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Learning Disorder in Palestine: Awareness and Diagnosis

*Hanyya Alnajjar, Hadeel Almutan, Jana Diriyeh, Nada Shahin, Nadine Assi.
American School of Palestine, Palestine.*

Background: A learning disorder (L.D) is defined by a child's difficulty in one or more fields of learning. As of 2021, an estimated 240 million children worldwide have a diagnosed learning disability. Diagnosing LDs helps children overcome the challenges that differentiate them from their peers; failure of diagnosis will only lead the child to be neglected and seen as 'stupid' for something they cannot control. Unfortunately, most of these children do not receive any specialized accommodations. Previous studies about the topic in the region do not give specific attention to different LDs, and very few applied any recommendations. The statistics confirm that further action must take place in order to create an educational environment accessible to all.

Objectives: Our research aims to assess the awareness, diagnosis, and prevalence of LDs among students, and how schools, teachers, and parents can be involved.

Methods: We observed students in the elementary classes, so we may understand the possibilities of LDs in Palestinian schools. We conducted interviews with school administrators, and educators. Interview questions will explore not only the awareness and prevalence of the issue but also the role of education and school intervention. Finally, there was further observation with the students who expressed signs of learning disabilities to further explore whether or not these students may actually have a learning disability.

Results: While observing students, there were a few prominent cases that may be apt to learning disabilities. The most frequently expressed signs were being easily distracted by their surroundings, constant fidgeting, and difficulty following basic class rules. Some students had a



recurring issue of having dramatic reactions to minor occurrences; for example, a student became very vocal about not getting a reward for supposed 'good' behavior. These students also began making disgusted facial expressions at anything they do not like.

A survey was conducted among the teachers to assess the awareness around the topic. 71% of the teachers had 10+ years of experience, and most of them studied here in Palestine, which meant that the target population was accurate. About half have a diploma in education; among them, 88% were introduced to LDs. 94% of all teachers said that they noticed extreme bullying on children susceptible to such disorders. 80% said that they would only report suspicion of a LD to parents, while others said they would either report it to the administration or simply do nothing, but they did not believe that they have below average intelligence or won't succeed as adults. They also agreed that there needs to be a LD specialist in every school.

Conclusion: It is evident that there is not only lack of diagnosis, but also lack of care and monitoring. These children require special care, instead they get scolded by teachers for something that may be out of their control. A support system for these students needs to be established in order to provide a healthy educational environment.

Keywords: Learning Disorders, Elementary, Palestine