



The Effectiveness of PEERS[®]: In-Person vs. Telehealth

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Introduction

- ASD is a common and pervasive disorder facing many social deficits. This poses negative consequences as these individuals lack a sense of community.
- COVID-19 placed many barriers to accessing essential interventions.
- PEERS[®] has been successful in improving social skills and decreasing problem behaviors.
- PEERS[®] had primarily been completed in-person.
- With increased use of online platforms, this study looks at if the telehealth version of PEERS[®] is as effective as the in-person version.

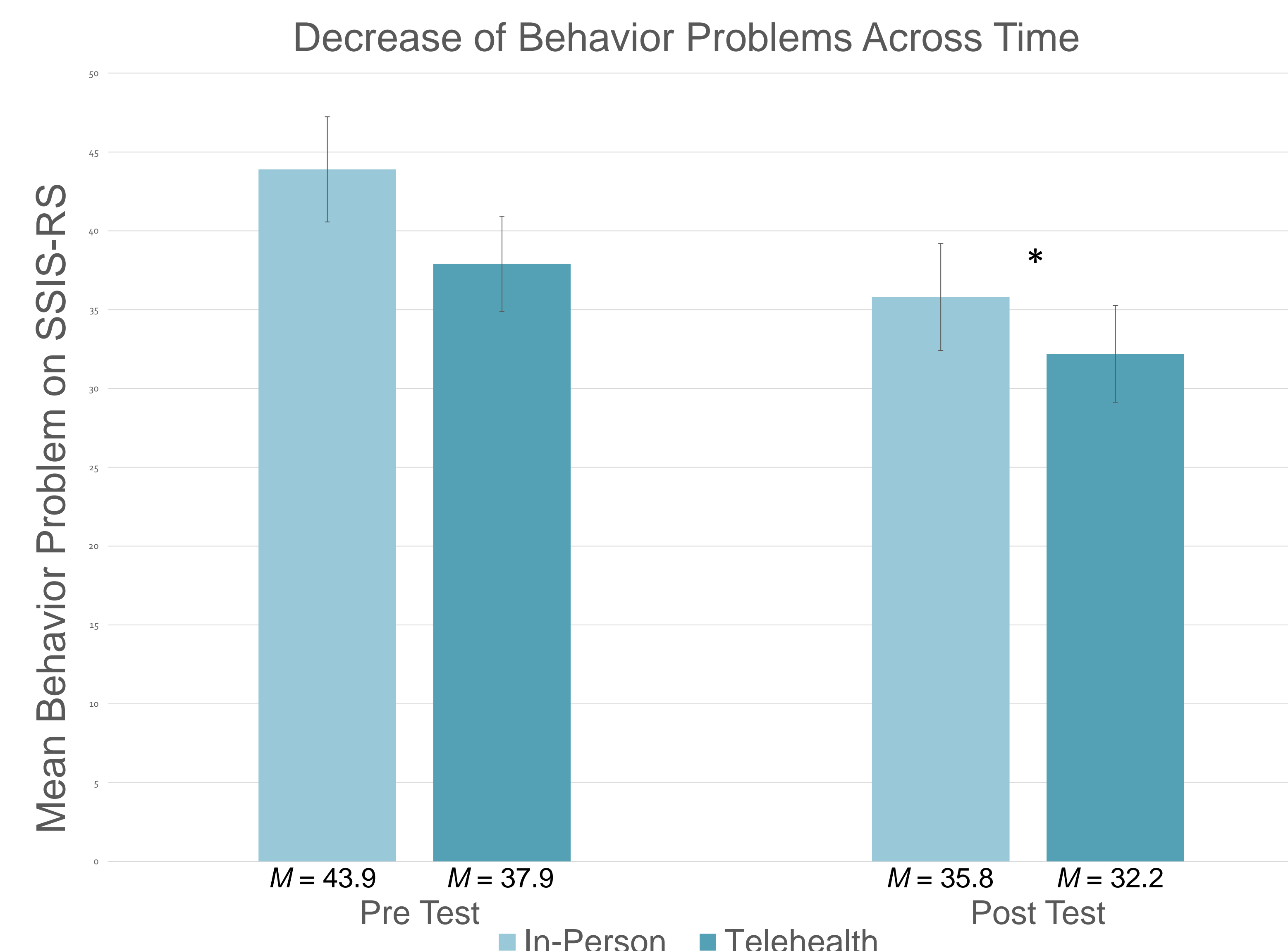
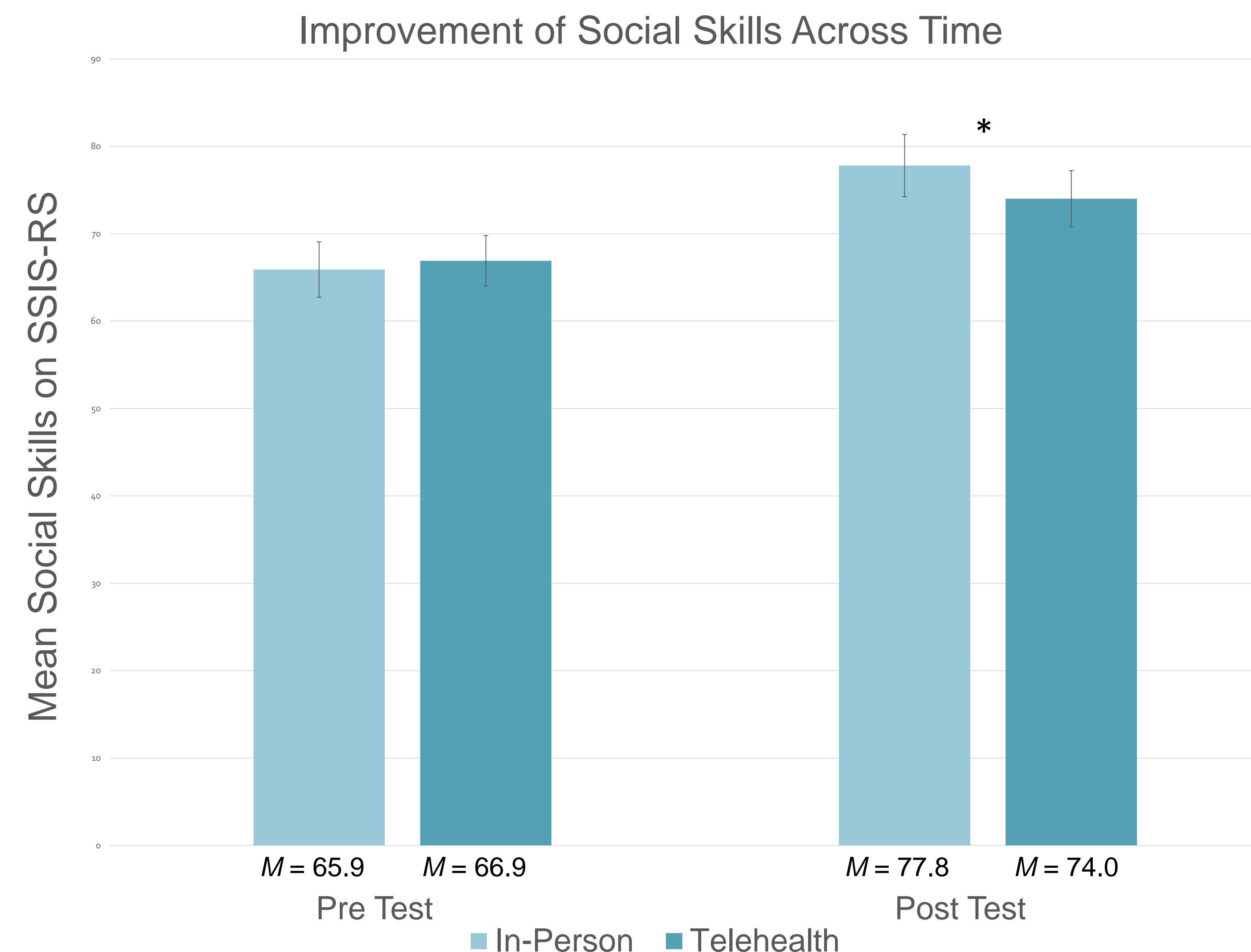
Method

- Participants consisted of adolescents with ASD ages 11-17 who were accompanied by their caregivers. The total sample contained 40 adolescents, broken into two groups: in-person, $n = 18$ and telehealth, $n = 22$.

Demographic characteristic	In-Person	Telehealth	
Child age at intake	$M = 13.8$ $n = 18$	$M = 14.0$ $n = 22$	$p = 0.934$
Primary parent education			$p = 0.04$
12 th grade	0.00%	4.55%	
Vocational/technical training	0.00%	4.55%	
Some college	22.2%	0.00%	
Associates degree	16.7%	0.00%	
Bachelor's degree	27.8%	13.6%	
Master's degree	27.8%	50.0%	
Ph.D./M.D./J.D.	5.56%	18.2%	
Did not identify	0.00%	9.10%	
Family income			$p = 0.43$
Under 25k	0.00%	0.00%	
25k-50k	5.56%	0.00%	
50k-75k	11.1%	9.10%	
75k-100k	27.8%	13.6%	
100k+	55.6%	77.3%	
Child race			$p = 0.79$
American Indian/Alaskan	0.00%	0.00%	
Asian	5.56%	9.10%	
Hawaiian/Islander	0.00%	0.00%	
Black	5.56%	4.55%	
Middle Eastern	0.00%	0.00%	
White	88.9%	81.8%	
Biracial/Multiracial	0.00%	0.00%	
Did not identify	0.00%	4.55%	
Child ethnicity			$p = 0.06$
Hispanic	5.56%	0.00%	
Not Hispanic	94.4%	77.3%	
Did not identify	0.00%	22.7%	
Child gender			$p = 0.60$
Male	88.9%	86.4%	
Female	11.1%	13.6%	

- Caregivers were asked to complete a lab-created descriptive measure and the Social Skills Improvement System-Rating Scales (SSIS-RS).

Results



Results

Social skills

- There was a main effect of time, $F(1,38) = 26.9$, $p = .00$
- There was not a significant main effect across groups nor on the interaction between time and group.

Problem behaviors

- There was a main effect of time, $F(1,38) = 21.2$, $p = .00$
- There was neither a main effect of group nor on the interaction between time and group.

Discussion

- It does not appear that choice of modality resulted in different effects.
- PEERS[®] significantly improved social skills in both the in-person and the telehealth groups over time.
- PEERS[®] significantly decreased problem behaviors in both groups over the course of the intervention.
- It is evident that PEERS[®] serves as a strong resource for adolescents with ASD to help meet their needs, serving as a protective factor to the COVID-19 stressors.
- This study suggests that given the right resources, adolescents can strive even with compounding stress.

Future Directions

- Future studies should include unbiased reporters and a waitlist comparison group in order to ensure that results are due to the intervention and not any external sources.

References

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