

## Internalizing Problems among Learning Disabled Adolescents

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Researches in Quality of Life and internalizing problems has increased in the recent past and many evident based researches share the prevalence of low quality of life among learning disabled adolescents. Low quality of life is majorly due to internalizing problems among autistic adolescents (Andersen et al., 2023). The objective of this study is to identify gender differences in quality of life in internalizing problems among learning disabled adolescents. Sixty six learning disabled adolescents in the age range of 11 to 15 years were selected through purposive sampling and administered by The Youth Disability Screener (YDS) and the data was analyzed by Independent Sample t test. The results showed that there was no significant mean difference between adolescent boys and girls in quality of life among learning disabled adolescents. Many studies stressed that internalizing problems were more in girls rather than boys but this study proves that there was no significant mean difference between boys and girls. It may be due to equal importance given to the children by their parents or social media or education. The study recommends the application of intervention strategies to improve quality of life and since there is homogeneity in gender, the intervention might be effective.

**Keywords:** Quality of Life, Internalizing Problems Learning Disability, Adolescent, Gender

Adolescents with learning disability face academic problems and the related academic emotions like low self esteem and high anxiety (Sainio et al., 2019). They internalize low self esteem and social skills difficulties which indirectly affects literacy related achievement (Boyes et al., 2020). Such internalizations contributes to poor quality of life (Giovagnoli et al., 2020). Internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression are linked to gender differences (Khan & Avan, 2020; Lau et al., 2021; Salavera et al., 2019). There is gender difference in quality of life among reading disorder students ((Balazs et al., 2016) and the current study aims to identify the presence of gender difference in quality of life among learning disabled adolescents.

### Internalizing Problems

Internalizing problems are defined as a set of emotional symptoms experienced by an individual that reveals more feelings of sadness, fears, behavioural inhibition and low self esteem (Novak et al., 2018). Internalizing problems identified in adolescents include depression, anxiety and social anxiety (Salavera et al., 2019). This internalizing problem is prevalent in both boys and girls equally and there is no gender difference (Luijten et al., 2021).

### Quality of Life

Quality of life can be defined as the total combination of objectively measurable experiences of an individual that includes physical health, social relationships, societal and economic influences, personal circumstances and functional activities as

well as subjective personal satisfaction with life. The term satisfaction with life includes many domains like health, work, material comforts, recreation, creative expression, social relations, family, society, education and learning (Felce & Perry, 1995). The current study focuses on the quality of life in internalizing problems among adolescents with learning disability.

### **Learning Disability**

Students with normal intellectual functioning but with a difficulty in cognitive processes and academic achievement are suffering with Learning Disability (LD). Students with LD are identified to be underachievers with poor performance in reading, writing and mathematics due to unexpectedness because of external factors and/or their learning potential (Büttner & Hasselhorn, 2011). Gyereh and Shukla (2023) asserted that children with learning disability suffer with mental health problems like anxiety and depression. These mental health issues demand the need to consider the quality of life in a learning disabled student and the present study aims to find out the differences between Learning Disabled boys and girls in their quality of life in internalizing problems.

### **Gender Difference and Internalizing Problems**

Few researches support gender difference in internalizing problems among adolescents and few otherwise. Though aggression is assumed to be more in boys (Card et al., 2008), researches showed the evolving change of girls scoring more in aggression (Choe & Yu, 2022) and that there are no gender difference in internalizing problems ((Babicka-Wirkus et al., 2023). Gender difference were limited in internalizing problems such as loneliness, depressive symptoms and social anxiety among adolescents ((Danneel et al., 2020) and the gender difference for loneliness is

similar for both male and female ((Maes et al., 2019). Internalizing problems leads to low academic performance ((Ende et al., 2016) and poor quality of life.

The prevalence of internalizing problems among adolescent girls is increasing affecting the quality of life (Philipsson et al., 2013). Providing interventions to reduce internalizing problems might result in higher quality of life (Arslan & Renshaw, 2019). Louzado et al. (2021) showed that men and women workers exhibited different levels of quality of life. Barbieri et al. (2022) confirmed that gender acts as a predictor variable to measure quality of life.

Children with dyslexia measured low on factors like teacher student relationship, parent child relationship, peer relation, learning ability and attitude of homework (Huang et al., 2020) that had an negative impact on quality of life. Children with dyslexia showed poor quality of life that manifested due to teacher student distrust, peer tension, poor learning ability and poor academic performance. The quality of life among dyslexics was comparatively lower than non dyslexic children that poor quality of life was determined by the psychosocial domain, physical and mental health domain and living satisfaction domain (Bing et al, 2019).

### **Need for Study**

From the above literature, it is evident that the adolescent boys and girls face internalizing problems. These internalizing problems affect the quality of life of the students. Learning disabled adolescent boys and girls are aware of their learning problems but they are not aware of the emotions they experience internally. Awareness on learning problems means that the learning disabled students know that they have academic problem and that they are treated differently by the family, school and community. The accompanying emotions due to this awareness are anxiety, depression, social

anxiety and withdrawal. Thus, these latent internalizing problems contribute to poor quality of life. Though gender difference is seen in internalizing problem and quality of life as per many research studies, the awareness on the presence of having learning problems contributing to emotional symptoms such as anxiety and depression have not been studied. As both learning disabled boys and girls are aware of their learning problems, it is intriguing to know the existence of gender difference in internalizing problems and quality of life. The implication of this study can be used to develop an intervention programme that reduces internalizing problems to moderate the quality of life of learning disabled adolescents.

### Objective

To identify the gender differences in quality of life among learning disabled adolescents.

### Hypothesis

There will be no significant difference between Boys and Girls in Quality of Life among Learning Disabled Adolescents.

### Method

#### Sample

A comparative research design was used in this study. Purposive Sampling Methods was used to collect data from 66 learning disabled adolescents comprising 34 girls and 32 boys in the age group 11 to 15 years from Saraswathi Kendra Learning Centre for Children, Alwarpet, Chennai and Wisdomms Special School and Learning Centre, Annanagar, Chennai. The participants were administered by Youth Disability Screener and demographic data sheet.

#### Tool

Youth Disability Screener is based on the assumption that disability not just includes health factors but also the level of functioning, activity and participation of the youth. This

implies a broader perspective that includes environmental and personal factors. It is a self reported, 4 items screener with 3 responses, "Yes", "No" or "Don't Know". It has identified 62% with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and 19% of adolescents with emotional disability (Topolski et al., 2002).

### Results

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Gender Difference in Quality of Life

Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Boys	32	1.81	1.49
Girls	34	1.91	1.08

Table 1 shows the Mean and Standard Deviation in Quality of Life among Learning Disabled Adolescent Boys and Girls. Quality of Life among girls was 1.91 and boys were 1.81 and there is a negligible difference in standard deviation clearly indicates that the group is homogeneous. But the slight variation could be due to the presence of low level of internalizing problem prevalent among girls than boys. Although this is contradictory to the study by Philipsson et al. (2013) that the prevalence of internalizing problem is increasing among adolescent girls affecting quality of life, the fact that the gender difference is inconspicuous. Further study is recommended to suggest on this.

An independent sample t test was conducted to compare the quality of life scores for boys and girls of learning disabled adolescents. There was no significant difference in scores for boys ( $M = 1.81$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) and girls ( $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ;  $t(64) = 0.311$ ,  $p = 0.76$ , two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.01, 95% CI: 0.74 to 0.54) is very small. Table II demonstrate that the t value is 0.31 is statistically not significant and there is no difference between boys and girls in Quality of Life. Although the Youth Disability

Screener measured adolescents' awareness on learning problem and its impact on the quality of life, the possible impact of social factors such as economic conditions, social support and family relation as an extraneous variable influencing the quality of life is to be

considered in future studies. Hence the Null Hypothesis "There will be no significant mean difference between Boys and Girls in Quality of Life among Learning Disabled Adolescents" is accepted.

Table 2. Independent Sample t Test for Gender Difference in Quality of Life (QoL)

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence interval of the Difference	
								Lower		Upper
QoL	Equal variances assumed	6.55	0.013	0.31	64	0.76	0.01	0.32	0.74	0.54
	Equal variances not assumed			0.31	56.40	0.76	0.01	0.32	0.75	0.55

N.S. = Not Significant

### Discussion

The study aims to identify the gender differences in Quality of Life among Learning Disabled Adolescents due to internalizing problems. The study offers opportunity to understand the amount of awareness that the learning disabled students have on their learning problems. The finding of the study shows that learning disabled adolescent girls have slightly higher quality of life than learning disabled adolescent boys. This means that the awareness about learning disability and its impact on their well being is slightly more among learning disabled girls than boys. Learning disabled adolescent girls have a better understanding on their learning problems than learning disabled adolescent boys. This iterates that learning disabled adolescent girls show slightly low internalizing problems than learning disabled adolescent boys. Nowadays, girls are empowered by being assertive in expressing their emotions, feelings and thinking due to rise in gender parity and internalizing problem is dependent on the emotional intelligence and social skills of a person (Salavera et al., 2019).

Based on the supporting literature, quality of life might also be influenced by economic factors, social relations and family relations besides awareness on learning problem. Hence, further research is recommended by considering the extraneous variable such as economic factors, social relations and family relations affecting quality of life.

### Implications and Limitations

The study is useful in understanding the introspection that the learning disabled adolescent girls have on their learning problems than boys. The study offers an opportunity to provide intervention in expressing internalizing problems towards a better quality of life for learning disabled adolescent boys more than girls. Hence, the study suggests that the school authorities to provide customized learning platform with gender specifications. As there are possibilities of the economic factors, social relations and family relations influencing the quality of life, these extraneous variables can be considered in the future study. A larger sample size can be considered in the future study.

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