



Challenges Faced by Parents of Children with Learning Disability

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ABSTRACT: Learning Disability is a neurological disorder and it affects an individual in such way that their brain works differently from others. Hence the processing that occurs in an individual's brain functions differently in people with Learning Disability. This can cause serious challenge to the individual and family physically, socially and emotionally. The study is of descriptive in nature and describes the various challenges faced by the parents of children with Learning Disability in all these aspects. The study is conducted among 65 parents of children with Learning Disability in Trivandrum.

Keywords: Disability, Learning Disability, Neurological disorder, Children with Disabilities, Parents Challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

"No other disabling condition affects so many people and yet has such a low public profile and low level of understanding as LD", Washington Summit 1994 (Reid L, et al., 1994).

Learning Disability is a neurological processing problem which affects an individual. It can be identified when the child starts his or her school life and now tends to be a challenge not only to an individual or family but for entire nation's development as the number seems to increase and without proper attention as such children may not be able to gain their fruitful future. The primary persons to understand and deliver proper attention and care are the parents and hence the challenges they face are also not minor.

A child with a difficulty in learning encounters many problems owing to the lack of understanding of the problem he or she faces. Owing to the many abilities and disabilities the child shows, parents are also confused about the accurate problem. Many parents suffer from a feeling of inadequacy when they discover that their child is disabled and many a times in case of Learning Disability, the parents do not discover or tend to fully understand the peculiar nature of the child's disability. In a society which places much importance and value on intelligence and which have a little toleration for any deviation from the cultural values Learning Disability is a big problem and it poses multi-dimensional challenges to parents. Parents do not tend to understand the fact that their child has Learning Disability and it is mainly because of the lack of awareness as they are often confused about the child's abilities and disabilities. Some of the challenges faced by parents are the shadows of some unidentified causes.

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Indian statistics show that at least 10% of the school going children in India suffers from Learning Disabilities (Times of India, Jan27 2012). This proves the importance of awareness about the problem for better facilities for such students. In the present situation many schools are not complying to the needs of such children. The number being increasing day by day it is essential for grooming a society that understands Learning Disability in reality.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Definitions of Learning Disability

World Federation of Neurology

"A disorder manifested by difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instructions, adequate intelligence and socio-cultural opportunity. It is dependent upon fundamental cognitive disabilities which are frequently of constitutional origin"

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities

"A heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to Central Nervous System Dysfunction. Even though a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (e.g. sensory impairment, mental retardation, social and emotional disturbance) or environmental influences (e.g. cultural differences, insufficient/inappropriate instruction, psychogenic factors) it is not the direct result of those conditions or influences"

National Institute of Learning Disability

A Learning Disability is an area of weakness or inefficiency in brain function that significantly hinders our ability to learn or to function in life. It is a pattern of neurological dysfunction in the brain that causes a person to have difficulty correctly receiving information coming into the brain(perception), correctly processing that information once it is received (cognition/ thinking) or satisfactorily responding to the information once it has been processed(written and verbal expression, visual-motor coordination, memory etc.)

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

Learning Disabilities are disorders that affect the ability to understand or use spoken or written language, do mathematical calculations, coordinate movements, or direct attention. Although Learning Disabilities occur in very young children, the disabilities are not usually recognized until the child reaches school age.

2.2 Types of Learning Disabilities

Dyslexia- It is the most common type of Learning Disability. Children with Dyslexia have a problem with language.

Dyscalculia- Children with Dyscalculia has a problem with mathematical operations.

Dysgraphia- Characterized by an inability to write properly.

Dyspraxia- problem in motor activities which leads to difficulty in learning.

2.3 Causes of Learning Disability

Learning Disability is caused by variety of reasons, none of which can be clearly outlined. Hereditary causes are an important factor. Other causes are Consumption of Alcohol or drugs by mother during pregnancy may affect the neurological development of the baby. Problems during

birth may also be responsible. Premature birth and nutritional deprivation are said to be other causes.

2.4 Family and Parental Problems

Roper (1999) states parents often think that it is better to struggle with the learning problems privately than to be branded with the stigma of being labeled as "Learning Disabled" as it may pose a great problem to children and adults and such attitude tempts the parents to delay seeking help for their child. Jeremy Turk(1996) stated that having a child with severe Learning Disability produces a number of challenges for the family: medical, Cognitive, Psychodynamic, educational and social. Jacques(2003) suggest the challenges faced in a family in the presence of a child with intellectual disability. They may often complain about the loss of a normal child. Morgan(1988), Kazak & Marvin (1984) says that siblings of a child with disability could feel that they are assigned more responsibility and receive less attention than siblings of normal children and this may lead to sibling rivalry.

2.5 Parental Coping Strategies

Corinne Smith and Lisa Strick (1999) speak of six strategies that parents can adopt for the academic success of their Learning Disabled Child.

- "Recognizing a learning problem that won't be out grown
- Designing an effective educational programme that targets a student's strengths.
- Negotiating effectively for what the child needs at school.
- Avoiding dead end practices that rob students of motivation and self esteem.
- Managing problem behaviors at home.
- Planning ahead for college and career."

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in four centers in Trivandrum ICCONS (Institute for Communicative and Cognitive Neuro Sciences), Vani Hearing Aid Centre, St. Mary's HSS, Pattom, Government Girls HSS, Pattom. The study is descriptive in nature as the researcher tries to describe the challenges faced by parents of children with Learning Disability in various aspects. Simple Random Sampling was used to select the sample and a well structured Questionnaire was administered to get the research findings. The primary source of data collection was the parents of children with Learning Disability in these centers. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS.

4. Analysis and Interpretations

4.1 Socio Economic Background of the families of Children with Learning Disability

63 % of the respondents belonged to Nuclear family and 53 % belonged to middle income group of annual income. It was found that with regard to age of diagnosis of the Learning Disability 96% of the respondents had identified their child's disability before 10 years where 50% of them had identified it in 2-5 years. Many psychologists recommend waiting until children are atleast 6years old before evaluating intelligence for more valid and reliable scores (Ann Logsdon 2010). But in this study 50 % of the parents diagnosed their child's disability before 6 years and it can be interpreted as Kerala society's uniqueness focusing more on child's education.

4.2 Cause of Learning Disability and its awareness among parents.

Majority of the respondents 76.7 % of the respondents were unaware of the cause of their child's Learning Disability. Other reasons stated were X-Ray exposure during pregnancy, bleeding during pregnancy, premature birth, Malnutrition, Mothers alcohol uses and Hereditary causes. The use of drugs and alcohol during pregnancy and complications such as low birth weight, lack of oxygen and premature or prolonged labor can cause brain damage and learning difficulties. Incidents after birth such as head injuries, nutritional deprivation or exposure to toxic substances just after birth can cause or contribute to Learning Disabilities (Brown,2003; Smith 2005). With regard to complication during child birth 43% had some complications while the other 43% did not have any complications at all during child birth. (Smith 2005) says that problems during birth may also be responsible for Learning Disability. In difficult deliveries the child may have to be delivered by forceps. This may damage the brain of the new born leading to learning difficulties. Premature Birth can also be a cause for Learning Disability.

4.3 Psycho socio and economic challenges faced by parents of children with Learning Disability.

Depression was felt by 36.7% of the parents on knowing the fact of their child's disability while 46 % of them accepted the reality which can prove to be good for their children. Jacques (2003) suggest that family reactions to intellectual disability are very variable but tend to follow a similar pattern. It is usual for the family to grieve the loss of the 'normal child' while at the same time having to come to terms with disability, both emotionally and practically. 66% of the parents feel they are somehow responsible for the cause of their child's disability. Barbara Cordoni (1987) states that one of the questions often asked by parents are whether the child has acquired this because of their sins. Is it a punishment for their sins. More than 60 % of the respondents receive support from their spouse to take care of their child, helps in training the child and provides emotional support.

The study shows that 60% of the parents do not hesitate to take their child to social functions and they provide support to their child, but the rest 40% has some difficulties in doing so. The sociological challenges were analyzed by including 10 statements of 3 point scale. The highest score was 22 and minimum score was 9. After categorization it was found that 53% of the respondents has low sociological challenges while for 30%, they faced high sociological challenges with regard to their child's condition. The reasons vary from the child's adjustment and achievements in school, child's interaction with other children in neighbourhood that proves to be a challenge to the parents. The economic challenges were also analyzed by including 10 statements of 3 point scale. The highest score was 24 and minimum score was 9. Only 6.7 % of the respondents experienced high economic challenge owing to their child. 26.7 % felt medium economic challenge. Economic challenges are experienced for the fact that children need special care and training to cater to their brain processing demands. Institutions like ICCONS, Vani Hearing Aid Centre, National Institute of Speech and Hearing provides special training for such children for which they charge an amount for each session. Hence the expense for the session, travel and accommodation can pose to be a challenge to the parents.

4.4 Attitude of the family members towards the Learning Disabled child.

60% of the parents reports of sibling rivalry. Morgan 1988, Kazak & Marvin 1984 says that siblings of a child with disability could feel that they receive less attention and that they have more responsibilities which may result in sibling rivalry. 40% of the respondents feel their child is isolated from others. Parents seem to express concern about the social isolation of their child. (Waggoner and Wilgosh, 1990). Teenagers with Learning Disability have shown to interact less with their peers and to spend more free time alone. (Martin and Carvallo, 2008). 53% of the respondents feel sympathy to the child.

5. Suggestions

The author tries to put forward the following suggestions as part of the study.

- Awareness about Learning Disability should be given at the school level in PTA meetings or special classes can be arranged for teachers and parents so that many students can be identified and the responsible persons can deal with such children in the required manner. Many a times the school does not seem to support such students and consider them to be not normal. Awareness should be created that such children are quite normal or extraordinarily talented; it is only in the processing difference that they appear to be different.
- Better awareness should be created among public about this disability as it is becoming common. The film "Tare Zameen Par" was a good initiative in this regard where stigma towards scholastically backward students was a bit reduced during that period.
- The Integrated Education Department (IED) established in some schools should be extended to all schools and special attention can be given exclusively for children with learning needs.

6. Conclusion

" If I can't learn the way you teach, teach me the way I can learn"- A child with Learning Disability.

The study on the Challenges faced by Parents of Children with Learning Disability is a study which tries to address a serious socio behavioural dimension of dealing with parenting of Learning Disabled child. The challenges faced by parents of children with Learning Disability are very high. There is wide scope for more studies in the area, a policy level intervention for Learning Disabled could lessen the burden for parents.

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