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Are There Learning Disabilities After High School?

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Previous investigations dealing with the long-term effects of learning disabilities have been concerned primarily with the relationship of early reading disability to adult adjustment.

The present study was designed to address the adult adjustment of both learning disabled and non-learning disabled young adults. This information will form the basis of a descriptive data base which will direct future research efforts.

METHOD

Subjects

Two groups of young adults were sampled for this study: young adults who were diagnosed as learning disabled by their schools sometime during their elementary or secondary school participation (LD group) and young adults who were not labeled as learning disabled and did not receive special services while in school (NLD group).

Procedures

Participation in the study was solicited by contacting 160 subjects by telephone and explaining the purpose of the study. The subjects, 47 LD and 59 NLD persons, returned a distributed packet of materials which included: (a) a brochure explaining the study, (b) two consent forms (one to be returned and one for the respondent to keep), and (c) the Young Adult Instrument.

Results

The large number of variables used in this study (147), and the relatively small sample sizes of respondents created a situation in which the results of inferential statistics to test differences between groups became tenuous because of an inflated experimentwise error rate. The authors acknowledge the risks associated with this procedure.

The two groups of participants differed little with respect to most demographic variables. Both groups were of similar age (LD, $\overline{X}$ = 20.31;

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NLD, $\overline{X}$ = 20.59); all respondents were Caucasian; most respondents had completed high school; and respondents had been out of school a similar period of time. However, the two groups differed in the ratio of males to females (LD = 1.78:1; NLD = 3.55:1); this created a serious sampling problem that could jeopardize the results of the study.

Vocational adjustment. The employment status of both groups of respondents at the time of the study was similar in many respects. However, when the jobs reported by both groups were transformed to the Duncan Socioeconomic Index, the LD group displayed a significantly lower mean job status than the NLD group. The LD sample reported they were neither happy nor unhappy while the NLD sample seemed to be fairly content with their employment situation ($p < .01$).The degree of happiness reported by each group was apparently unrelated to earned income.

Social personal adjustment. A major component in social/personal adjustment is making friends and taking part in activities. The NLD group was more active in social or fraternal activities and recreational activities than the LD sample. The NLD group also reported belonging to more community clubs and groups than the LD groups.

Community adjustment. The two groups of respondents differed little with regard to the number of contacts with law enforcement or justice agencies. However, considerably more LD young adults reported they had been convicted of a crime by a court of law than the NLD sample.

Medical status. The only area of difference between the groups in this area was their use of prescribed medicine. Twenty-four percent of the LD sample stated they were currently using medicine prescribed by a doctor compared to 9% of NLD.

Education. The LD respondents reported they were less happy with their education in junior and senior high school than the NLD respondents. The two samples reported differing levels of educational plans and aspirations. More NLD (84%) than LD (67%) respondents stated that they had plans for future educational activities. Using a discriminate analysis model, 73% of the total sample was correctly classified as LD or NLD on the basis of five variables. These variables included:

1. Satisfaction with employment.
2. Degree of involvement in social or fraternal organizations.
3. Degree of involvement in recreational activities.
4. Use of prescribed drugs.
5. Plans for future education or training.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The conclusions based on these results must be considered tentative in view of the sampling deviations described in the results section. The most critical limitation is the male to female ratio in the sample. This is alluded to in the results section. It is noteworthy that LD young adults appear to be adjusting as well as the NLD sample in a number of important adult adjustment areas such as getting and maintaining employment, and making friends. However, the results may be cause for concern. That is, although LD young adults are comparable to NLD persons in a number of important areas, it may be concluded that they seem to be much less satisfied with some areas of their lives. The implications of these conclusions can be related, at least in part, to past experiences which have shaped their present attitudes and expectations for adult life. The schools must prepare LD students for adult adjustment. At a minimum, LD students should be taught to develop future goals to help them function as adults.

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