

Level of stress among mothers of children with Learning Disability in Kashmir

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Abstract

Learning disabilities are a common and increasing problem that places strain on parents, schools, and communities. As if parenting is not already demanding and stressful enough, parents of children with special needs and limitations usually face significant additional difficulties. Raising a child with disabilities can be exceedingly arduous and challenging, as well as rewarding. In addition to the stresses directly linked to raising a child with learning disabilities, parents also have to deal with a variety of stressors unconnected to their child's special needs; these non-child related stressors can also be augmented by various family characteristics. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the level of stress among the mothers of children with learning disabilities enrolled in special schools of district Srinagar in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The data was collected with the help of using Perceived Stress Scale – a self report scale which involved 135 parents.

Key Words: Learning Disability, Mothers, Stress, special school, Kashmir

Introduction

Learning disabilities are a common and increasing problem that places strain on parents, schools, and communities. When a child has an average IQ but performs substantially lower than would be expected on standardized testing, a learning disability may be identified (Al-Yagon 2012). This unexplained gap between age, ability, and level of academic attainment when considered severe is usually a catalyst for an educator to identify a learning disability (Reynolds 1992). This can lead to a wide range of diagnoses to fall under the category of learning disability as long as the discrepancy between ability and academic performance is severe enough to cause the child to fall behind peers by two or more years (Croll 2002). Historically, learning disabilities have been studied as a general category, but recent research tends to be more specific, studying distinct categories such as ADHD, ADD, and dyslexia. Learning Disabilities (LD) refer to a number of disabilities which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disabilities affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and / or reasoning. These children have the opportunity to learn at school daily in an inclusive program. However, through our observation there are some parents who are not so happy

and they often experienced stress when their children are not such as children without disabilities. The presence of LD children often been shrouded by negative experience, difficulty and often accompanied by high levels of stress, because of the difficulties, the frustration, and the challenges faced by parents in their daily lives. The presence of these children within the family brings an unexpected demands and challenges to the parents, which they often are not prepared. Having a child with disabilities brings life-changing implications and long-lasting effects in the lives of the whole family (Simmerman, Blacher & Baker, 2001). Learning disabilities can be hard on a family. One parent, often the mother, may recognize and face the problem sooner or more readily than the other. Misunderstanding and conflict can result. Brothers and sisters often resent the amount of attention given to a child with special needs and may proclaim knowingly that the child is a spoiled brat who is perfectly capable. Grandparents tend to blame parents for not doing enough, not being disciplined enough, organized enough, or not giving enough direct help to the child. Neighbors can be intolerant if the child is very hyperactive or has low frustration tolerance and tends to explode or cry at each hurdle.

Objective:

To assess the level of stress on mothers of children with Learning disability.

Methodology

This was a cross-sectional study conducted at various special schools of Jammu And Kashmir State. Participants were 135 mothers of children, aged 2-18 years with the diagnosis of Learning disability. The age of mothers ranged between 35-66 years. The researcher met the participants individually, explained the purpose of the study and their consent was taken. Information regarding the diagnoses, intelligence quotient and severity of disability of the child were collected from their medical records and disability certificates (essential document issued by medical board at district level consisting chief medical officer/sub divisional medical officer in the district and another expert in the field of intellectual disability that enables persons with intellectual disability to avail benefits, concessions or schemes provided by government. The mothers were assessed for stress using perceived stress scale.

Instrument:

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) by Cohen (1989) was used to assess level of stress among the sample. The measure consisted of 10 statements and each item is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from never (0) to almost always (4). Positively worded items are reverse scored, and the ratings are summed, with higher scores indicating more perceived stress. The PSS scores are obtained by reversing the scores on the four positive items: For example, 0=4, 1=3, 2=2, etc. and then summing across all 10 items. Items 4, 5, 7, and 8 are the positively stated items. Scores below 13 are considered low, 14 – 19 are considered and scores of 20 or higher are considered high stress.

Results:**The Level of Parental Stress**

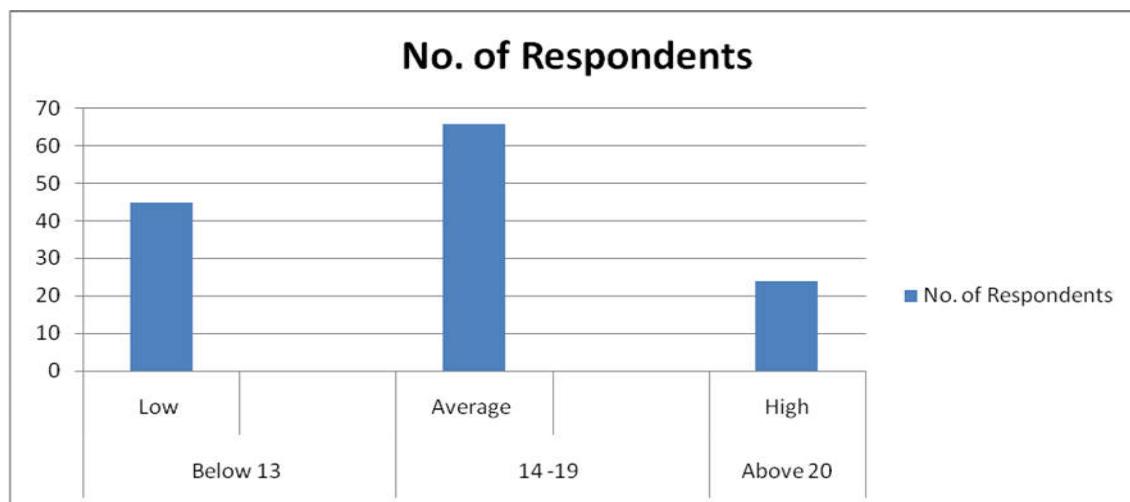
The Level of Stress among mothers of children with learning disability is determined based on the feedback of parents of Perceived Stress Scale. Table below shows the level of stress among mothers of children with learning disability.

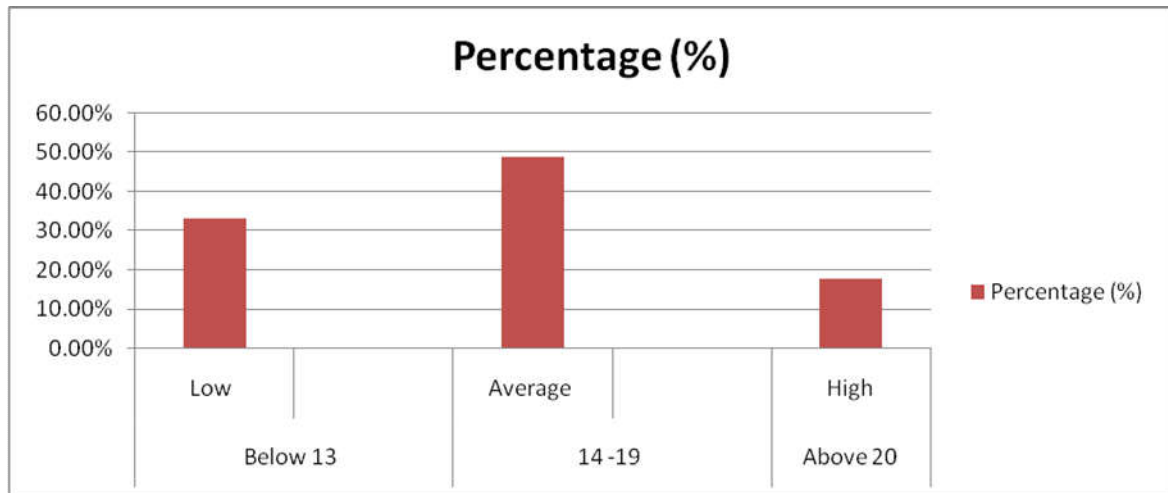
Participants' Background Information

	Gender	Number of Participants	Age Range (Years)	Locality
Biological Mothers	Females	N=135	35-66 years	Urban

Level of Stress among the mothers of Children with Learning Disabilities

Score	Level of Stress	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 13	Low	45	33.3%
14 -19	Average	66	48.8%
Above 20	High	24	17.7%





The above Table reveals that the totals of 24 (17.7%) mothers are experiencing stress at high level (scores above 20) and they are in the adverse conditions and are considered as severe or profound. The high level of stress experienced by parents of LD children could be related to subjective factors such as feeling social isolation and life dissatisfaction, and often have feelings of guilt that somehow they caused the child to be disabled, for no reasons. While as 66 (48.8%) mothers of children with learning disability were suffering average level of stress (a score of 14 to 19) and it is considered as moderate. Furthermore, the analysis also showed that 45 (33.3%) of them experienced low level of stress which is classified as normal.

Discussion and Conclusion

The diagnosis of a moderate to severe learning disability in a child represents a pivotal moment in the life of a parent particularly mother, affecting a parent's mind experience and Igniting a flow of interpersonal, familial, and systemic effects, themselves shaping the parent's internal processes. The parent may experience intense feelings of anger, shame, grief, and guilt. These parents were initially ignorant about the nature of the disturbances in their child. Later, they reported feeling anxiety, guilt, insecurity, emotional instability, self pity and hopelessness. Every parent dreams about his/her child being 'perfect' in all respects. When there is learning disability in spite of above-average intelligence, the disappointed parents develop negative attitudes towards the child. Some of them become over-protective and fail to make realistic demands on the child. After a child is diagnosed with learning disabilities, a parent may immediately begin to deny that the problems exist. Parents also may experience anger, fear, and guilt which might cause confusing thoughts that sometimes have to do with feelings of inadequacy leading the parent to feel they may have caused the learning disability. Another stage is blaming others for their child's learning disability. Children with learning disabilities often have problems with disorganization. Smith (2002) attributes this to neuronal links being scattered throughout the brain instead of being patterned as found in children without learning disabilities. Due to this central nervous system dysfunction, parents may need to provide more

structure and order for children with learning disabilities to help them with successful completion of tasks and projects whether academic or daily activities at home or elsewhere. Parents should also monitor and facilitate healthy relationships between their child and the people with whom they interact. Smith (2002) argues that these children need to be explicitly taught how to relate and interact with other people. Intensively promoting self-esteem as well as empowerment is also important. Children with learning disabilities should be encouraged to be active learners by helping with household tasks so that they see that their efforts can actually make a difference in the lives of other people. While children without learning disabilities might learn on their own from these lessons, children with learning disabilities may need to be guided to the intended lesson to be learned.

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