

Development and Preliminary Testing of the Dutch Version of the Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills

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Abstract : Background: The PEERS (Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills) intervention can be considered a well-established, evidence-based intervention in the USA. However, testing the efficacy of cultural adaptations of PEERS is still ongoing. More and more, the involvement of all stakeholders in the development and evaluation of interventions is acknowledged as crucial for the longer term implementation of interventions across settings. Therefore, in the current project, teens with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), their neurotypical peers, parents, teachers, as well as clinicians were involved in the development and evaluation of the Dutch version of PEERS. Objectives: The current presentation covers (1) the formative phase and (2) the preliminary adaptation test phase of the cultural adaptation of evidence-based interventions. In the formative phase, we aim to describe the process of adaptation of the PEERS program to the Dutch culture and care system. In the preliminary adaptation phase, we will present results from the preliminary adaptation test among 32 adolescents with ASD. Methods: In phase 1, a group discussion on common vocabulary was conducted among 70 teenagers (and their teachers) from special and regular education aged 12-18 years old. This inventory concerned 14 key constructs from PEERS, e.g., areas of interests, locations for making friends, common peer groups and crowds inside and outside of school, activities with friends, commonly used ways for electronic communication, ways for handling disagreements, and common teasing comebacks. Also, 15 clinicians were involved in the translation and cultural adaptation process. The translation and cultural adaptation process were guided by the research team, and who included input and feedback from all stakeholders through an iterative feedback incorporation procedure. In phase 2, The parent-reported Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS), the Test of Adolescent Social Skills Knowledge (TASSK), and the Quality of Socialization Questionnaire (QSQ) were assessed pre- and post-intervention to evaluate potential treatment outcome. Results: The most striking cultural adaptation - reflecting the standpoints of all stakeholders - concerned the strategies for handling rumors and gossip, which were suggested to be taught using a similar approach as the teasing comebacks, more in line with 'down-to-earth' Dutch standards. The preliminary testing of this adapted version indicated that the adolescents with ASD significantly improved their social knowledge (TASSK; $t_{31} = -10.9$, $p < .01$), social experience (QSQ-Parent; $t_{31} = -4.2$, $p < .01$ and QSQ-Adolescent; $t_{32} = -3.8$, $p < .01$), and in parent-reported social responsiveness (SRS; $t_{33} = 3.9$, $p < .01$). In addition, subjective evaluations of teens with ASD, their parents and clinicians were positive. Conclusions: In order to further scrutinize the effectiveness of the Dutch version of the PEERS intervention, we recommended performing a larger scale randomized control trial (RCT) design, for which we provide several methodological considerations.

Keywords : cultural adaptation, PEERS, preliminary testing, translation

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