PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTIONS TO IMPROVE SOCIAL FUNCTIONING IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH PHYSICAL CHRONIC CONDITIONS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION / AIM

Difficulties with social functioning are common among youth with chronic pain; however, little research has examined psychosocial interventions for social functioning in this population. A systematic approach was used to assess psychosocial interventions for social functioning challenges in youth with chronic physical conditions to determine which of these may be generalized to youth with chronic pain.

METHODS

A search of EMBASE, Medline, CINAHL, and PsychINFO databases, as well as grey literature was employed to identify studies for inclusion, using a combination of each databases unique subject headings. Selection criteria included: (1) samples between the ages of 5-18 years of age; (2) measurement of social functioning outcomes; (3) studies of chronic physical condition(s); (4) quantitative studies; (5) published in manuscript form in English.

RESULTS

Database searches yielded 424 possible studies. Of these studies, 13 met inclusion criteria. Studies examined psychosocial interventions for social functioning in samples of children with seven different physical conditions. Three studies (23%) specifically targeted social functioning, whereas ten studies (76.9%) examined social functioning in the context of a larger intervention. Although some studies reported contradictory results, findings generally indicated decreased loneliness and peer problems and increased prosocial behaviours as a result of the interventions.

DISCUSSION / CONCLUSIONS

Although some studies reported good social functioning outcomes as a result of psychosocial interventions, several measurement challenges were identified, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions about generalizability to youth with chronic pain. Interventions did not target the complexity of social relationships in chronic pain populations, suggesting that further research is needed to develop interventions for these youth.

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