Resilience and Emotion Regulation as Predictors of Internalizing Problems in Autistic Youth

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION
Little is understood about the predictors of internalizing problems for autistic youth. The present study evaluated the potential predictors of internalizing problems in a sample of autistic youth.

METHOD
The Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC-2) was completed by the guardians of 17 autistic youth.

RESULTS
Change in emotion self-control and resilience combined significantly predicted changes in internalizing problems.

DISCUSSION
Increases in resilience lead to decreases in internalizing problems, whereas increases in emotion dysregulation lead to increases in internalizing problems.

PARTICIPANTS
- 17 autistic youth (9.94 ± 1.98 years; 88% male; 94% white) enrolled in the Resilience Builder Program® (RBP), a 12-week, manualized group intervention for children with social competence and self-regulation challenges (1).

PROCEDURE
- Treatment was completed at a private practice in Maryland. RBP is a cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) group program designed for children with social deficits
- ASD diagnosis was based on parent report
- In this sample, autistic youth were integrated into ‘mainstream’ groups, including youth with other diagnoses such as social anxiety and ADHD
- Group assignment was based on severity of social deficits and ASD symptoms
- Parents completed the BASC-2 (5) pre- and post-therapy to evaluate treatment impact of the RBP (1) on social, emotional, and behavioral functioning.

FIGURE 1. Internalizing Problems by Unstandardized Predicted Value

DATA ANALYSES
- Change scores for emotion self-control, resilience, and internalizing problems were calculated and used for data analysis
- A multiple regression was conducted to assess whether change in resilience and emotion self-control predicted change in internalizing problems.

RESULTS
- The overall regression model, including change in emotion self control and change in resilience, significantly predicted change in internalizing problems, \( R^2 = .53, R^2 (14) = 6.81, p = .011 \)
- Controlling for change in emotion self control, change in resilience alone was not significantly related to change in internalizing problems; \( b = -.08, df (14) = .20, p = .847 \)
- Controlling for change in resilience, change in emotion self control alone was not significantly related to change in internalizing problems; \( b = .66, df (14) = 1.68, p = .120 \)

DISCUSSION
Our results suggest that, following participation in the RBP group therapy treatment, both improved resilience and emotion regulation collectively led to reduced internalizing problems. These results corroborate and add to the current literature regarding stronger emotion regulation as a protective factor for mental health outcomes in autistic youth (2,5).

Furthermore, the results emphasize the importance of improving both resilience and emotion regulation in autistic youth to prevent or improve internalizing problems. Future research should focus on the development and improvement of interventions targeting internalizing problems which enhance both resilience and healthy emotion regulation in autistic youth. Additionally, future studies should make an effort to use a more ethically, racially, socioeconomically, and gender diverse samples with varying levels of ability, intelligence, and levels of support needs.

REFERENCES