

## Self esteem among Children with Learning Disability: an Intervention Study

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to assess self-esteem as a psychological correlate of learning disability among children: scope of psychological interventions. It was hypothesized that LD children have low self-esteem. A sample of 30 Students for experimental group, across the age group of ten years to sixteen years were included for the study. Children with average and above average IQ but with learning difficulty, Children who are physically healthy and active in other co-curricular activities, Children who are going for remedial classes for subject wise Learning difficulty were included. And children with various types of Learning disability like dyslexia(both reading comprehension and writing), dyscalculia and dysgraphia were included for the study. Information sheet -Socio-demographic data sheet, Rosenberg Self-Esteem (Rosenberg 1965) questionnaires were administered on the selected sample. The study was an experimental study where the self esteem was assessed pre and post intervention. An intervention was administered for the experimental group which included developing and maintain a healthy self-esteem. Analysis was done using 't' test to assess the effect of intervention. The experimental and control group was further analysed to see the effectiveness of the intervention programme. The pre-test results show that the students with LD have scored low on self esteem. Key findings were the post test shows intervention programme has a significant influence on the experimental group and not very significant influence on control group. Further, the limitations and implications of the study for further research are also given.

**Keywords:** *Self-esteem, Learning Disability, Psychological correlates*

In the modern society mastery of basic academic skills-reading, writing and arithmetic is a necessary pre-requisite for success in both school and employment setting and in society at large. A large percentage of children suffer from learning disabilities or learning difficulties and therefore do not master or partially master-these required academic skills. The term

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'learning difficulty' has been applied to those children who have significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of their age. They are unable to make use of the education facilities available in schools. People with learning difficulties can have problems with many every day learning activities. Reading, spelling and numeracy skills are basic to school achievement. Children with specific learning difficulties may show problems in all three areas or only one or two. Reading and spelling are closely associated skills and it is rare to find reading – disabled children who are not at all handicapped in spelling. Most children are likely to be behind in all three areas, although there are occasional reports of sub groups showing rather more of one or the other deficit. Problems in self-regulatory behaviours, social perception and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction, they are not the result of these conditions or influences, Children whose overall level of intellectual development is normal but who nevertheless have specific difficulty with some particular task, such as reading. On assessment, children with specific learning difficulties usually have a performance profile in which there is a marked difference between their level of achievement in their area of specific difficulty and their levels of achievement in other areas of cognitive functioning. Because of this, such children are often said to show a discrepancy between their achievement and their aptitude in the area of difficulty. Learning difficulties not only present problems in coping with academic requirement but has serious repercussions. Teachers and parents label children by their behaviour without knowing that reasons are at the root of the problem. Behavioural problems can be caused by learning difficulties and emotional problems. According to researchers, learning difficulties can cause emotional distress. Children with learning disabilities may have higher levels of depression, anxiety, loneliness and low self-esteem than children with no disabilities. Children with learning difficulties are frequently criticized and denigrated by teachers and parents and they may be rejected by peers, who are quick to perceive who stands out in the class as being unable to read and spell. As they fall further and further behind they develop a picture of themselves as deficient, different, hopeless and unsuccessful, unless special steps are taken to attend to these issues. Continuing failure and increasing distress further reduce motivation to try and a syndrome of "learned helplessness" may produce indifference to learning, or in some cases, energetic avoidance of school work.

Learning disabilities may negatively affect a child's social growth. Children with LD who do not have many friends will feel lonely, sad and misunderstood. These children will get into fights easily because they will feel disapproved. Emotional problems may mask learning disabilities. Because adults may pay attention on the child's personality and behaviour, they may ignore the child's learning disabilities. When disabilities are not observed and children do not get help and support, they will come up with any excuse to avoid doing home work tend to drop out of school. Any robust evolutionary account of self-esteem also needs to pass the cultural test (Henrich et al. 2010). Although there are differences in the source of self-esteem between Western and Eastern cultures (i.e., individual vs. Collective, respectively),

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the self-esteem motive appears universal (Leary et al.1995a). Perceived emotional support has a strong effect on self-esteem, regardless of culture (Uchida et al.2008).The research investigating the associations between self-esteem and various aspects of social inclusions and belongingness, as outlined supports the socio-meter model of self-esteem. People are sensitive to their social environments and the degree of inclusion or belonging experienced, and this sensitivity is reflected in levels of state, trait self-esteem. Self –esteem is therefore linked to the degree to which we are socially included or excluded, especially by those with whom we are strongly connected or with whom we identify. Self-esteem takes into account both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. It depends positively on the effort and negatively on the compensation, but only for the part of the effort that can be considered a gift, i.e. the part in excess of the price paid for the effort. Leary (2003) had observed that self-esteem was highly correlated with social anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, and depression. Rosenberg (1979) and Leary also proposed that self-esteem is reflection of an individual’s perceptions of how others view oneself. Gailliot & Baumeister(2007), Belongingness is positively and uniquely associated with self-esteem. Pickett (2004) found Individuals who have a high need to belonging (i.e., a high need to experience social connectedness are more sensitive to and accurate in detecting and interpreting social cues. Consistent self acceptance leads to increases in self-esteem acceptance, and consistent self rejection leads to lower levels of self-esteem compared to increasing rejection studied Buckley et al.(2004).

It is perceived that from the various literature reviews and other related studies the research on issue like self-esteem is not focussed independently as a psychological correlate with learning disability. Many a times there would be a lot of comparison with their academic achievement and general behaviour and acceptance. Self-esteem as a correlate could be trained and in effort to the same the research is been conducted to understand the psychological correlates of LD children.

The objective of the study was to find out the effect of intervention on self-esteem of the children with LD. It was hypothesised as, there exists a significant difference in self-esteem among LD children post intervention.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Sample*

The sample were experimental Group – N=30 and Control Group- N=30 which were derived from the overall 87 sample size. Children were aged between 11-18yrs of age both the genders were included for the study.

#### *Tool*

The tools used were basic Information sheet consisting of Socio-demographic datasheet, Consent form of parents, Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg 1965) and Intervention Programme consisting of Self-esteem activities. And the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and ‘t’ test. Certain exclusion criteria and inclusion criteria were followed; Special children with Autism, borderline MR etc., Children with low IQ, Children suffering from any

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physical illness, Children who go to special school were the exclusion criteria. And inclusion criteria were Children with average and above average IQ but with learning difficulty, Children who are physically healthy and active in other co-curricular activities, Children who are going for remedial classes for subject wise Learning difficulty and also students who are not attending for the same. The procedure followed was socio-demographic sheet, consent form was given to the parents with Rosenberg's self-esteem scale to the sample. The questionnaire was scored for descriptive statistics of the sample. Analysis was done for the pre-test. Students were divided for experimental and control group for intervention programme- (4 sessions). At the completion of the intervention programme self-esteem was assessed for post intervention.

### *Intervention Programme*

#### **Exercises involved:**

**Core beliefs:** Core beliefs are the thoughts a person has that determine how they interpret their experiences. For example, if someone has the core belief that "The world is a bad place", they will believe that people who are kind have an ulterior motive (someone being kind without reason just doesn't line up with their world view). Challenging these negative core beliefs can help clients develop a healthier understanding of themselves and the world around them. Use this core beliefs worksheet to help educate clients and get them to think about how their thoughts affect their mood and behaviour. Expected outcome: This CBT worksheet can also serve as a good take-home reminder after having a discussion about core beliefs.

**Overcoming fears:** My Fears: Prompt children to begin a discussion about anxiety and fear using the My Fears anxiety worksheet. This worksheet will give your clients an opportunity to discuss the feelings of fear and anxiety, why they are important, and how they can be harmful. Children are asked to list their fears, describe their thoughts about the anxiety, identify where in their body they sense the feeling, and finally to create a plan for dealing with fear in the future. Expected outcome: The goal of this worksheet is to begin introducing children to the concept that thoughts and feelings are linked, and to increase awareness of their emotions by asking them to identify how their body responds to anxiety.

**Trait analysis:** Positive Traits is a list of 58 positive traits, to circle their own positive traits to begin building self-esteem. Ask them to share a story about sometimes they have displayed these traits, or just let them take the list home to keep as a reminder of their positive qualities. Expected outcome: Exercise tends to be a great way to initiate positive group conversations.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*Table I : Showing t-test scores on Self-esteem Pre and Post intervention of the subjects*

Variable Self-esteem	Mean	SD	't'
Pre-test	14.20	1.695	3.153**
Post-test	19.55	1.995	

\*\* - Significant at 0.01 level, \* significant at 0.05 level

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Results on the table showing the scores on self-esteem of children with learning disability, pre and post intervention. The 't' scores signify there is a significant difference in the level of self-esteem of the subjects post intervention. The objective of the study was to identify the level of self-esteem post intervention among students with LD. Based on the findings of the research the hypothesis is proven where, there is a significant difference in the level of self-esteem post intervention techniques administered on LD students. Intervention programme has significant influence in the level of self-esteem level of the children. In this regard a study conducted by Buckley et al. (2004) proves a Consistent self acceptance leads to increases in self-esteem acceptance, and consistent self rejection leads to lower levels of self-esteem compared to increasing rejection. Self-esteem is highly correlated with social anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, and depression. A constant approval and self talk and changing of the schemas about self might be a powerful tool to overcome fear and accept self which is a great indicator of good self-esteem. A positive dialogue with self as indicated in the intervention programme and positive word suggestion are great enhancers of self-esteem.

### CONCLUSION

The study has found there is a significant difference in the level of self-esteem post intervention of children with LD.

Some of the implications of the study are that the results can be a very good indicator of building positive self-esteem for children with LD. It also gives scope for more skill development programmes in the area of psychology to be constructed and validated in the area of inclusive education. Similar studies can be conducted with other co morbidity like autistic children, children with ADHD.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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