

**Comparative Study**

## **Comparative Study to Evaluate Happiness and Resilience Among Students with Special Needs and Mainstream Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The objective of this study is to assess and contrast the levels of happiness and resilience among children with special needs and mainstream students. A cross-sectional design was employed to gather quantitative data from 82 participants, aged 10-20 years, consisting of special needs (N=39) and mainstream students (N=43). The Children's Happiness Scale and Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-R) were utilised to evaluate the levels of happiness and resilience in the participants, respectively. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilised for data analysis, which involved conducting independent-samples t-tests. The results revealed statistically significant disparities in both happiness ( $t = 3.71, p < 0.05$ ) and resilience ( $t = 1.06, p < 0.05$ ) between the two groups. The findings enhance our comprehension of the distinct difficulties and abilities encountered by children with special needs in contrast to their peers in mainstream schooling, therefore enabling us to develop well-informed interventions and support measures.

**Keywords:** *Evaluate Happiness, Resilience, Special Needs and Mainstream Students*

In the field of education, it is crucial to prioritise the well-being and strength of students. Examining happiness and resilience plays a role in understanding how students develop holistically in educational environments. Contrasting students with needs with those in mainstream education provides a perspective on these important aspects.

This study aims to conduct a comparison to assess the levels of happiness and resilience in students with needs compared to their mainstream peers. By analysing existing literature and conducting research, the goal is to uncover the complex connections between happiness, resilience, and the educational setting.

### **HAPPINESS**

Happiness, which involves well-being, life satisfaction, and positive feelings, is essential for measuring students' overall quality of life. Understanding the experiences that shape happiness within a context is crucial.

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## **Comparative Study to Evaluate Happiness and Resilience Among Students with Special Needs and Mainstream Students**

Several research papers investigating the happiness and well-being of children in school have been published over the years, as mentioned by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015. The reason for this is that improved physical and mental well-being are closely associated with feelings of happiness. (Roberto B. et. al., 2019).

In psychology, happiness refers to a state of emotional well-being that can be experienced in two distinct ways. Broadly speaking, it involves having a favourable evaluation of one's life and achievements as a whole. More specifically, it can also be described as a state of emotional well-being that arises when pleasant events occur at a specific instant.

Seligman et al. (2009) argue that educators should dedicate more effort to researching the factors that contribute to children's happiness and develop effective techniques to enhance it. Happiness is commonly defined as a state of well-being characterised by individuals experiencing positive feelings and feeling satisfied with their lives (Carter & Seifert, 2012).

The concept of subjective well-being, encompassing various happiness-related experiences rather than a momentary emotion, has led to the emergence of an entire field of research. Individuals who experience joy in this manner are prone to experiencing a state of happiness on a regular basis, with occasional episodes of sadness. However, this broader form of happiness encompasses more than mere emotions; it also encompasses cognitive processes. When prompted to contemplate the conditions and events in their lives, individuals who are content generally provide a positive assessment of these circumstances and happenings. Consequently, individuals who are pleased express their satisfaction with their lives and all its aspects.

It is noteworthy that contentment does not necessarily encompass all these different qualities in a single individual. Despite experiencing intense negative feelings, individuals can nevertheless maintain the ability to acknowledge that their lives are progressing positively.

The importance of studying children's development within the framework of their surrounding environments, such as their home, school, and community, has been highlighted by extensive research conducted over several decades (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These settings serve as microenvironments where young individuals spend a substantial amount of their active hours during their childhood and teenage years. Only a limited amount of study has extensively examined the familial and personal factors associated with happiness in connection to different stages of development. Research conducted by Gwyther (2017) has shown that the level of happiness experienced by children is strongly influenced by factors such as the functioning of the family, the quality of the parent-child connection, and the overall satisfaction within the family. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that the family plays a vital role in shaping the positive growth and development of children and adolescents (Daniel, 1996).

### **RESILIENCE**

Resilience is another crucial psychological factor that contributes to overall well-being. Resilience is essential in an ever-changing environment that constantly presents individuals with new challenges on a daily basis. Individuals that possess resilience exhibit higher levels of functionality and experience an enhanced quality of life. Moreover, they demonstrate superior adaptability in the face of life's adversities (Leppin et al., 2014). Resilience, as

## **Comparative Study to Evaluate Happiness and Resilience Among Students with Special Needs and Mainstream Students**

defined by the American Psychological Association (APA), refers to the ability to recover and adapt to challenging events, trauma, threats, or adversity. Nevertheless, possessing resilience does not ensure that individuals will be exempt from facing difficulties or experiencing discomfort in such situations.

Several risk factors have been identified for the emergence of psychopathology in children and adolescents. These include bullying, childhood adversity, parental psychopathology, and significant threats (Albertine J., 2014). Identifying risk variables, however, does not always lead to successful prevention or accurate psychiatric prediction. We argue that the primary focus of research on the development of psychopathology should be on characteristics that influence both risk and resilience. There is still a lot that is not known about the factors that protect young people from mental disorders or promote normal development in children and teenagers. In order to assist physicians and researchers in determining the most effective areas to focus on for early intervention and preventive efforts, it is crucial to obtain a deeper understanding of resilience and its changeable clinical and epidemiological factors in children and adolescents.

Masten (2014) asserts that cultivating resilience is an individual endeavour that can be pursued by anyone through their convictions and behaviours. To successfully navigate obstacles, an individual must possess effective coping methods. Resilience, as defined by Masten, refers to the ability to achieve accomplishment despite encountering challenges or obstacles. Ungar (2013) defines doing well as making significant progress despite facing hardship, which typically leads to bad results.

The impetus for our investigation into this subject stemmed from the importance of resilience and happiness in the lives of individuals, particularly in the growth and maturation of young students. It is intriguing to explore the potential differences in resilience and happiness between children with exceptional needs and regular students.

### **SPECIAL EDUCATION IN INDIA**

Childhood is a phase characterised by swift growth, during which both physical and neurological capacities thrive. Nevertheless, a considerable segment of society may encounter obstacles due to their particular needs. This phrase spans a broad spectrum of illnesses, including both physical and neurodevelopmental abnormalities.

It is important to acknowledge the obstacles faced by students with needs in education. When looking into the situation of children with needs in schools in India, it is clear that these students face many challenges, from social stigma to obstacles within the institutions. Although progress has been made in inclusive education, there are still disparities that exist, which require an in-depth examination of the variables that affect the happiness and resilience of these children compared to their mainstream peers.

The influence of the school setting on the physical and mental health, as well as the ability to adjust and perform effectively, of children is of utmost importance. Schools function as small-scale representations where social interactions, academic requirements, and institutional support systems come together to influence the overall growth and development of students. Therefore, understanding the distinct impacts of school environments on happiness and resilience has significant implications for educational policy and practice.

## **Comparative Study to Evaluate Happiness and Resilience Among Students with Special Needs and Mainstream Students**

Education facilitates the belief that all individuals have equitable opportunities in a morally upright and impartial society. Having a solid living situation is crucial for ensuring an optimistic, autonomous, and safe future. In India, the development of special education as an independent system for educating children with disabilities, separate from the conventional school system, started in the 1880s. In 1971, the Planning Commission included an integrated education strategy in its plan after successful global trials that involved including impaired pupils into regular classrooms. The government initiated the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) programme in December 1974. The Centrally Sponsored Scheme was specifically created to provide educational opportunities for children with special needs (CWSN) in order to support their success and inclusion in mainstream schools. All local schools are expected to enrol children with disabilities. Training programmes were also offered to special educators.

The term "special education" originally denoted the education provided to children and adolescents whose educational requirements arose from disabilities or learning challenges. Nevertheless, the term "special needs education" (SNE) has superseded its predecessor. The statement asserts that individuals with special educational needs should be provided with the opportunity to attend mainstream schools that can effectively cater to their specific requirements through child-centred teaching methods.

Special education often encompasses educational programmes and strategies specifically tailored for students who have disabilities, whether they are physical, mental, or emotional in nature. These children require specialised teaching methods, equipment, or support, either inside a standard classroom setting or in a separate environment. Potential disabilities encompass mental, physical, emotional, and developmental impairments.

### **PHYSICAL DISABILITY**

This study also includes children with exceptional needs who have physical limitations among the sample population. The limitations generally appeared in two domains: mobility and visual impairment.

Locomotor impairments refer to restrictions on the ability to move and get around. The range of impairments might vary from slight coordination difficulties to a complete reliance on assistive equipment for walking. Children who are blind, however, suffer from either a total or partial absence of sight. Both of these constraints have a substantial influence on a child's capacity to engage with their surroundings and take part in everyday tasks.

The objective of this study is to investigate the encounters of children with these particular physical limitations within the wider framework of special needs. Through analysing the obstacles people encounter and the many interventions at their disposal, our aim is to enhance comprehension of the most effective means of promoting their growth and welfare.

### **NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS**

In a ground-breaking move, the DSM-III introduced the inclusion of "developmental disorders" inside the category that encompassed autism disorder. The DSM-5 introduced the inclusion of "neurodevelopmental disorders" (NDDs) as a broad group of illnesses. This new section supersedes the previous chapter titled "Disorders usually first diagnosed in infancy, childhood, or adolescence." Neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) gained more prominence in the latest version of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)

## **Comparative Study to Evaluate Happiness and Resilience Among Students with Special Needs and Mainstream Students**

published by the World Health Organisation. They were specifically included in the psychiatry chapter under the heading "Mental, behavioural or neurodevelopmental disorders."

Neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) are a group of conditions that lead to deficits and functional impairments, which begin during the developmental period, as defined by the DSM-5. Neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) encompass a range of conditions such as specific learning difficulties, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), intellectual disability (ID), communication impairments, and neurodevelopmental motor disorders, which include tic disorders. The categories of Neurodevelopmental Disorders (NDDs) in ICD-11 and DSM-5 exhibit little differences. Importantly, the specifier "associated with a known medical or genetic condition or environmental factor" might be applicable to any Neurodevelopmental Disorder (NDD) as defined in DSM-5. This specifier indicates that advancements in genetics research are expected to alter this ailment category in the coming decades. It allows the clinician to record etiological factors, such as fragile X syndrome.

Neurodevelopmental disorders are behavioural and cognitive diseases that arise during the developmental stage. They are marked by significant difficulties in acquiring and performing specific intellectual, motor, language, or social abilities.

Neurodevelopmental diseases encompass conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder, and irregularities of intellectual development. Intellectual development disorders are characterised by notable deficiencies in cognitive abilities and adaptive skills, which encompass everyday conceptual, social, and practical capabilities. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) encompasses a wide array of conditions characterised by consistently limited, repetitive, and inflexible behaviour, interests, or activities, along with varying degrees of challenges in social communication and reciprocal social interaction. Morris-Rosendahl, Deborah J. (2020)

Various successful treatment methods are available, including speech, occupational, and behavioural therapy, as well as psychiatric therapies. Medication may also be considered for particular age cohorts and medical conditions. The source of this information is the World Health Organisation (WHO) in the year 2022.

While the present research was being carried out, it consisted of students experiencing a number of developmental disorders. The data collection was done from Special Schools of Delhi NCR, including Sunrise Learning Special School and Amrit Masonic Special School.

This research aims to provide a detailed analysis of these complex dimensions in order to guide specific interventions that promote the well-being and adaptive functioning of all students in the educational system.

Overall, this comparative investigation aims to fill the gap in current knowledge about the relationship between happiness, resilience, and the educational experiences of students with special needs. This research aims to promote a more open and equitable learning setting where all students can succeed while thriving by providing insight into the complex processes involved.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Sample*

The participants for this cross-sectional study were chosen via purposive sampling. The study included children and adolescents aged 10-20 who had been diagnosed with a Neurodevelopmental Disorder. The study excluded children who had any psychiatric or medical comorbidity that could have affected their performance on the tests.

To provide a basis for comparison, a group of children and adolescents without any disabilities was included in the study.

The sample comprised 82 participants, [Students with Special Needs (N= 39) and Mainstream Students (N= 43)]. Mean Age of Mainstream Students was 15.4 and that of Students with Special Needs was 15.2. The sample of mainstream students was relatively homogenous in terms of Gender with 22 Females and 21 Males, while the sample of Students with Special Needs was heterogenous and consisted of 13 Females and 26 Males. There were no substantial disparities in the socio demographic features between the two groups.

### *Statistical Tools*

- **The Children's Happiness Scale (Morgan, 2014):** This instrument created by Dr. Roger Morgan of Children's Rights Director for England. It involves compiling a comprehensive list of 100 statements that children may use to describe themselves. The list comprises indicators of happiness, encompassing both states of being happy or miserable, as well as factors that have the potential to elicit happiness or unhappiness in a child. The list was generated by combining children's introspection with studies on happiness and wellbeing. It was compiled to have 20 items which could be answered by choosing between "Yes" or "Not" according to the conditions that the children feel.
- **Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-R):** The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-R) is an internationally recognised self-report assessment tool utilised by researchers and practitioners to evaluate social-ecological resilience. The development process involved conducting interviews with young individuals and carers from many parts of the world. The test has been modified to cater to younger children aged 5-9 years, adults (known as the Adult Resilience test), and those who are well-acquainted with the target person (referred to as a Person Most Knowledgeable). For this study, CYRM for Adolescents (Ages 10 – 23 years) was used.

### *Procedure*

The study participants were chosen from a variety of schools, including Mainstream Education Classrooms, Special Schools and Inclusive Schools. Given that the study participants were underage, the parent was required to provide written informed consent. Consent was obtained from the subjects. Subsequently, the study participant underwent the administration of the Children's Happiness Scale and Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-R).

The findings will make a substantial contribution to comprehending the relative characteristics of the selected variable and its correlation with the existence or absence of physical disability in the sample group.

## Comparative Study to Evaluate Happiness and Resilience Among Students with Special Needs and Mainstream Students

### RESULT

*Table 1 T test between mainstream and special needs students across study variables*

	Mean	SD	T	Level of Significance
Happiness				
Mainstream students	34.23	7.21	3.71	p<0.05
special needs students	40.44	7.85		
Resilience				
Mainstream students	43.48	3.99	1.06	p>0.05
special needs students	44.38	3.61		

Table 1 represents the t statistics between mainstream and special needs students on happiness and resilience. There is a significant difference in the happiness of mainstream and special needs students. Special needs students scored higher while mainstream students scored lower. There is no significant difference in the resilience of mainstream and special needs students.

### DISCUSSION

#### *Implications and Applications*

The objective of this study is to assess and contrast the levels of happiness and resilience between mainstream students and those with special needs. In light of the growing emphasis on inclusive education, it is essential to comprehend the psychological well-being of children with special needs in relation to their counterparts in mainstream school. This understanding is vital for developing efficient educational programmes and support systems. This study aims to enhance the current body of research by presenting actual data on the happiness and resilience levels of students with special needs in contrast to their peers in normal education.

The study utilised a comparative research approach, employing standardised measures to evaluate the levels of happiness and resilience in both mainstream and special needs pupils. The sample comprised 82 individuals, with more than 47% representing students with special needs and around 52% representing mainstream pupils. Participants in their respective educational environments completed self-report questionnaires to collect data and some of them were even given assistance as needed.

The analysis showed a notable disparity in enjoyment levels between mainstream and special needs learners, as evidenced by the t statistics ( $t = 3.71$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Surprisingly, special needs children outperformed their mainstream peers in terms of happiness. This surprising discovery indicates that kids with exceptional needs may demonstrate perseverance and experience happiness in their situations, even though they encounter additional challenges.

Nevertheless, there was no substantial disparity observed in resilience levels between mainstream and special needs children ( $t = 1.06$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). This outcome suggests that the two groups have similar degrees of resilience, reflecting their ability to adapt and handle difficult situations, regardless of their educational background. However, even with the absence of a significant difference, the mean resilience in students with special needs (44.38) was slightly higher than that of mainstream students (43.48).

## Comparative Study to Evaluate Happiness and Resilience Among Students with Special Needs and Mainstream Students

The discovery that kids with special needs reported greater levels of satisfaction in comparison to mainstream pupils contradicts traditional ideas regarding the psychological health of those with difficulties. This outcome emphasises the significance of acknowledging the varied encounters and viewpoints of students with special needs and emphasises the requirement for customised support systems to foster their emotional welfare. It is important to observe that most students with special needs reported feeling closer to their carers, and this improved social support may contribute to their higher levels of satisfaction despite their disabilities.

The research findings were unique and incoherent with previous finding in which the results indicate that special education children exhibited lower levels of enjoyment in both subjective and school-related domains when compared to their mainstream classmates. (Uusitalo-Malmivaara, L. et. al. 2012)

The lack of a substantial disparity in resilience levels between mainstream and special needs kids implies that resilience is not limited to any specific group, but rather is a trait inherent in individuals from many backgrounds and abilities. This discovery highlights the significance of cultivating resilience in all children, regardless of their educational setting, by implementing treatments that encourage adaptive coping mechanisms and emotional regulating abilities.

The consequences of these findings are substantial for educational practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders who are involved in providing help to students with special needs. It is crucial to shift away from focusing on the weaknesses of students with special needs and instead embrace techniques that recognise and develop their individual skills and talents.

It is essential for educators to give priority to the creation of inclusive learning environments that prioritise social-emotional learning and cultivate a sense of belonging for all pupils. Furthermore, it is crucial to adopt focused interventions in educational environments to enhance resilience. These interventions aim to equip children with the necessary abilities to effectively navigate adversities and succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Additional investigation is necessary to examine the fundamental mechanisms that contribute to the elevated levels of happiness among students with special needs and to determine successful methods for fostering their well-being and resilience. Longitudinal studies are necessary to analyse the patterns of happiness and resilience over a period of time and evaluate the impact of treatments in improving these outcomes among students with special needs.

### *Limitations*

- **Self-Reporting Bias:** Subjective experiences are what make happiness and resilience possible. When it comes to self-reported assessments, such as surveys, there is the possibility that factors such as social desirability or the difficulty of precisely expressing emotions could have an impact.
- **External Validity:** There is a possibility that the findings cannot be generalised to accommodate various student populations or educational environments. As an illustration, a school that has robust support systems for pupils who have special



## Comparative Study to Evaluate Happiness and Resilience Among Students with Special Needs and Mainstream Students

needs could see different outcomes in comparison to a school that has a limited amount of resources.

- **Interpretation of Happiness Scores:** There is a possibility that variables other than genuine happiness are responsible for the higher happiness scores of pupils who have wants. One example is that kids who have certain needs might have a different baseline for expressing their emotions, or they might be more easily pleased with the area in which they are located.
- **Lack of Explanation for Differences:** The study merely finds a substantial difference in happiness, but it does not provide an explanation as to why this difference exists. It would be necessary to do additional research in order to have an understanding of the fundamental elements that influence emotions in these populations.
- **Resilience Measurement:** There is no discussion of the potential limits of the resilience measure that was utilised in this study. Some students who have special needs may demonstrate resilience in a variety of different ways, some of which may not be captured by the chosen measure.

### CONCLUSION

A striking discovery emerged from the findings of this research: children with special needs reported considerably better levels of satisfaction compared to their counterparts who were enrolled in mainstream classes ( $t(df) = 3.71, p > 0.05$ ). The scores of resilience were not significantly different between the two groups, as indicated by the fact that the  $t$ -value was 1.06 and the  $p$ -value was less than 0.05.

Due to the limitations of these findings, such as the possibility of selection bias and the subjective nature of self-reported measures, it is essential to interpret them with caution. When conducting research in the future, it is important to investigate the underlying elements that influence happiness in student populations. Furthermore, a more nuanced grasp of this concept could be obtained by doing research on the ways in which students with special needs exhibit resilience.

In spite of these limitations, the conclusion that students with special needs reported higher levels of enjoyment is significant and calls for additional research to be conducted within this area. It is possible that interventions that support the well-being of all students could be informed by an understanding of the elements that contribute to the happiness of the students.

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## Comparative Study to Evaluate Happiness and Resilience Among Students with Special Needs and Mainstream Students

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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