Learning disabilities (LD) is a term used to describe a neurological handicap that interferes with a person ability to perceive, process, store and retrieve information. LD creates a gap between a persons’ ability and performance and it is often characterized by low academic achievement. A child with a learning disability who is in an educational jeopardy is at an extreme disadvantage in a culture that places a high value on achievement and rewards those who are successful. When a child experiences constant lack of success despite best efforts it may weaken a child's feeling of self worth and reduces further motivation which may give rise to various psychosocial and behavioral problems in children.

However, the damaging effects of having a learning disability are not just limited to the child but they also have a profound effect on psychological, emotional and financial resources of the parents and family as a whole. The mothers of children with learning disability are especially more affected as they deal with every day consequences of the child’s disability.

A majority of research work done in the field of learning disabilities has emphasized on the areas of definition, diagnosis and treatment. However little attention has been devoted to understanding the effects of learning disabilities on the personality structure (Lufi et al., 2004). The federal definition of learning disability also focuses on its medical and cognitive aspects but studies have shown that cognitive variable alone are not enough to predict learning disabilities. It is noted that along with low scores on achievement and intellectual measures, students with learning disability also had high scores on psychopathology indices (Lufi et al., 2004). And sometimes these psychopathology and emotional variables were more significant predictors of learning disabilities than various cognitive and meta cognitive measures (Sideridis et al., 2006). Literature also suggests that there is a need to enrich our understanding of the attributes and core characteristics of students with learning disability by the use of more classification and identification studies (Greenway and Milne 1999).

It is clear that although the presence of learning disabilities is associated with psycho-social and behavioral difficulties in children, however, all children who have learning disabilities do not exhibit the same magnitude of the problem in terms of
anxiety, self esteem, interpersonal relationships and other range of behavior problems. There are other factors which are better able to explain the variation in the child’s outcome. These can be the family environment, parental stress and parental personal resources that help one learning disabled child adjust or cope better with his disability than the others.

Therefore, the rationale of the current research is based on the fact that academic underachievement alone is not enough to describe a learning disabled child. In order to understand the true essence of a learning disabled child, it is important to identify psychosocial, behavioral and familial variables that help describe such children. Hence the present research aims at studying the psychosocial, behavioural and familial profile of the LD children. It also attempts to study the behaviour problems exhibited be learning disabled children in relation to the maternal stress, coping strategies used and the family environment. The present research addresses a gap in the previous researches by investigating the collective role of the psycho-social correlates of the learning disabled children and that of his mother and family. Though the last two decades have seen a rise in research work done on learning disabilities, there have been inconsistencies reported and hardly any attempt has been made to study the psychosocial and behavioural correlates of learning disabled children in relation to their maternal stress, coping strategies and family environment as a whole. This study also attempts to contribute to the existing literature by describing the psychosocial characteristics of learning disabled children and their family in order to add to the classification studies. Therefore the present research was conceived to study the familial and psychosocial correlates of learning disabilities in children.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. To study the self concept in children with learning disabilities and typically developing children.

2. To study anxiety in children with learning disabilities and typically developing children.

3. To study loneliness in children with learning disabilities and typically developing children.
4. To study stress in mothers of children with learning disabilities and typically developing children.

5. To study the coping strategies used by mothers of children with learning disabilities and typically developing children.

6. To study the family environment of children with learning disabilities and typically developing children.

7. To study the stress in mothers of learning disabled children with behaviour problems and mothers of learning disabled children without behaviour problems.

8. To study the coping strategies used by mothers of learning disabled children with behaviour problems and mothers of learning disabled children without behaviour problems.

9. To study the family environment of mothers of learning disabled children with behaviour problems and mothers of learning disabled children without behaviour problems.

**HYPOTHESES**

On the basis of theoretical considerations and research studies reviewed, following hypotheses were framed:

**Hypothesis 1:** Children with learning disabilities will have lower self concept than typically developing children.

**Hypothesis 2:** Children with learning disabilities will have higher anxiety than typically developing children.

**Hypothesis 3:** Children with learning disabilities will have higher loneliness than typically developing children.

**Hypothesis 4:** Mothers of children with learning disabilities will report more behaviour problems in their children than mothers of typically developing children.

**Hypothesis 5:** Mothers of children with learning disabilities will have higher stress than mothers of typically developing children.
Hypothesis 6: Mothers of children with learning disabilities will have high conflict and less cohesion in their families than mothers of typically developing children.

Hypothesis 7: Mothers of children with learning disabilities will use more emotion focused coping as compared to mothers of typically developing children.

Hypothesis 8: Mothers of children with learning disabilities and behaviour problems will have more stress than mothers of children with learning disabilities without behaviour problems.

Hypothesis 9: Mothers of children with learning disabilities and behaviour problems will have higher conflict and less cohesion in their families than mothers of children with learning disabilities without behaviour problems.

Hypothesis 10: Mothers of children with learning disabilities and behaviour problems will use more emotion focused coping than mothers of children with learning disabilities without behaviour problems.

SAMPLE

In the present study the sample consisted of participants drawn from various schools from the city of Chandigarh (U.T). The total sample consisted of 200 children and 200 mothers (100 students with learning disability (LD) and their mothers and 100 students with a non learning disability (NLD) and their mothers). The LD and NLD students were all in the age ranging from 6-10 years (M for LD =8.27 years and M for NLD was 8.42 years). The school authorities were asked to refer children who were known to have a learning disability and were attending resource rooms. The subjects that were chosen for the study had received a previous diagnosis of LD from reputed clinics. NIMHANS index for specific learning disabilities (SLD) battery and tests of Intelligence (Malin’s Scale for Indian Children and Standard Progressive Matrices) were used to obtain a diagnosis of Learning disabilities along with other necessary procedures. To draw comparisons among children with learning disabilities and typically developing children on selected familial variables, mothers’ of LD subjects were also studied along with their NLD counterparts. Efforts were made to maintain homogeneity on the variables of education, socio-economic status and age. Table 3.1
shows the frequency distribution of age of the subjects in both the groups. The sampling technique was purposive. The study used a non probability sample i.e. a combination of random and convenience sample. For the selection of the sample the following aspects were taken into consideration.

**Inclusion Criteria:**

1. Parents’ informed consent was achieved for administrating the tests and children of those parents who agreed to participate in the study were chosen.

2. Only those children who had a diagnosis of learning disabilities from a reputed clinic were included in the study.

3. Care was taken that all the children included in the present study had normal vision, normal auditory ability.

4. To study familial variables the families were approached. The fathers’ showed little inclination towards the daily activities and stated work pressure as a reason mothers’ were however more involved in the upbringing and day to day activities of the child. Hence the maternal responses were incorporated in the study.

**Exclusion Criteria:**

1. Care was taken to not include children who were slow learners, autistic or who had other neurological deficits.

2. Children of the help staff who are able to attend school as part of the philanthropy effort by the school were also excluded to maintain socio economic homogeneity.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL MEASURES**

Followings tests were used in the present study to collect the required information from the subjects:


2. Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (Asher et al., 1984).
3. Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders (SCARED) (Birmaher et al., 1997).
4. Conner’s Parent Rating Scale Revised (s) (Conner’s et al., 1998).
7. Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1986).

To measure the psychosocial profile of the subjects’ scores were obtained on the Self Concept Scale; Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale and Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders. These measures were administered on the learning disabled children and the control group (NLD). Whereas, to obtain the behavioural and familial profile Conner’s Parent Rating Scale Revised (s), Parenting Stress Index. Ways of Coping and Family Environment Scale were administered to the mothers’ of LD children and their NLD counterparts.

ANALYSIS

The data was subjected to the following analysis:

1. Frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of all the variables included in the study.
2. To find out the percentage of behaviour problems in the learning disabled and non learning disabled group, percentage analysis were carried out.
3. For the demographic details, the percentage analysis was done to find out the percentage of learning disabled and non learning disabled on the variables included in demographic details.
4. Discriminant analysis I was applied to identify the psychosocial, behavioural and familial profile for the group of children with learning disabilities and their mothers and typically developing children and their mothers.
5. Discriminant analysis II was applied to identify the variables which are important predictors of behaviour problems in the group of children with learning disabilities and their mothers, included in the study.
6. t-tests were applied to study the difference in the domain of anxiety, loneliness, self concept, behaviour problems, maternal stress, maternal coping and family environment variables for the group of children with learning disabilities and the control group.

FINDINGS

In order to achieve the objectives of the present study, the main analysis carried out on the collected data were percentage analysis, discriminant analysis and t-tests. The discriminant analysis 1 was applied on the group of learning disabled children and their mothers and non learning disabled children and their mothers included in the study. The analysis was done with the dual purpose of examining the discriminant coefficients of all the variables under the study so as to identify the groups that are best described by these variables and also to see the accuracy of classifying the subjects into two groups on the basis of the obtained results. Keeping in view the objectives, discriminant analysis 2 was applied on the group of children with learning disabilities and behaviour problems and learning disabled children without behaviour problems to identify the variables which are important predictors of behavioral problems in learning disabled children. Finally, t-tests were applied to compare the groups of children with learning disabilities and typically developing children on the measures of anxiety, loneliness, self concept, behavior problems, maternal stress, coping strategies used by the mothers and the mothers’ perception of their family environment.

1. The results show that out of the group of children with learning disabilities 51% have language deficits, 22% have visual perceptual deficits and 27% have both language and visual perceptual deficits. Further it was seen that 41% of learning disabled children have behavior problems whereas only 13% of the control group (NLD) have behavior problems.

2. The discriminant analysis I was applied on the learning disabled children and non learning disabled children included in the study. The results reveal that the loneliness and social dissatisfaction, panic anxiety, generalized anxiety disorders, separation anxiety, social anxiety and significant school avoidance are important in describing the group of children with learning disabilities. Further
parental distress, parent child difficult interaction and difficult child as measured by the psychological stress index show higher discriminant coefficient for the group of learning disabled children. The mothers’ report of oppositional, cognitive, hyperactivity and ADHD behaviours as measured by the Conner’s parent rating scale were also important variables in describing the group of children with learning disabilities. Additionally it was seen from the results that the mothers’ perception of conflict in the family environment has also shown higher discriminant coefficients for the learning disabled group. Further, the use of self controlling, escape avoidance, seeking social support, and distancing as the coping strategies used by the mothers have been descriptive of the learning disabled group. Further the results show that cohesion and expressiveness in the family environment as perceived by the mothers has shown higher discriminant coefficients for the NLD group. Also the use of planful problem solving, Accepting Responsibility, confrontive coping and positive reappraisal as coping strategies used by the mothers have shown higher discriminant coefficient on the group of NLD children. Also the self concept has been descriptive of the NLD group in the study.

3. Keeping in view the objectives discriminant analysis II was also done to identify the variables which are important predictors of behavioral problems is children. The results revealed that parental stress indices (parental distress, parent child difficult interaction) were important predictors of behavior problems in children with learning disabilities. Mothers’ perception of conflict in the family environment and the use of distancing, self controlling, escape avoidance as coping strategies by the mothers were also strong predictors of behavior problems for the group of learning disabled children included in the study. However, the use of seeking social support, planful problem solving, positive reappraisal and confrontive coping as coping strategies by the mothers and the mothers’ perception of cohesion and expression in the family environment show higher discriminant coefficients in the group of learning disabled children without behavior problems, suggesting the predictability of these variables for this group.
4. The t-ratios were derived from the means and standard deviations of different scores on the indices of anxiety, loneliness and social dissatisfaction, self concept, behaviour problems, maternal stress, coping strategies used by the mother and the mothers’ perception of the family environment. The results revealed that the group of learning disabled children showed significantly higher levels of anxiety than the control group. The children with learning disabilities reported more anxiety on all the indices of the anxiety questionnaire i.e. generalized anxiety, panic anxiety, social anxiety, separation anxiety and significant school avoidance. Learning disabled children also reported higher loneliness and social dissatisfaction and a lower self concept as compared to the control group of typically developing children. With regard to behavior problems the t-ratios revealed that mothers of children with learning disabilities reported more behavior problems in their child as compared to mothers of typically developing children. Further, the t-ratios show that mothers of learning disabled children perceived more stress and conflict in the family environment whereas mothers of typically developing children reported lower levels of stress and higher levels of cohesion and expression in the family environment. The results of the t-ratios further reveal that the mothers of learning disabled children without behaviour problems made use of confrontive coping and seeking social support as a coping strategy significant more than the mothers of learning disabled children with behaviour problem.

The results described above give us significant interpretations. They imply that panic anxiety, generalized anxiety, separation anxiety, social anxiety and significant school avoidance and loneliness and social dissatisfaction are descriptive of the learning disabled group. In case of learning disabled children their predisposition to academic under achievements, fear of negative evaluation, lack of social skills acquisition, their inability to follow instructions, etc may be a cause of anxiety and social exclusion. This even keeps them from participating in class activities from the embarrassment of being laughed at if they produce a wrong answer or inappropriate social behaviour. As shown in our results they may exhibit social anxiety or school avoidance from the fear of being
perceived unlikable, stupid or being constantly ridiculed. Agarwal (2014) stressed upon the need to develop social skills in children with learning disabilities.

Further, it can be seen from the results that psychological stress indices of parental distress, parent-child difficult interaction and difficult child are important variables in describing the familial profile of a learning disabled child. It has been noted that challenges and difficulties that accompany, parenting responsibilities of having a child with learning disabilities like aiding them with homework, being called to the school more often because of the child’s behaviour and academic problems, having to repeat instructions, etc adds to a parent’s stress. Another important cause of stress in parents of learning disabled children could be worrying about their child’s future. Such challenges can also create barriers in the parent-child interaction and subsequently affect their relationship (Amerongers and Mishna, 2004). This may in turn increase the psychological and behavioural comorbidities that accompany learning disabilities.

Ayoub, Vallonton and Mastergeorge (2011) report that parenting stress may be more directly linked to child’s development and behaviour.

The perusal of the results further reveals that the conflict in the family environment is another important indicator for describing the group of learning disabled children. Literature that supports a link between conflict in the family environment states that a child with disability due to the characteristics specific to having a learning disability may cause disrupted parent child bonding and subsequent problems within the family (Vacca, 2008). Therefore conflict amongst family members is likely to be present in the family of a child with learning disabilities.

The perusal of the results further indicated that maternal perception of behavioural problems, oppositional, cognitive, hyperactivity and ADHD have shown to be important descriptors of the learning disabled group. Behavioral disturbances in the children with learning disabilities could be the consequence of the various psychological and social issues faced by such children. Further, empirical evidence also points at learning disabled children who experience loneliness typically would use less adaptive strategies like asking adults and peers for help or showing their frustrations through oppositional, aggressive or disruptive behaviours. (Margalit and Al-Yagon,
Weiner (2004) also in his study stated that children with learning disabilities show social skill deficits which leads to problems in social relationships which foster internalizing and externalizing behaviours problems in such children.

The results also reveal that use of self controlling, escape avoidance and distancing as coping strategies used by the mothers have shown to be descriptive of the learning disabled group. Coping refers to both cognitive and behavioural efforts made to manage the demands that tax an individual’s resources (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004). The use of avoidant coping (i.e. efforts to deny or minimize the problem) shown in our results may be due to the feeling of denial, shock and the societal pressures in acknowledging the learning disability in their children. In accordance with our results Durban et al. (2012) had also reported that parents of children with learning disabilities were not open to joining groups that were activity engaged in the campaign for helping such children. Thus this attitude is reflective of the fact that due to certain societal values and pressures parents are embarrassed to speak openly of their child’s disability.

Further the results of the present study determined that mothers of children with learning disabilities perceived more behavior problems in their children as compared to their NLD counterparts. In the interest of academic inquiry Discriminate Analysis was also used on the collected data to identify variables that could be contributors of behaviour problems in learning disabled children. The results revealed that parental stress and its indices of parental distress and parent child difficult interaction are important predictors of behaviour problems in learning disabled children. Conflict in the family environment and the use of avoidance coping strategies like distancing, self controlling, escape avoidance and accepting responsibility by the mothers also were strong predictors of behavioral problems in learning disabled children.

Therefore it implies that children with learning disabilities whose parents experience great stress, have a conflicted family environment or use avoidance coping strategies are more likely to develop behavioral problems compared to learning disabled children whose parents experience cohesion and expression in their family environment and use active coping strategies like seeking social support, planful problem solving, positive reappraisal and confrontive coping. Therefore, one can conclude that if the
added stress and increased demands resulting from the learning disabled child’s support needs are not managed they may lead to behavioral manifestations in such children.

The perusal of the results also shows that children with learning disabilities experience a greater sense of anxiety and loneliness and social dissatisfaction as compared to typically developing children. The children with learning disabilities also reported a lower sense of self-concept as compared to non learning disabled children. Lenka & Kant (2012) reported that LD children do not have the sensitivity that helps them to adjust, lack of social skill acquisition and repeated school failure may lead to psychosocial deregulations in such children.

Moreover the results also showed that the mothers of learning disabled children reported more stress as compared to mothers of typically developing children. They perceived more conflict in the family environment and used seeking social support as a coping strategy significantly higher than mothers of their non learning disabled counterparts. The added care giving responsibility, constant school visits, lack of social skills in the learning disabled child could be leading to added stress for the parents and family as a whole. Rogers (2007) points out the pressures to produce perfect babies and to meet all their needs are immense. In the face of these pressures, which arise from both internalized norms and societal expectations, parents may feel shock, loss and disappointment when their child receives a diagnosis of learning disabilities. These feelings may lead in turn to denial, anxiety and conflict. She suggests that without the right level of support having a child with learning disabilities can disable the whole family.

Overall the current study points at the various psychosocial, behavioural and familial variables that describe a learning disabled child. Learning disabilities is often looked at as a biological disorder that is innate but for better understanding of the psychosocial, emotional and behavioural profile of the learning disabled child, and also to plan better interventions strategies focus needs to shift towards environmental factors like parental stress, psychological resources used by the caregivers, family environment of the learning disabled child that may aid in increasing or decreasing the difficulties that accompany learning disabilities.
IMPLICATIONS

This study has practical implications as the information may provide professionals who work with learning disabled children and their families’ ways to effectively deal with their issues. It points out the various psychological, social and emotional difficulties faced by the learning disabled child so that along with academic intervention attention by the special educators can be paid to helping the child manage anxiety, loneliness, self concept and other such emotional and psychological problems that accompany a learning disability. Also insights on how stress is to be handled, the changes that need to be brought about in the family environment and the coping strategies that are useful was also provided in the research. The present study therefore gives a call out to the educational providers and the families of learning disabled children to implement wholesome intervention techniques that work not only on the child but also on his family.