

Neuropsychology Abstracts

Title: PSYCHOSOCIAL AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING IN ADOLESCENTS WITH SPINA BIFIDA

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Background: The adolescent developmental period brings challenges to families of youth with spina bifida. Findings from a longitudinal study that began in 1993 will be presented, along with an overview of several longitudinal prediction models. Finally, an overview of future directions for this program of research will be discussed.

Method: A sample of youth with spina bifida (n=68) and a matched comparison sample (n=68) were assessed initially at age 8 or 9, and were assessed again every 2 years thereafter. Families were assessed in their homes with multi-method (questionnaires, observational methods, interviews) and multi-source (parent, child, teacher, health professional, medical chart reviews) methodologies.

Results: Children and adolescents with spina bifida (and their parents) are at-risk for some types of psychosocial difficulties, particularly in families from lower SES backgrounds. On the other hand, there are also areas of resilience in such families. Over time, youth with spina bifida tend to fare worse than their comparison age-mates on certain measures of psychosocial adjustment and families of youth with spina bifida are not as responsive to the developmental changes of adolescence as are comparison families. Girls with spina bifida are increasingly at-risk for social difficulties during the adolescent transition and boys with spina bifida are increasingly at-risk for a delay in the development of independent functioning.

Conclusion: After presenting longitudinal findings, the designs and objectives of two other new studies are discussed. One examines whether there is a neuropsychological basis for the peer difficulties found in youth with spina bifida. The other focuses on a camp-based independence intervention.