

Chapter 6

Students With Learning Disabilities and Feelings of Loneliness

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the degree of loneliness of adolescents with LDs, and the possible differences and correlations with the type of LDs, gender, and age. The sample comprised 30 adolescences with LDs, 14 (46.7%) boys and 16 (53.3%) girls, aged 12-15 years ($M=13.60$, $Sd=.770$). A self-report questionnaire and the children's loneliness questionnaire (CLQ) were used for data collection. The findings of the study indicated that all adolescents, regardless of the type of LDs, demonstrated moderate to low levels of loneliness. There was no statistically significant difference between students with MGLDs and students with SpLDs relating to feelings of loneliness, although students with MGLDs experienced feelings of loneliness higher compared to students with SLDs. As far as the gender, there was no significant difference between girls and boys; however, the girls scored higher. Finally, there was no correlation with age.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning disabilities (LDs) are a general term for a special education need and disabilities (SEND) that has an impact on different learning domains. The term “General learning disabilities” (GLDs) refers to a situation in which a child’s or young person’s cognitive challenges have an influence on all aspects of the school curriculum and frequently also on extracurricular activities. Specific Learning Disabilities (SpLDs) are where the impact of the child’s or young person’s cognitive difficulties is seen in a particular area of learning, such as reading, writing, spelling, or mathematics (SchoolsWeb, 2022). There are different types of LDs, which can be mild, moderate, severe, or profound. According to the DSM-5, 5 to 15 percent of school-age children across different cultures are affected by a learning disorder that limits them in reading, writing, or mathematics (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Students with LDs are experiencing challenges in academic work, mainly reading, writing, and/or calculation difficulties (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Although students with LDs are often regarded as a heterogeneous group, they are situated in specific social surroundings, such as schools and families, with which they interact dynamically every day (Yu et al., 2005).

Various studies have highlighted a number of issues related to the emotional and social aspects of the education of students with LDs (Schiff & Joshi, 2016). Students with LDs may encounter many difficulties in their education, such as issues related to peer group acceptance, friendship, and social isolation, low self-efficacy and self-esteem, and externalized and internalized behavior problems (Cavioni et al., 2017). Moreover, students with LDs also face social obstacles at school, including more active rejection and detachment from their classmates (Wagner et al., 2007) and more feelings of loneliness (Margalit, 2010).

Loneliness is the emotional and mental distress or unease that comes from being alone or feeling alone (APA, 2024). It is defined as involving the cognitive awareness of a deficiency in one’s social and personal relationships and the ensuing affective reactions of sadness, emptiness, or longing (Asher & Paquette, 2003). It reflects a global indicator of dissatisfaction with the quality and/or quantity of individuals’ social relationships (Asher et al., 1990).

Psychological theory and research provide numerous perspectives. Social psychology focuses on the emotional distress caused by unmet needs for intimacy and companionship, while cognitive psychology emphasizes on the unsettling experience resulting from a perceived discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships. Psychologists following existential or humanistic viewpoints view loneliness as an unavoidable and distressing part of being human, which can lead to heightened self-awareness and renewal (APA, 2024).

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