

Early School-Age Language and Communication Outcomes of Children at Increased Likelihood of Communication Difficulties

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Abstract

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Background

Literature on school-age outcomes of children at increased likelihood of communication difficulties is fairly sparse. The majority of studies investigating this group focus on children up to the age of 3, and on siblings of children with autism diagnosis, and do not consider broader groups of children at increased likelihood of communication difficulties. However, the studies that exist suggest that this group have higher incidence of communication, cognitive and other developmental difficulties that persist into the school years.

Methods

Sixty-two children recruited in infancy were assessed remotely on measures of language, phonological awareness and social communication at 6-8yrs: 31 children with average likelihood of communication difficulties; and 31 children with increased likelihood of communication difficulties based on family history (11 at increased likelihood of social communication difficulties and 20 at increased likelihood of language/literacy difficulties).

Results

Although mean scores for all groups were within average ranges, children with increased likelihood of social communication difficulties showed significantly lower scores on measures of receptive and expressive language and parental ratings of communication skills. Children with increased likelihood of language/literacy difficulties only differed from the average likelihood group on parental reports, and not on formal language assessment measures.

Conclusion

Children at increased likelihood of communication difficulties have lower language ability and more social communication difficulties at early school age. These difficulties may be particularly pronounced in children at increased likelihood of social communication difficulties. However, all children at increased likelihood of communication difficulties would benefit from ongoing monitoring and early identification of needs.

