Abstract ISPA 2023

The cognitive development of preschoolers at risk for dyslexia and ADHD

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Keywords:

Diverse student populations, vulnerabilities and inclusion

Dyslexia and ADHD co-occur frequently and may affect children before diagnosis. Therefore, early identification of at-risk children is crucial to mitigate the risk of poor school performance and socio-emotional problems. Unfortunately, our understanding of the cognitive predictors of co-occurring dyslexia and ADHD is limited, making it challenging to provide adequate support. To this end, our research aimed to identify potential cognitive precursors of co-occurring dyslexia and ADHD. We compared the broad cognitive profile (i.e., phonological skills, executive functions, and processing speed) of 117 preschoolers at cognitive risk for dyslexia (through a phonological skills screening) and/or at behavioral risk for ADHD (through a standardized questionnaire), to the profile of typically developing preschoolers (*n* = 48). Results revealed that children at risk for dyslexia (irrespective of ADHD risk) performed lowest on phonological skills (of course, we identified dyslexia risk on this basis), executive functions, and processing speed. In addition, children at risk for ADHD showed executive deficits, but only when they were also at risk for dyslexia. Conclusively, ADHD risk did not influence the cognitive profile, but dyslexia risk did. These findings highlight the specific vulnerabilities of children at risk for co-occurring dyslexia and ADHD and emphasize the importance of early identification.