

Specific learning disabilities and parent involvement and satisfaction with schooling

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Objective

To investigate the degree of parent involvement and satisfaction with their children's education, among children with and without a specific learning disability.

Method

This is a cross sectional double blind study performed between the years of 2007-2008 in Imam Jaafar Sadegh Elementary and Guidance School in Tehran, Iran. The number of parents participated in the study was 200. Developmental Test of Visual Perception was used in assessing children's disability. Types of parent involvement considered were in-school activities (attending parent-teacher conferences and school meetings, etc) and out-of-school activities (helping with homework, etc).

Results

Seventeen out of 200 children were diagnosed with specific learning disability. Children with specific learning disability compared to other

children had parents who participated in activities related to their children's immediate learning environment rather than getting involved broadly in school general activities. The difference between two groups is highly significant ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions

Parents of children with specific learning disabilities compared to other parents, were most likely to attend a parent-teacher conference, or to request a specific teacher or classroom, but were less likely to volunteer in general school activities and were less likely to be very satisfied with their children's school, teachers, standards, and discipline. They were primarily concerned about their children's immediate learning needs and environment instead of participating broadly in school activities. (Rawal Med J 2009;34: 128-130).

Key words

Learning disability, Parent involvement, Parent satisfaction, schooling.

INTRODUCTION

The number and prevalence of children with disabilities have increased in recent years.¹ This increase has been due to the number of societal factors such as higher survivorship of very low birth infants; higher maternal age; and earlier identification of children with disabilities through increased service provision.² Of particular interest to educational researchers are the academic challenges for children with specific learning disabilities, the most prevalent disability among school-age (ages 6-21).³ Parents of these children also face specific challenges to ensuring their children's educational, social, and emotional development.⁴ The aim of this study was to examine the ways in which parents of children with learning disabilities are involved in their children's education, and their satisfaction with various aspects of their children's education compared to the parents of children without a learning disability.

SUBJECTS AND METHOD

The study was carried out at Imam Jaafar Sadegh elementary and guidance school in Tehran, during the years 2007-2008. Parents of 200 children participated in the study. Children were divided into three groups: kindergarten, elementary and guidance school. The learning disabilities were measured using the Test of Marianne Frosting (Developmental Test of Visual Perception) by the school authorities' permission and reviewing the periodic evaluations regularly done by school authorities every three months. A consent form was signed by the parent on the registration day. A questionnaire containing 19 items was filled by the parents of children to measure their degree of involvement and satisfaction with school work. The U.S.A 2003 Parent and Family Involvement in Education Surveys of the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) was used as an example. $p < 0.05$ was considered as statistically significant.

RESULTS

Overall, 17 children out of 200 were diagnosed with a specific learning disability. Parents of children with specific learning disabilities more likely to check that the homework is done and help with the homework and felt the amount of homework assigned was too much (13.7 versus 10.5), or too little (17.8 versus 13.2), attended parent-teacher conferences (84.9 versus 76.3), and requested

specific class or teacher (46.1 versus 28.6). Parents of children with specific learning disabilities were less likely than parents of other children to volunteer at their children's school (33.4 versus 42.6), and were less likely to be very satisfied with their children's school (52.2 versus 62.0), teachers (57.1 versus 64.1), academic standards (51.9 versus 62.3) and discipline (59.2 versus 63.7) (Table).

Parent involvement and satisfaction	Number of children	Child has specific learning disability		Child does not have a specific learning disability		P<=0.05
		Percent	s.e.#	Percent	s.e.#	
Total	200	8.8	0.34	91.2	0.34	*
Parent checks that homework is done	163	90.3	1.34	84.8	0.36	*
Someone in family helps child with homework&						
less than once a week	47	20.4	1.55	26.4	0.44	*
1 to 2 days a week	65	31.8	1.85	36.0	0.65	*
3 to 4 days a week	48	32.5	1.79	26.0	0.55	*
5 or more days a week	23	15.3	1.37	11.7	0.40	*
Parent feels about amount of homework is&						
about right	144	68.5	1.84	76.3	0.51	*
too much	21	13.7	1.42	10.5	0.33	*
too little	26	17.8	1.52	13.2	0.43	*
Parent is very satisfied with&						
Child's school	122	52.2	1.95	62.0	0.63	*
Child's teachers	127	57.1	1.87	64.1	0.55	*
School's academic standards	122	51.9	2.02	62.3	0.61	*
School's order and discipline	127	59.2	2.01	63.7	0.59	*
Parent attended a&						
general school meeting	176	86.4	1.51	87.8	0.42	
parent-teacher conference	154	84.9	1.33	76.3	0.45	*
parent volunteered for&						
child's school	84	33.4	1.86	42.6	0.62	*
child's classroom	116	16.3	1.45	21.9	0.52	*
fundraising	123	52.5	2.31	62.8	0.56	*
Parent requested specific class/teacher	60	46.1	1.59	28.6	0.52	*
Number of times parent involved at child's school		mean	s.e	mean	s.e	
Total		6.7	0.41	7.6	0.16	
Kindergarten		7.7	0.70	7.5	0.19	
Elementary school		6.0	0.80	7.3	0.32	
Guidance school		6.3	0.67	7.8	0.30	*

Compares the percentage of children with a specific learning disability to the percentage of children without a specific learning disability. #s.e.=standard error.

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that parents of children with specific learning disabilities focus on the activities related to their children's immediate learning environment, such as parent-teacher conferences, the teacher and the classroom, while parents of children without learning disabilities are involved in the school environment more broadly, through fundraising, attending general meetings, and volunteering. The nature of parent involvement among children with specific learning disabilities also carries over to home. Parents of children with specific learning disabilities are more involved in helping their children with homework and were less satisfied with the amount of homework their children receive. Children with specific learning disability had parents who were less likely to be very satisfied with school compared to parents of children without a specific learning disability.

The gap between students with and without learning disabilities continues to widen. Students in special education have lower school completion rates than their non disable peers. As adults, they are larger group of Americans who remain unemployed and experience higher arrest rates; they are less likely to live independently in the community.⁵ Parents also are naturally involved in their children's education. The first step in the parent involvement process is the general decision of parents to become involved in their child's schooling. This decision may be either explicit or implicit. That is, some parents may make a deliberate decision to become involved, while others may simply respond to external pressures for involvement without consciously considering their decision. Furthermore, parents may, at any point, decide to withdraw their participation.⁶

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler⁷ theorize that the decision for parents to become involved in their children's education is influenced by a number of factors including their view of the parent role with regard to involvement in education, their sense of efficacy in helping their children succeed in school and general invitations and demands for involvement from either their child or the school.

For example, some parents may see involvement in schooling as central to their role, while others may believe education is best left to school personnel. The former are more likely to take an active part in their children's education.⁸ The overall frequency of involvement with the child's school for parents of children with and without learning disabilities is not measurably different. The difference is qualitative.

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