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Evelin Witruk / Dian Sari Utami (eds.)

## **Traumatic Experiences and Dyslexia**



**PETER LANG**

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Samudra Senarath

## **Anxiety and Self-Esteem among Children with Dyslexia in Sri Lanka**

**Abstract:** Dyslexia is a complex neurological condition, occurring in approximately five to twelve percent of the population. For more than a decade, the impacts of secondary symptoms on the lives of individuals with dyslexia have been studied from different perspectives. The present study was focused to identify children with dyslexia anxiety and the level of their self-esteem as well as confidence in education compared to the non-dyslexia children. A total of 30 children with and without dyslexia, living in the Western Province participated in this study. These children, studying in Grade five in boy's schools, belonged to the age group of 10–11 years. All these children were given three questionnaires (i.e., Spence Children's Anxiety Scale, Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventories 3). Self-developed screen test and semi-structured interviews were also conducted to examine the confidence in education. Descriptive analysis, paired sample t-test, and frequency analysis were used to test hypotheses. Results of this study showed that the children with dyslexia have not displayed a significant level of overall anxiety scores. Compared to the anxiety subscales; Generalized, Separation, and Social anxiety, and some items presented significant differences in children with dyslexia in contrast to the normal children. Children with dyslexia have shown significantly very low self-esteem in contrast to the normal children. It is identified that normal children also showed the self-esteem below the average level. Very low level of confidence in education is noticed in the group of children with dyslexia when compared to the normal children.

**Keywords:** children with dyslexia, anxiety, self-esteem, confidence in education

### **1 Problem of the Study**

Research on dyslexia states that some children have great difficulty in learning to read, write, spell and pronounce the words, despite having normal intelligence. The prevailing rate of dyslexia is 5% - 12% in the present world (Katusic, Colligan, Barbaresi, Schaid, & Jacobsaon, 2001). However, Sri Lankan literature reports the prevailing rate is 5–10%. Researchers have stated that the primary symptoms of dyslexia in early school children are poor identification and knowledge of sounds, low awareness of phoneme and problems with coping. Because of dyslexia, many children are dropped from the schools (Bolhasan, 2009). It has long been hypothesised that children with learning disabilities, including dyslexia, may be highly vulnerable to emotional consequences such as anxiety, stress, somatic complaints etc. One of the research study proved that 20% of children with dyslexia suffer from depression and another 20% suffer from anxiety disorders. Studies show that the



most dyslexia pre-schoolers do not suffer from anxiety, but their anxiety develops as they enter into school and experience difficulties to fit the learning environment and expectations of teachers and parents (Bolhasan, 2009).

In general, children with learning difficulties reported that a low score of positive well-being, were unhappy and more anxious than their peers (Casey, Levy, Brown, & Brooks-Gunn, 1992). Children with dyslexia have more academic, social and psychological problems than their non-dyslexia peers (Vigilante & Dane, 1991). Many researchers stated that appropriate teaching and support could help to make a progress in children with dyslexia and decrease their secondary psychological symptoms. In Sri Lankan context, this area is novel to teachers and officers in education system. As a result of this, teachers have less knowledge, misconceptions, and low experiences. Inadequate teacher training programmes, lack of time for contact, being overloaded with daily school routines and responsibilities prevent helping these children (Senarath, 2016). In Sri Lanka, education system mainly focuses on three competitive national exams, e.g., the Grade-Five Scholarship Examination, the General Examination of Ordinary Level and the General Examination of Advanced Level. There are lacks of sufficient studies on secondary symptoms of children with dyslexia. The primary objective of the present study is to identify the anxiety level among children with dyslexia in contrast to the non-dyslexia children. The study expects to examine the level of self-esteem among children with dyslexia and the confidence shows in education during the learning period in the regular classroom. Specific hypotheses were made for each goal of this study. Thus, dyslexia children would have significantly higher anxieties, low self-esteem and low confidence in education in comparison to the normal children.

## 2 Theoretical Review

Scientific research on dyslexia has been increased over the past several decades. Nevertheless, numbers of existing studies are carried out to investigate the nature, aetiology, and assessment methods. On the research studies in secondary psychological symptoms of anxiety, depression, self-confidence, self-esteem and motivation are limited. According to the research evidence children and adolescents with dyslexia have higher anxiety levels than typically developing children. For instance, Paget's and Reynold's (1984) study found that those with 6 to 17-year-old children with learning disabilities were more anxious than their non-learning disabled peers, as the anxiety manifesting itself to worry and concentration difficulties.

Further, Casey, Levy, Brown, and Brooks-Gunn (1992) conducted a study and reported that children (aged 8–12 years) with reading and writing difficulties displayed significantly lower scores for positive well-being, and were unhappier and anxious than their peers who have no difficulty in reading. In a review of research on children population with learning difficulties, Huntington and Bender (1993) concluded that children with learning difficulties might experience higher levels of

anxiety than their peers. Willcutt and Pennington (2000) examined the psychiatric difficulties present in a sample of reading disabled twins. They found that anxiety was associated with reading difficulties, but, in contrast hyperactivity and conduct disorder were not elevated in twins among reading disabled children. This suggests that increased anxiety levels occur as a consequence of language difficulties, rather than being caused by the genetic and environmental influences common to both twins. Based on the findings of the above discussions, it is expected that children with dyslexia will show more trait anxiety regarding academic situations than controls. Eichhorn (2016) study proved that children with in integrative classes showed a lack of scholastic self-esteem significantly when compared with the control group.

### 3 Methods

#### 3.1 Sample

The sample survey design and random sampling techniques were selected for this study. Fifteen children with dyslexia and fifteen normal children were selected in grade five classes (age 10–11 years) from three schools in educational zone, Colombo.

#### 3.2 Instrument

Two Standardized tests were employed for the present study. These are the Spence Children Anxiety Scale (SCAS) (Spence, 1998). Test reliability and validity presented ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ) and ( $r = .58$ ) three editions of Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventories (CFSEI-3) (Battle, 2002). For the current study reliability and validity are stated as ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ). Self-developed screening questionnaire reliability and validity showed ( $\alpha = 0.67$ ). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with ten students in both the groups. Quantitative data analyzes were used for children's anxiety, and self-esteem which measures mean, and standard deviation and paired t-test. Confidence in education was analyzed by using percentages. Semi-structured interviews were presented as descriptive as well as percentage vice.

### 4 Results of the Study

Children with dyslexia and normal children did not present significantly for the overall anxiety scores. But in contrast, the generalised anxiety subscale presented anxiety children with dyslexia (Experimental Group, EG) compared to the normal children (Control Group, CG) as mentioned in Figure 1. Children with dyslexia presented generalised anxiety symptoms five out of six items, were proved their anxiety in contrast to the normal children; "I feel worry about things" (EG  $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), CG ( $M = 1.76$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ),  $p < 0.001$ ; "When I have problem, my heart beats really fast" (EG;  $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ); (CG  $M = 1.74$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ),  $p < 0.001$ .)"

## Generalized Anxiety

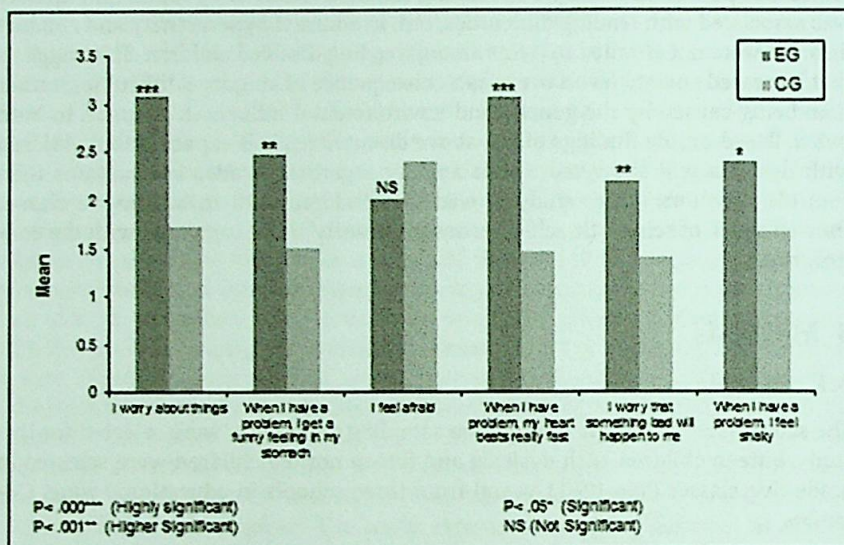


Figure 1. Generalised anxiety in two groups

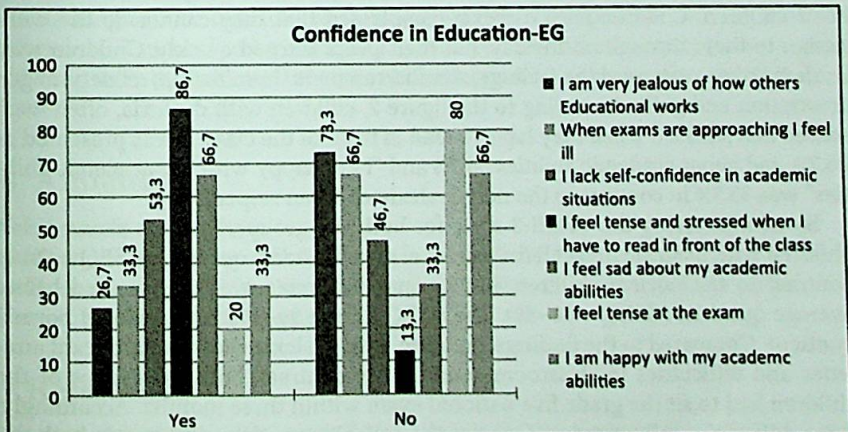
Results of semi-structured interviews are also proved that children with dyslexia have more worries about their classroom performances. Children often experience actual physical symptoms due to their anxiety, and this is turned to decrease in their ability to learn or to be absent from the school. And interview results verified that children with dyslexia presented other difficulties such as fatigue, irritability, headaches, distress, misbehavior to avoid a task, lack of participation in class discussions or activities, negative talk about self, easily frustrated, reluctant to ask for help, expressing anger, etc.

According to the Table 1, children with dyslexia encountered social anxiety significantly in comparison to the normal children. (i.e., "I feel scared when I have to take test" (EG;  $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ); (CG;  $M = 1.27$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ );  $p < 0.001$ ; "I worry that I will do badly at my school work" (EG;  $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ); (CG;  $M = 1.60$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ),  $p < 0.001$ ; "I feel afraid if I have to talk in front of my class" ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ); (CG;  $M = 1.03$ ,  $SD = 0.26$ ),  $p < 0.001$ ). Interview results were also revealed that children with dyslexia were unable to cope up with the difficulties within educational activities in the classroom with compared to the normal children. Term test marks of children with dyslexia are very low and classroom rank was also back behind the all normal children.

**Table 1.** Social anxiety in both groups

| Social anxiety   | Mean               |               | SD                 |               | Significant |
|--|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------|
|  | Experimental Group | Control Group | Experimental Group | Control Group |             |
| I feel scared when I have to take test                             | 3.33               | 1.27          | 0.82               | 0.59          | 0.000***    |
| I feel afraid if I have to use public toilets or bathrooms         | 2.47               | 1.33          | 1.13               | 0.82          | 0.004**     |
| I feel afraid that I will make a fool of myself in front of people | 3.00               | 2.47          | 1.07               | 1.19          | 0.207       |
| I worry that I will do badly at my school work                     | 3.00               | 1.60          | 1.07               | 0.83          | 0.000***    |
| I worry that other people think of me                              | 3.00               | 1.20          | 1.00               | 0.41          | 0.000***    |
| I feel afraid if I have to talk in front of my class               | 3.07               | 1.07          | 1.03               | 0.26          | 0.000***    |

Note.  $p < 0.001$ \*\*\*,  $p < 0.01$ \*\* ,  $p < 0.05$ \*. SD: Standard Deviation

**Figure 2.** Confidence in Education - Experimental Group (Children with Dyslexia)

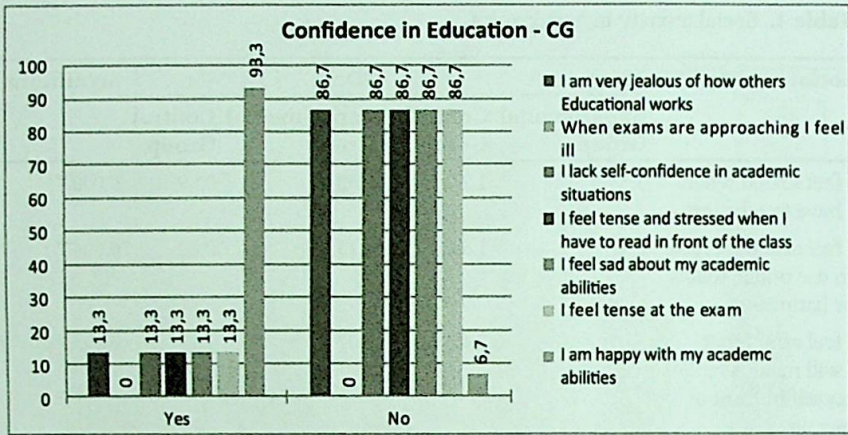


Figure 3. Confidence in Education – Control Group (Normal Children)

According to the third objective of the study, the findings of the research proved that children with dyslexia faced significant difficulties in education in contrast to the normal children. According to figure 2, experimental group of children encountered worries, sadness about their abilities in education, tense at the exam and feel ill significantly in compared to the figure 3, in non-dyslexia children. Lack of self-confidence in academic situations presented higher level in EG in contrast to CG, i.e., “yes response” was in EG = 53.3% and CG presented 13.3%, but no responses were reported in CG 86.7%. Accordingly, the results of interview also proved children with dyslexia and their parents are frustrated about the educational level of their children. Children with dyslexia complained that they cannot do the work assign to them throughout the day, but their peers learned quickly. Children with dyslexia often expressed the feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, anxiety, anger, frustration and guilt. According to the figure 2, children with dyslexia, often were tensed and stressed when they have to read in front of the class. It was presented as 86.7%; sad about academic abilities 66.7% and “I am happy with my academic abilities” was 33.3% in contrast to the non-dyslexia children respectively.

By administering the CFSEI-3 scale for both the groups, findings showed that children with dyslexia presented a low level of self-esteem quotient (GSEQ < 70) in contrast to the normal children, but normal children are also presented below average quotient (GSEQ = 80–89). The GSEQ’s from 90–110 is considered normal quotient. Compared to the findings, children with dyslexia showed significant anxieties and difficulties in classroom activities. In contrast, both the groups of the children had to sit the grade five national exam within three months. Accordingly, these difficulties influenced to decrease the self-esteem of the children in both the groups.

**Table 2.** Level of Self Esteem between EG & CG

| Group                | Mean | SD    | Global Self Esteem Quotients (GSEQ)  |
|----------------------|------|-------|--------------------------------------|
| EG<br>(Dyslexic)     | 49   | 10.67 | < 70<br>Very low self esteem         |
| CG<br>(Non-dyslexic) | 82   | 8.32  | 80 – 89<br>Below average self esteem |

## 5 Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

Children with dyslexia presented a certain level of anxieties within subscales and low level of self-esteem in compared to normal children. However, the CG group performed below the average level of self-esteem statistically. This was also verified with interview results, such as the CG group children were also faced Grade-Five National Exam which also influenced the decrease of their self-esteem. They are always frustrated and faced with difficulties every day at school. Experimental group of children presented the higher level of educational problems than non-dyslexia children. According to the findings, hypotheses were accepted that means children with dyslexia were showed very low self-esteem and difficulty with confidence in education in compared to the normal children.

Based on the findings of this research study, dyslexia children have shown the generalised and social anxieties, education difficulties, and very low self-esteem quotient in contrast to the non-dyslexia children. Teachers need more training on dyslexia children more teaching facilities, and teaching-learning aids; improve remedial teaching methods especially for children with dyslexia; need proper counselling service for children with dyslexia and their parents. The examination procedure is needed to be changed to measure the academic performance among children with dyslexia, and that would be supportive of preventing psychological issues.

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