

A Comparative Study of Emotional and Behavioral Problems among Children with and Without Learning Disabilities

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Abstract

The study explored the relationship between emotional and behavioral problems and learning disability by comparing children with and without learning disabilities. It was hypothesized that both comparison groups will be different on emotional and behavioral problems and there will be gender differences too. Purposive sampling was done to recruit cases for the learning disabilities group. Sample consisted of students (both boys and girls) from private schools of Lahore, studying in grades 3, 4, 5. A matched sample of children without learning disabilities was selected to constitute the comparison group. Learning disabilities diagnostic inventory (Hammill & Bryant, 1998) and Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991) were used to assess the variables. Descriptive analysis of data, t-test and multiple analysis of variance were carried out to test the proposed hypotheses. The results revealed that groups of children with and without learning disabilities differ significantly across almost all emotional and behavioral problems. The findings of the study also showed gender differences on different emotional and behavioral problems.

Keywords: Emotional/ Behavioral Problems, Learning Disabilities

Introduction

The present comparative study undertakes to explore the relationship between emotional/ behavioral problems among children with and without learning disabilities. It proposes to firstly identify children who suffer from a learning disability of any sort and then find out the relationship between the specific type of learning disability and emotional and behavioral issues present among those children. The study would also be exploring the similar relationship among children without any learning disability. To understand the nature of relationship between the variables of the study it is necessitous to discuss the variables in detail first.

Learning disabilities have been defined by individuals with disabilities education act (2001) as a disruption in one or more of the basic psychological processes that are involved in understanding or usage of language, spoken or written, that results in a flawed ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Moreover, learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. This is not a diagnosable disorder as per DSM-IV-TR but there is a category of learning disorders which consists of reading disorder, mathematics

disorder and disorder of written expression.

The national institute of mental health has reported that the prevalence rate of learning disabilities is 10% of general adult population (Nimh, 2000). While, as per an indigenous study conducted by Irshad, Gillani & Mahmood (2005) it was concluded that 75 out of 200 (37%) of the girls in public and private sector schools of Peshawar were suffering from learning disability of some sort. In an interview to Pakistan Today (July, 2011) Ashba Kamran, chief executive, foundation for rehabilitation and education of special children said that in private schools of Pakistan, almost 10 to 18 percent children are suffering from learning difficulties whereas the situation is even worse in government schools where attention towards the children is already minimal.

Emotional and behavioral problems constitute a broad category which is used commonly in educational settings, to group a range of more specific perceived difficulties of children and adolescents. Emotional problems are referred to as internalizing problems or disorders whereas behavioral ones are referred to as externalizing disorders or problems by Achenbach [1]. In a study conducted to estimate the prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems among primary school children in Karachi, Pakistan it was found that as per the ratings of parents and teachers approximately 35% children were found to be suffering from emotional and behavioral problems [2]. Results of a study conducted by Sadia Saleem showed that emotional behavioral problems were a strong predictor of poor school performance and low self-esteem.

Children with learning disabilities may be more vulnerable to anxiety and depression than others for several reasons (friedman, 2012). For children, adolescents and young people suffering from learning disabilities, the prevalence rate of a diagnosable psychiatric disorder is 36% which is quite an accelerated rate as compared with 8% of those who did not have a learning disability.

By conducting the present study we would be in a position to hold that learning disability had high co-morbidity with emotional and behavioral problems in Pakistan. It could then be suggested that children must be identified for presence of any kind of learning disability when they start their schooling. So that the problems that they could suffer from as a result of their disability of learning could be avoided. Moreover, special attention and consideration would be advocated to the children who would be identified as having learning disabilities.

It is hypothesized that:

1. Children with Learning Disabilities have more Emotional and Behavioral Problems as compared to those who do not have Learning Disabilities.
2. There are gender differences regarding manifestation of Emotional and Behavioral Problems among Boys and Girls.

Method

Participants

Purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit cases for the learning

disabilities group. While a matched sample of children without learning disabilities was randomly selected to constitute the control group. Out of the total number of 365 students, 75 were screened out by the teacher for having probable learning disabilities and 36 were objectively identified as having learning disability. An equal number of students (36) were recruited to be included in sample as the comparison group of children without learning disabilities. So the total number of participants was 72. Both boys and girls belonging to grades 3-5 were recruited from private schools of lahore. Physically and mentally handicapped students were excluded from being a part of the study.

Measures

The learning disabilities diagnostic inventory: Donald d. Hammill and Brian R. Bryant (1998) was used to screen children suffering from learning disabilities. Child behavior check list: by Achenbach is a checklist was used to identify emotional and behavioral problems among children. The teacher's report form that was to be completed by teachers was used in this study.

Results

Table 1: Showing Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) showing differences between Emotional and Behavioral Problems (Anxiety, Social Isolation, Depression, Unpopular, Self-Destructive, Inattentive, Overactive and Aggressive) across Learning Disabilities and Non-Learning Disabilities Groups

Variables	LD Group		Non-LD Group		Mean Difference (LD-Non LD)	F	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Anxious	65.11	13.62	56.58	4.07	8.53*	12.94	.001
Social Isolation	63.55	10.41	57.97	4.04	5.58*	8.99	.004
Depressi-on	67.83	12.63	59.44	5.41	8.39*	13.39	.000
Unpopul-ar	67.05	13.70	60.80	7.95	6.25*	5.60	.021
Self- Destructi-ve	63.05	8.42	61.25	6.38	1.81	1.05	.309
Inattenti-ve	61.69	9.99	56.50	3.60	5.19*	8.61	.005
Overacti-ve	62.75	12.38	57.25	3.46	5.50*	6.58	.012
Aggressi-ve	64.38	8.73	59.36	4.31	5.03*	9.58	.003
Internaliz-ing	61.56	11.756	51.97	7.707	9.583*	16.73	.000
Extern-alizing	61.94	5.565	55.83	4.333	6.111*	27.03	.000

Note: M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, p= significance, *= p< 0.05

Table 2: Showing Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) showing differences between Emotional and Behavioral Problems (Anxiety, Social Isolation, Depression, Unpopular, Self-Destructive, Inattentive, Overactive and Aggressive) among Boys and Girls

Variables	LD Group		Non-LD Group		Mean Difference (LD-Non LD)	F	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Anxious	65.11	13.62	56.58	4.07	8.53*	12.94	.001
Social Isolation	63.55	10.41	57.97	4.04	5.58*	8.99	.004
Depressi-on	67.83	12.63	59.44	5.41	8.39*	13.39	.000
Unpopul-ar	67.05	13.70	60.80	7.95	6.25*	5.60	.021
Self- Destructi-ve	63.05	8.42	61.25	6.38	1.81	1.05	.309
Inattenti-ve	61.69	9.99	56.50	3.60	5.19*	8.61	.005
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Note: M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, p= significance, *= p< 0.05

Discussion

The present comparative study aimed to explore the relationship between emotional/ behavioral problems among children with and without learning disabilities. The study proposed to screen children who suffered from any learning disability and then find out the relationship between the learning disability and emotional and behavioral problems of those children. The study compared both the groups of children in order to know whether children who had learning disability identified were different from those who did not have any such disability in terms of emotional and behavioral issues they exhibited. The study also explored the differences that existed between boys and girls in manifestation of these problems. Statistical analysis was done to test the proposed aims of the study.

The study comprised of 36 screened cases of learning disabilities. According to the methodology of the study, a matched sample of students without learning disabilities was also recruited. So altogether, the study sample consisted of 72 students, 36 with learning disabilities and 36 students without any type of learning disability.

The highest number of students in the overall sample scored above the cut off on the scales of depression and self-destruction. While least number of study sample pupils scored above the cut off on the scales of inattention and social isolation. Majority of the cases scoring above the cut off on all the emotional and behavioral problems belonged to the group of students suffering from learning disabilities. But in case of aggression, equal number of learning disabled and non learning disabled scored above the cutoff.

The first hypothesis of the study got accepted since the results of the study depicted that there are significant differences among groups of children with learning disabilities and those without learning disability across different emotional and behavioral problems. It could be concluded that the emotional and behavioral problems of depression, anxiety, social isolation, inattentiveness, over activity, aggression and unpopularity were more prevalent among group of children with learning disabilities as compared to non- learning disabled children. The results of the study are in line with the previous findings which indicated that individuals with reading disability exhibited significantly higher rates of all internalizing and externalizing disorders than individuals without the disability [3]. Similar findings have been put forward by Friedman, that children with learning disabilities may be more vulnerable to anxiety and depression than others. 73% of all the incidences where a child scored above the cutoff on any of the eight emotional and behavioral problems belonged to the group of children suffering from learning disabilities. Depression turned out to be the diagnoses of highest number of learning disabled children while self-destruction existed equally through both groups.

The learning deficits make children sensitive to the environment since they are at a constant risk of embarrassment. They make such spelling, pronunciation and calculation errors which other children of their class do not do. This induces feelings of rebellion, hatred and isolation in the child and they resultantly tend to show symptoms of

aggressive behavior, depression, anxiety, social isolation and others. Moreover, these problems can then lead to even more pathological issues in the child's personality when he/she grows up. So in order to safe guard the children from these psychological problems and pathologies early screening, diagnoses and intervention should be provided to the children.

Furthermore, boys and girls were compared with one another in order to look for any differences between them with respect to type of emotional and behavioral problems they manifest. The findings revealed that boys and girls differentiated in terms of problems they exhibit. Boys more frequently suffer from aggressiveness, inattention, over activity and self destruction while girls manifest the problems of anxiety, depression, unpopularity and social isolation. Altogether, boys demonstrate externalizing problems while girls more frequently display internalizing problems. Analyses of gender differences in a study conducted by erick g. Willcutt (2000) also indicated that the significant relation between learning disability and internalizing symptoms was largely restricted to girls, whereas the association between learning disability and externalizing psychopathology was stronger for boys. Since diagnosis of an emotional and behavioral problem can formally be made if the t-score obtained by the respondent is greater than 65. In case of girls, highest number of cases scored above the cutoff on the scale of depression while least number of girls scored above the cutoff on the scale of over activity. Whereas, in case of boys highest number of cases scored above the cutoff on the scale of self-destruction and aggression while least number of boys scored above the cutoff on the scale of social isolation.

Boys and girls showed differences in their manifestation of psychological issues. In boys the most prevalent problems were self-destruction and aggression. While girls exhibit problems of depression and anxiety more frequently. There are differences in overall characteristics of girls and boys which makes them suffer from different types of emotional and behavioral issues. Different strategies should be used to deal with both the genders separately since their needs are different.

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between emotional/ behavioral problems among children with and without learning disabilities. Both the proposed hypotheses were accepted. Children with learning disabilities suffer from emotional and behavioral problems more frequently as compared to non learning disabled children. Moreover, boys exhibit externalizing problems like aggression, inattention, over activity and self-destruction while girls show internalizing problems like anxiety, depression, social isolation and unpopularity. The results of the study were in line with the previous studies found in the literature [4-18].

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