown to successfully increase knowledge about ASD and attitudes towards peers with ASD. At the same time, this study did not find that the anti-stigma program enhanced intentions to engage with peers with ASD.

with ASD, explanations about understanding behaviours, and instruction on how to interact with peers who have ASD. Adolescents in the no-intervention conditions attended regularly scheduled class, during these times. All participants completed measures of knowledge, attitudes, and behavioural intentions before the 6-week intervention, right after the intervention, and one semester later.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that compared to the no-intervention conditions, participants in the intervention condition rated their classmates with ASD as more similar to themselves, less personally responsible for their behaviour, and could better distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate reactions to relations with their peers who had ASD. Individuals in the



intervention condition had more knowledge and positive attitudes about ASD after the anti-stigma intervention. The intervention had no effect on adolescents' intentions to interact with their peers with ASD.

How can you use this research?

This research indicates that multi-session programs targeting stigmatization of individuals with ASD can improve knowledge and attitudes of some high school students. Going forward, this may be an important intervention for typically developing adolescents with classmates with ASD. More research on this topic will help determine the most effective anti-stigmatization programs.

About the Researchers

Jessica Staniland and Mitchyll Byrne are researchers at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia.

Citation

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This research summary was written by Stephanie Fung for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found on our [blog](#) and at asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries

About the Chair

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families in Canada.

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