Social, Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties in Adolescents with SLI: Part and Parcel of an SLT’s responsibility? Bethany Fuller

Introduction

- Specific language impairment (SLI) is a persistent developmental language disorder with significant heterogeneity. It has been defined as “an impairment of language comprehension, language production, or both” in the presence of normal non-verbal IQ and desire to socially engage.
- This diagnosis is not stable across the developmental trajectory and the manifestation of language impairment may differ in adolescence; including social, emotional and behavioural (SEB) difficulties.
- It is extremely important to acknowledge the support that can be provided for adolescents with SLI at this significant period of transition and if this support should be provided by the Speech and Language Therapist (SLT); they are a "substantial and potentially unmet need".

Adolescents with SLI have been reported to be significantly less independent:
- Lack of independence is associated with poor early language skills and poor later literacy skills. Expressive language ability at 7;0 was significantly related to independence at 16;0.
- Better expressive and receptive comprehension abilities are linked with greater independence, targeted by SLTs.

Language impairment is a causal factor of SEB outcomes in adolescents with SLI, and can be supported by SLT intervention:
- Adolescents with SLI have reported to be significantly less independent.
- Limited group of participants reducing generalisation of results to all adolescents with SLI.

Impaired executive function (EF) in adolescents with SLI:
- EFs are highly interrelated with language, promoting each other and linked with greater independence, targeted by SLTs.

Language ability in adolescents with SLI may not be an indicator of all SEB outcomes:
- Language is not the most important factor for realisation of optimal outcomes in adolescence and adulthood.

Lower self-esteem is not related to language impairment:
- At 17;0 there was no significant difference with norms on self-esteem.

Mental Health in Adolescents with SLI (%):
- Language impairment is a causal factor of SEB problems in adolescence, correlated with poor behaviour, social skill and independence. The co-occurrence rate of language and behavioural difficulties is 50-70%.

Validity of results strengthened by large cohort and comparison with 124 matched TD peers.

A substantial proportion of adolescents with SLI are at risk for SEB problems later, if targeted early on and monitored throughout adolescence.

SLT intervention for adolescents with SEB problems is effective:
- SLT involvement is essential to provide support and guidance for adolescents with SLI.

References