

Peer Influence in Autism Spectrum Disorder – Teacher Reports Across Symptom Types

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Little is known on peer socialization in persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Given this research gap, we investigated teachers' observations of peer influence among children and adolescents with ASD and which types of ASD symptoms are particularly likely to be influenced.

In structured interviews teachers provided information on 23 children and adolescents (age $M = 9;11$ years; $SD = 3;6$; range 4;9 to 18;1). All students showed moderate forms of ASD according to teacher reports on the Social Responsiveness Scale ($M = 104.52$; $SD = 17.96$; Bölte & Poustka, 2008; Constantino & Gruber, 2005) and very low adaptive skills, as measured by the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System-3 (Bienstein, Döpfner, & Sinzig, in prep.). In the structured interviews, teachers reported the frequency with which individual students were influenced by their peers during a typical school week (0 = never or almost never, 5 = five days per school week).

Across all 12 investigated symptoms, teachers reported a mean of 0.75 days ($SD = 0.59$) during which students with ASD were observed to be influenced by their peers. A Friedman test showed significant variation in observed peer influence across the 12 items ($p < .001$; $\alpha = .71$).

These initial results indicate that, according to teachers, children and adolescents with ASD are influenced by their peers, although not very often and to varying degrees across autistic symptomatology.

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