

Perceived parent-child relationship by learning disabled children with medium and high self-esteem

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ARTICLE INFO :

Received : 14.06.2017
Revised : 05.10.2017
Accepted : 20.10.2017

KEY WORDS :

Self-esteem, Learning disabled children, Parent-child relationship

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE :

Sati, Lata and Vig, Deepika (2017). Perceived parent-child relationship by learning disabled children with medium and high self-esteem. *Adv. Res. J. Soc. Sci.*, 8 (2) : 203-210, DOI: 10.15740/HAS/ARJSS/8.2/203-210.

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to explore the parent-child relationship as perceived by learning disabled children. The total sample for the present study was 80 learning disabled children. The sample was selected from remedial centres/schools with remedial services in Ludhiana, Chandigarh and Khanna. Only those children were selected who belonged to intact families and had been formally diagnosed as learning disabled by a certified psychologist or remedial educationist and had been taking remediation for a period of at least 6 months. Coopersmith Inventories (School form) by Coopersmith (1981) was used to assess self-esteem of learning disabled children. Parent-child Relationship Scale by Rao (2001) was used to assess parent-child relationship as perceived by learning disabled children. The data was expressed in frequency and percentage. Arithmetic mean and t-test were computed for comparison between two groups. Results reflected that learning disabled children perceived to have more intimate relationship with their mothers in contrast to fathers.

INTRODUCTION

A well-educated, enlightened, understanding and supportive family is supposed to be pivotal for the prosperous and successful long lasting rehabilitation for children with learning disabilities (Burnett *et al.*, 1999). The positive relationship between parents and children is significantly related to self-esteem and academic achievement of the child. Encouraging and favorable environment is necessary for the children with learning disability to shape their self-esteem besides this, parents and teachers of such children are the greatest assets (Singer, 2005). Warmth, including nurturance, support, availability and affection is associated with positive

outcome in children's development such as higher self-esteem (Rohner, 1990) and better psychological adjustment (Khaleque *et al.*, 2007). The self-concept of children develops positively, when parents are positively involved in the life of their children (Elbaum and Vaughn, 2001). Positive parent-child relationships are very significant for learning disabled children (Dyson, 2003). Parents need to provide healthy atmosphere at home. Parents should spend some quality time with the child (Lal, 2013). Intellectuals agree to the point that parents' psychological resources as well as their developmental histories somehow influence the quality of childrearing and parenting and ultimately child development (Arteche and Murray, 2011). A study conducted on sibling

relationships and parent stress in families of children with and without learning disabilities draws the conclusion that parental stress and siblings indifferent behaviour often presents the learning disabled child with behaviour problems such as lack of compliance, troubled impulse control, disruptive and immature social interactions and high sensitivity towards criticism (Lardieri *et al.*, 2000). The parents need to play different roles. They need to play role of the problem solver, psychiatrist, advisor, organizer, disciplinarian, companion and many more additive roles. Those need to work in such a manner they don't cross the fine line of being 'doing for', 'overprotecting', or 'overstructuring' (thereby fostering a sense of learned helplessness) and 'overchallenging' or pushing an individual forward unrealistically (Spekman *et al.*, 1993). The study conducted by Wood *et al.* (2003) on parenting and childhood anxiety revealed that parents of learning disabled children felt that they had an immense responsibility to ensure that children perform better at school. This makes their behaviour look intrusive and controlling. Control is associated with autocratic parenting style where parents make decision for the child, show over protectiveness and even instruct them that how they should think and feel. Child behaviour, activities and routines are excessively regulated by parents. Children may become more anxious because they feel that their life is run by their parents and they have no control/say over events in their lives. Parents who do not listen, accept or validate their children's accounts of their emotional reactions contribute to poor emotional development (Muris *et al.*, 2004). In another study by Aggarwal and Mishra (2005) it was reported that self-confidence of the children is affected by various dimensions of parenting like symbolic reward, object reward, love, demand, rejection, protection, symbolic punishment and object punishment significantly. Feelings of security and emotional support are inculcated if there is love, protection and moderate degree of demands while on the other hand rejection, punishment (symbolic as well as object) produced anxiety, pressure, fear of failure, feeling of indifference and hesitation in expression of feelings among children. Further, Tiwari and Naithani (2011) concluded in their study that love and use of symbolic reward are important dimensions in parent child relationship which make children high achievers whereas over protectiveness and demanding attitude has negative influence on the

scholastic achievement of children.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Sample Selection :

The sample of 80 elementary school going learning disabled children were selected from remedial centres or schools with remedial services for learning disabled children situated in Ludhiana, Chandigarh and Khanna. Only those children were selected who belonged to intact families and had been formally diagnosed as learning disabled by a certified psychologist or remedial educationist and had been taking remediation for a period of at least 6 months.

Tools :

– Self-esteem Inventories (school form) by Coopersmith (1981) was used to assess self-esteem of the children. Inventory had 58 items. The four subscales of the school form were scored separately related to self attitude in 4 areas namely general self, social self-peers, home-parents and school-academic. The subjects were asked to answer the items by marking any one of the two response options *viz.*, 'Like Me' or 'Unlike Me'.

– Parent- Child Relationship Scale by Rao (2001) was used to elicit information about parent-child relationship as perceived by the learning disabled children. The scale comprised of 100 items belonging to ten dimensions of parenting namely protecting, symbolic punishment, object punishment, rejecting, demanding, indifferent, symbolic reward, object reward, loving and neglecting. Each respondent scored the tool for both father and mother separately. Items for both the parents were common except for three items which were different, in the father and mother forms due to the nature of variation in paternal and maternal relationship with children. Respondents were asked to rate statements as per their perception of their relationship with either father or mother on a five point scale ranging from 'Always' to 'Very Rarely'. The scale was scored separately for each of the parent. Thus, every respondent obtained ten scores for 'father form' and ten for 'mother form' on the ten dimensions of the scale. Each sub-scale yielded a score found by summing the scores of the rating on each item of the sub-scale. All the dimensions were categorized for the range of scores as given below:

Sr. No.	Scores	Category
1.	10-23	Low
2.	24-37	Medium
3.	38-50	High

Statistical analysis of data :

The data was expressed in frequency and percentage. Arithmetic mean and t-test was used to compare the two groups.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

Self-esteem of learning disabled children :

Overall percentage distribution of children with learning disability across various levels of self-esteem is depicted in Table 1. It was found that majority (67.50%) of the children had medium level of self esteem followed by high self-esteem (32.50). None of the respondents was found to have low self-esteem.

Perceived parent-child relationship by learning disabled children :

Overall percentage distribution of parents of

children with learning disability across various dimensions of parent- child relationship as perceived by children is presented in Table 2. The children perceived their mothers to be highly protecting and loving in contrast to fathers. Maximum percentage of children perceived their fathers to be average loving and protecting. No father and mother were reported with low level of protectiveness. However, 5 per cent of the children perceived low level of love from their fathers. It may be because of gender difference in expression of emotions. Women are very expressive in contrast to men (Gray, 2003).

Mothers were found to be giving more symbolic reward in comparison to fathers’ on the other hand maximum percentage of fathers were perceived to give low or average level of reward in contrast to mothers. Any achievement of child was happily welcomed by mother with instant praise and positive gestures. Besides this mothers were always engaged with their child whether it is to do homework, or to instruct or to make any decision for the child. Hence, the child’s achievement gave them the sense of their own achievement. Gray (2003) has also reported that usually fathers lack expression and are generally less involved with child. In case of object reward no significant difference was found between mothers and fathers.

Table 1 : Overall percentage distribution of children with learning disability across various levels of self-esteem (n=80)

Levels of self-esteem	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Low	-	-
Medium	54	67.50
High	26	32.50

Table 2 : Overall percentage distribution of parents of children with learning disability across various dimensions of parent- child relationship (n=160)

Dimensions of parent-child relationship	Levels of parent –Child relationship					
	Low		Average		High	
	Father f (%)	Mother f (%)	Father f (%)	Mother f (%)	Father f (%)	Mother f (%)
Protecting	-	-	54 (67.50)	22 (27.50)	26 (32.50)	58 (72.50)
Symbolic punishment	15 (18.75)	7 (8.75)	60 (75.00)	52 (65.00)	5 (6.25)	21 (26.25)
Rejecting	40 (50.00)	34 (42.50)	40 (50.00)	44 (55.00)	-	2 (2.50)
Object punishment	17 (21.25)	8 (10.00)	58 (72.50)	59 (73.75)	5 (6.25)	13 (16.25)
Demanding	10 (12.50)	2 (2.50)	55 (68.75)	34 (42.50)	15 (18.75)	44 (55.00)
Indifferent	20 (25.00)	19 (23.75)	60 (75.00)	59 (73.75)	-	2 (2.50)
Symbolic reward	10 (12.50)	-	57 (71.25)	30 (37.50)	13 (16.25)	50 (62.50)
Loving	4(5.00)	-	66 (82.50)	35 (43.75)	10 (12.50)	45 (56.25)
Object reward	8 (10.00)	9 (11.25)	69 (86.25)	65 (81.25)	3 (3.75)	6 (7.50)
Neglecting	31 (38.75)	26 (32.50)	48 (60.00)	53 (66.25)	1 (1.25)	1 (1.25)

Besides love and protectiveness, more number of mothers in contrast to fathers, were perceived to give more symbolic punishment and object punishment as well. The reason for this could be that mothers spend more time with their children, hence, were more involved in disciplining the child. Thus, the mothers could have been giving more objective and symbolic punishment. Mothers generally give their best for the achievement of children. They had given up their career and social life just to make their child adapt to this highly competitive world (Heiman, 2002).

The table further depicts that mothers were perceived to be more demanding as compared to fathers. It may be because mothers were the ones who were instructing the children time to time and were making decisions for them, therefore, they might be perceived as more demanding in comparison to fathers. Therefore, data reflects that children had more intact and intimate relationship with mothers as compared to fathers.

Comparison of mean scores of parents of children with learning disability across various dimensions of parent-child relationship is depicted in Table 3. After comparing the mean scores it was found that learning disabled children perceived their mothers to be more protecting and loving as compared to their fathers. The difference in mean scores was found to be statistically highly significant ($t=6.64, 7.92; p<0.01$).

Further, probing into the dimension related to punishment the overall picture depicts that mothers were more involved in giving punishments as compared to fathers. Highly significant difference was found in the mean scores of fathers and mothers, Mothers being more physically and symbolically punishing.

Data further reveals that besides punishment mothers were found to be good at giving symbolic reward also. The mean score of mothers ($SR=38.61\pm5.05$) was found to be higher in comparison to fathers ($SR=31.35\pm5.72$). Statistically, the difference in mean scores of fathers and mothers with regard to symbolic reward was found to be significant ($t=8.50, p<0.01$). Statistically, no significant difference was found among parents with regard to others dimensions of parent-child relationship.

Comparison of father-child relationship as perceived by learning disabled children with medium and high self-esteem is presented in Table 4. More than half of the children with medium self-esteem (66.66%) and high self-esteem (84.61%) perceived that they receive average level of object punishment from their fathers. The mean score of children with high self-esteem (29.50 ± 5.35) was found to be slightly high in comparison to children with medium self-esteem (27.89 ± 7.49). Nevertheless, this difference was found to be statistically non-significant.

Maximum (92.30%) children with high self-esteem perceived that their fathers showed average level of indifferent behaviour in contrast to children with medium self-esteem (66.66%) which shows that children perceived that their fathers expressed unconcerned apathetic, passive behaviour and functioning without either importance or interest in them. The difference was found to be significant ($t=2.49, p<0.05$). A small percentage (7.69%) of children with high self-esteem perceived that their fathers were less indifferent towards them while 33.33 per cent of children with medium self-esteem perceived their fathers to be less indifferent

Dimensions	Parent –child relationship (n=160)		t-value
	Father (Mean±SD)	Mother (Mean±SD)	
Protecting	35.20±4.81	40.46±5.19	6.64***
Symbolic punishment	28.51±5.59	32.78±5.91	4.69***
Rejecting	23.21±6.08	24.08±6.03	0.91 ^{NS}
Object punishment	28.41±6.88	31.83±6.23	3.29***
Demanding	32.40±6.75	36.81±4.67	4.80***
Indifferent	26.58±4.52	27.06±5.50	0.59 ^{NS}
Symbolic reward	31.35±5.72	38.61±5.05	8.50***
Loving	32.28±5.06	38.65±5.09	7.92***
Object reward	29.06±4.74	30.25±5.10	1.50 ^{NS}
Neglecting	25.46±4.94	25.76±5.44	0.36 ^{NS}

*** indicates significance of value at $P < 0.01$,

NS=Non-significant

towards them. The difference was found to be statistically significant ($t=2.48, p<0.05$). The mean score of children with high self-esteem (27.81 ± 4.11) differ significantly from mean score of children with medium self-esteem (26.00 ± 4.62). This signifies that children with high self-esteem perceived that their fathers had more indifferent

Table 4 : Comparison of father-child relationship as perceived by learning disabled children with medium and high self-esteem (n=80)

Dimensions of parent- child relationship	Levels of parent-child relationship	Levels of self-esteem		t-value
		Medium (n ₁ =54) f (%)	High (n ₂ =26) f (%)	
Protecting	Low	-	-	1.00 ^{NS}
	Average	36 (66.66)	18 (69.23)	
	High	18 (33.33)	8 (30.76)	
	Overall Mean±SD	35.57±4.91	34.42±4.58	
Symbolic punishment	Low	10 (18.51)	5 (19.23)	0.79 ^{NS}
	Average	41 (75.92)	19 (73.07)	
	High	3 (5.55)	2 (7.69)	
	Overall Mean±SD	28.17±5.48	29.23±5.86	
Rejecting	Low	30 (55.55)	10 (38.46)	1.27 ^{NS}
	Average	24 (44.44)	16 (61.53)	
	High	-	-	
	Overall Mean±SD	22.61±6.22	24.46±5.70	
Object punishment	Low	13 (24.07)	4 (15.38)	0.98 ^{NS}
	Average	36 (66.66)	22 (84.61)	
	High	5(9.25)	-	
	Overall Mean±SD	27.89±7.49	29.50±5.35	
Demanding	Low	7 (12.96)	3 (11.53)	0.23 ^{NS}
	Average	37 (68.51)	18(69.23)	
	High	10 (18.51)	5 (19.23)	
	Overall Mean±SD	32.28±7.01	32.65±6.31	
Indifferent	Low	18 (33.33)	2 (7.69)	1.69*
	Average	36 (66.66)	24 (92.30)	
	High	-	-	
	Overall Mean±SD	26.00±4.62	27.81±4.11	
Symbolic reward	Low	9 (16.66)	1 (3.84)	1.37 ^{NS}
	Average	38 (70.37)	19 (73.07)	
	High	7 (12.96)	6 (23.07)	
	Overall Mean±SD	30.74±5.59	32.62±5.90	
Loving	Low	3 (5.55)	1 (3.84)	0.96 ^{NS}
	Average	41 (75.92)	25 (96.15)	
	High	10 (18.51)	-	
	Overall Mean±SD	32.67±5.53	31.50±3.89	
Object reward	Low	7 (12.96)	1 (3.84)	0.03 ^{NS}
	Average	44 (81.48)	25 (96.15)	
	High	3 (5.55)	-	
	Overall Mean±SD	29.07±5.04	29.04±4.14	
Neglecting	Low	20 (37.03)	11 (42.30)	0.77 ^{NS}
	Average	34 (62.96)	14 (53.84)	
	High	-	1 (3.84)	
	Overall Mean±SD	25.76±4.67	24.85±5.51	

* indicates significance of value at P < 0.10, NS=Non-significant

behaviour towards them in contrast to children with medium self-esteem. The difference was found to be statistically significant ($t=2.48, p<0.05$).

Children with medium self-esteem (18.51%) perceived their fathers to be highly loving in contrast to children with high self-esteem. Majority of fathers

Table 5 : Comparison of mother-child relationship as perceived by learning disabled children with medium and high self-esteem (n=80)				
Dimensions of parent-child relationship	Levels of parent-child relationship	Levels of self-esteem		t-value
		Medium (n ₁ =54) f (%)	High (n ₂ =26) f (%)	
Protecting	Low	-	-	0.76 ^{NS}
	Average	15 (27.77)	7 (26.92)	
	High	39 (72.22)	19 (73.07)	
	Overall Mean±SD	40.59±4.99	40.19±5.69	
Symbolic Punishment	Low	7 (12.96)	-	0.30 ^{NS}
	Average	32 (59.25)	20 (76.92)	
	High	15 (27.77)	6 (23.07)	
	Overall Mean±SD	32.93±6.30	32.50±5.12	
Rejecting	Low	24 (44.44)	10 (38.46)	0.46 ^{NS}
	Average	28 (51.85)	16 (61.53)	
	High	2 (3.70)	-	
	Overall Mean±SD	23.87±6.47	24.54±5.09	
Object Punishment	Low	7 (12.96)	1 (3.84)	2.16**
	Average	41 (75.92)	18 (69.23)	
	High	6 (11.11)	7 (26.92)	
	Overall Mean±SD	30.81±6.55	33.96±4.96	
Demanding	Low	2 (3.70)	-	1.70*
	Average	26 (48.14)	8 (30.76)	
	High	26 (48.14)	18 (69.23)	
	Overall Mean±SD	36.20±4.98	38.08±3.70	
Indifferent	Low	13 (24.07)	6 (23.07)	0.78 ^{NS}
	Average	39 (72.22)	20 (76.92)	
	High	2 (3.70)	-	
	Overall Mean±SD	26.72±5.46	27.77±5.81	
Symbolic reward	Low	-	-	1.42 ^{NS}
	Average	22 (40.74)	8 (30.76)	
	High	32 (59.25)	18 (69.23)	
	Overall Mean±SD	38.06±4.91	39.77±5.24	
Loving	Low	-	-	1.99**
	Average	28 (51.85)	7 (26.92)	
	High	26 (48.14)	19 (73.07)	
	Overall Mean±SD	37.89±4.87	40.23±5.27	
Object reward	Low	7 (12.96)	2 (7.69)	1.98**
	Average	45 (83.33)	20 (76.92)	
	High	2 (3.70)	4 (15.38)	
	Overall Mean±SD	29.52±4.92	31.77±5.21	
Neglecting	Low	17 (31.48)	9 (34.61)	0.97 ^{NS}
	Average	36 (66.66)	17 (65.38)	
	High	1 (1.85)	-	
	Overall Mean±SD	25.35±5.60	26.62±5.10	

* and ** indicate significance of values at $P < 0.10$ and < 0.05 , respectively NS=Non-significant

(96.15%) were perceived as average loving by children who had high self-esteem, while, on the other hand 75.92 per cent of the children with medium self-esteem perceived their fathers as average loving. Slight difference was found in mean scores of children with high (31.50 ± 3.89) and medium self-esteem (32.67 ± 5.53). Although, no significant difference was found between two levels of self-esteem.

Majority (96.15%) of the children with high self-esteem perceived that they received average level of object reward from their fathers in contrast to children with medium self-esteem (81.48%). The mean score of medium self-esteem children (29.07 ± 5.04) was found to be slightly higher than that of high self-esteem children (29.04 ± 4.14) reflecting that children with medium self-esteem received more object reward in comparison to children with high self-esteem. Statistically, no significant difference was found between children with high and medium self-esteem.

In other dimensions, there was no significant difference found in fathers' behaviour as perceived by children with medium and high self-esteem.

Comparison of mother-child relationship as perceived by learning disabled children with medium and high self-esteem is depicted in Table 5. It was found that 12.96 per cent of the children with medium self-esteem perceived that they received low symbolic punishment but no children with high self-esteem perceived that they received low level of symbolic punishment. The mean score of children with medium self-esteem (32.93 ± 6.30) was found to be slightly higher in contrast to children with high self-esteem (32.50 ± 5.12). Statistically, no difference was found between children with high and medium self-esteem with regard to symbolic punishment.

Children with high self-esteem (26.92%) perceived that they received high object punishment from mothers in contrast to children with medium self-esteem (11.11%). The mean score of children with high self-esteem (33.96 ± 4.96) was found to be slightly high in comparison to children with medium self-esteem (30.81 ± 6.55). The difference was found to be statistically significant ($t=2.16$, $p<0.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that children with high self-esteem received more object punishment from their mothers with regard to children with medium self-esteem.

69.23 per cent of the learning disabled children with high self-esteem perceived their mothers to be highly

demanding in contrast to children with medium self-esteem (48.14%). The mean score of children with higher self-esteem (38.08 ± 3.70) differed from mean score of children with medium self-esteem (36.20 ± 4.98). The results were found to be statistically significant ($t=1.70$, $p<0.10$) which highlights that children with high self-esteem had more demanding mothers in comparison to children with medium self-esteem.

73.07 per cent of the children with high self-esteem perceived their mothers to be highly loving in contrast to children with medium self-esteem (48.14%). Majority of mothers (51.85%) were perceived as average loving by children with medium self-esteem, while, on the other hand 26.92 per cent of the mothers were perceived as average loving. Slight difference was found in mean scores of children with high (40.23 ± 5.27) and medium self-esteem (37.89 ± 4.87). Statistically, significant difference was found between children with medium and high self-esteem ($t=1.99$, $p<0.05$). It is clear from the data that children with high self-esteem perceived their mothers to be highly loving in comparison to children with medium self-esteem.

15.38 per cent of the children with high self-esteem perceived that they received high level of object reward from their mothers on the other hand 3.70 per cent of the children with medium self-esteem perceived that they received high level of object reward. The mean score of children with high self-esteem (31.77 ± 5.21) was found to be slightly higher than that of medium self-esteem children (29.52 ± 4.92) reflecting that children with high self-esteem received more object reward in comparison to children with high self-esteem from their mothers. Moreover, the difference was found to be statistically significant ($t=1.98$, $p<0.05$) (Table 5).

Statistically, no significant difference was found in two levels of self-esteem with regard to other dimensions of mother-child relationship.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded children had more intimate relationship with mothers in comparison to fathers. Too much of love and object reward from fathers was found to be the reasons for lowering self-esteem of the child. It may be because more love and reward constantly remind the child of his/her disability. On the other hand object punishment and indifferent behaviour by fathers enhanced the self-esteem of children. It may be because

children felt that their fathers treat them equal without any discrimination on the basis of their disability. As Wren (2006) also reported that discrimination lowers the self-esteem of the learning disabled children. In case of mothers, high loving and demanding nature in addition to object reward enhanced the self-esteem of the children with learning disability. Moreover, it was observed that object punishment also somehow helped in building self-esteem of children while in contrast symbolic punishment degraded the self-esteem. It may be because symbolic punishment has more devastating effect on the psychological well-being of the child as it is for longer period of time in comparison to object punishment.

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