



## IMPACT OF COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ON ACADEMIC STRESS IN STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

**Abbas T. M.**

Research scholar, Arunodaya University, Department of Psychology, Lekhi village,  
Naharlagun, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

### ABSTRACT:-

**Context:** Academic stress is the most predominant, untreated reason for academic failure in schools. Stress management programs in schools are hardly ever offered, despite the fact that it has been shown that lowering stress considerably enhances the performance of students with learning disabilities including spelling, reading, math, and handwriting. **Aim:** The goal of the study is to ascertain how counselling and psychotherapy affect school students' ability to cope with academic stress. **Methods:** An experimental study (experimental group and control group) was carried out from March 2022- September 2022 amongst randomly selected 30 school students with a learning disabilities, in Kozhikode, Kerala, India. The research scholar interacted personally and provided counselling and psychotherapy. Through two counselling programs, students were taught general stress-relieving techniques in four batches, each separated by a month. The DASS methodology was utilized to gauge the stress level. Students who gave their consent and participated in all of the sessions were given standardized, peer-reviewed, pre-validated stress assessment questionnaires (pre-test and post-test). **Results:** It was shown that counselling and psychotherapy helped the experimental group students manage their learning stress. This demonstrates that the intervention programs were successful in lowering the study subjects' baseline stress as well as their academic stress. **Conclusion:** The study concluded that, counselling and psychotherapy significantly reduce the academic stress experienced by the research participants. **Recommendations:** To address the issues associated with learning difficulties, counsellors and medical experts must make an effort to inform parents, teachers, and other school staff about their duty to promote a healthy environment. Therefore, in order to improve youth's capacities, interests, and aptitudes as well as motivate them to achieve their academic goals and stop them from indulging in such harmful behaviors, youth should be guided toward creative and constructive activities. **Suggestions:** The study suggests that, adults and senior high school students can successfully reduce any kind of stress through psychotherapy and counselling.



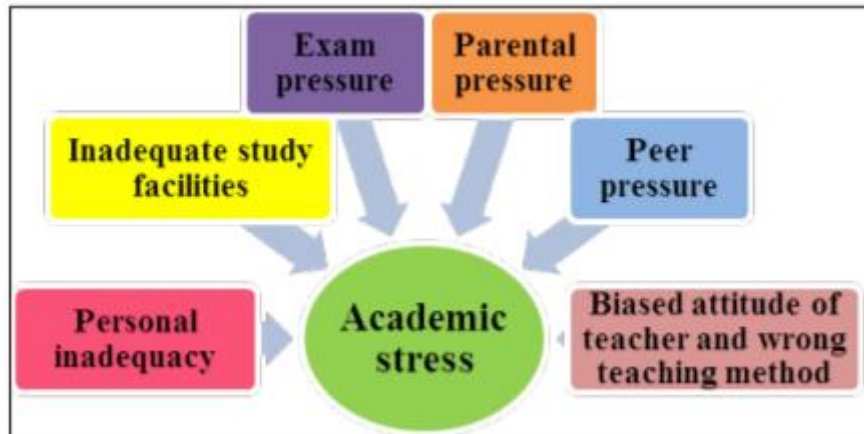
**KEYWORDS:** Academic stress, Counselling, Psychotherapy, Stress, Learning disability.

### INTRODUCTION :

Learning disability can be diagnosed when a person does much worse on individually administered, standardized exams in written expression, reading or math than would be expected given their level of ability, age and education. The learning issues significantly impede academic success or regular activities that call for reading, math, or writing abilities. The number of students with learning

difficulty in school is increasing, which highlights the necessity to recognize and treat the variables influencing their academic performance (Grigorenko et al., 2020).

As per the study of Procentese et al. (2020), academic stress is the psychological suffering caused by obstacles, failure, or even the awareness of the risk of academic failure. Self-reported stress is linked to the manifestation of anxious moods and decreased well-being, according to prior research. Secondary research that self-report upper levels of academic stress also report poorer well-being, as measured by social, psychological, cognitive, and physical components, according to the current OECD survey.



**Figure 1: Factors leading to academic stress (Source: image retrieved from Google scholar)**

The current education system is praised for its honesty and is closely related to sacrosanct duty (Bairagya and Joy, 2022). India's education system is workbook-based and heavily emphasizes cramming for exams, necessitating extensive study sessions and daily study habits. This demanding routine of early to nighttime study provides little to no time for socializing and enjoyment.

Despite having adequate cognitive and sensory abilities, children with learning disabilities significantly struggle in the areas of reading, writing, and arithmetic. These students perform poor academics and experience high levels of stress and worry. They experience more behavioral, emotional, and social issues than people who don't have learning difficulties. Learning impairments will result in exam failure if not treated as soon as possible, and these kids run the risk of developing stress-related diseases. In order to identify learning disabilities, all children with learning issues should be assessed scientifically as early as possible. Children's learning issues can be effectively controlled by giving scientific direction and intense one-on-one counselling (Norcross and Cooper, 2021).

There have been several research studies on learning difficulties undertaken in nations all around the world. The epidemiology, risk factors, and significance of early intervention are all covered in the research studies. Numerous studies on kids with learning difficulties have been conducted in Kerala, and standardized procedures for testing and treatment have been created. No study has discovered solutions that successfully return the participants to their regular, stress-free state. Thus, the current study was conducted to determine how well psychotherapy and counselling were in helping students with learning difficulties manage stress.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

**Aim**

To discuss the impact of counselling and psychotherapy to reduce academic stress among school students with learning disability.

**OBJECTIVES**

- To get consent from the study subjects
- To reduce stress among school students through two interventions

- To find and counsel students with learning disability
- To administer psychotherapy among students with learning disability.

**Hypothesis**

**H1:** There is a significant positive effect of psychotherapy and counselling among students with learning difficulties.

**H2:** Psychotherapy and Counselling together have positive impact on coping stress among students with learning impairment.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Participants:** Students with any type of learning disability or ADHD-like attention issues were also eligible to participate in the study. 30 participants in total were recruited. Two groups of participants were randomly assigned: the control group (students without disabilities) and the experimental group (students with disability). There were no notable age disparities between the study groups, with students' ages ranging between 8yrs and 14yrs. Children having any medical or psychiatric comorbidity that might have affected test performance were not included in the study.

**Interventions:** The intervention used was an adaptation of counselling and psychotherapy.

**Tools:** The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) is a 42-item survey that comprises three self-report scales for measuring the three harmful emotional states of anxiety, depression, and stress (Zanon et al., 2021). Each of the three scales' 14 items is divided into subscales of 2-5 related items. Anhedonia, dysphoria, sluggishness, life devaluation, self-criticism, and hopelessness are all evaluated on the Depression scale. Moderate to severe depression is indicated by a score of seven or above. The anxiety scale measures situational anxiety, skeletal muscle effects, autonomic arousal, and subjective experiences of anxious affect. Anxiety that is moderate to severe is indicated by a score of 6 or above. Arousal levels that are persistent and non-specific are sensitive to the Stress scale. Stress is considered moderate to severe when the score is 10 or higher.

Here is the interpretation of standard DASS

Level of psychological distress	vs.	DASS scale score
Normal	:	0-77
Mild	:	78-87
Moderate	:	87-95
Severe	:	95-98
Extremely severe	:	98-100

**Procedure:** The parent's signed informed consent was obtained because the study participants were minors. The participants were asked for their consent too. The questionnaire was then given to the participant. The details regarding age, gender, years of education, family, contact details, comorbidity presence were collected. Then the DASS was then administered to the students. Those who were found to be vulnerable, were administered psychotherapy and counselling sessions.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Recent growths in child development have shown that a child's early experiences have a big impact on how they learn. Through early identification and developmental treatments beginning in infancy, the limits in social and cognitive development of the children entering kindergarten schools can

be considerably decreased or eliminated. All children should have their physical, social-emotional, and academic health fostered from birth. The present study found that, the students with learning difficulty face different types of stress than normal students. The study observed that 38% of the respondents were girls and 62% were boys. This indicates that boys with learning disability make up the majority of responses and that they account for 62% when compared to females. According to a study by Pisaniello et al (2019), boys make up about two-thirds of school-age students with learning difficulties. According to study on learning disabilities (LD), the proportion of males to girls with LD in the school-identified group ranged from 5:1 to 9:1.

**Table 1: Total participants, mean of stress score with mean age**

Total participants	Mean of total stress score	Mean age of participants
30	41.56	11

After giving counselling and psychotherapy, it can be interpreted that these two can help the learning disability students to overcome their academic stress. The students became more confident and self-motivated after the administration of intervention. They learnt how to cope up with learning stress (Table 2).

**Table 2: Analysis of DASS**

DASS	Group		P value
	Experimental group	Control	
Depression			
Before	50.11±14.68	49.50±4.73	0.84
After	37.69±9.09	48.39±4.03	<0.001
P value	<0.001	0.15	
Anxiety			
Before	29.57±10.18	28.83±4.64	0.71
After	24.46±7.09	28.71±4.32	<0.001
P value	<0.001	0.86	
Stress			
Before	42.68±13.91	41.56±6.70	0.68
After	30.45±8.54	41.92±5.69	0.005
P value	<0.001	0.14	

Majority of the students belonging to experimental group showed significant results. After participating in counselling and psychotherapy sessions, they are able to deal with their learning stress. A very small number of students improved by more than 50% and required extra support.

Early detection of learning disabilities is crucial, as is quick intervention, since the longer these youngsters go without diagnosis, the harder remediation will be and the lower the likelihood of success (Bech et al, 2018). Developmental and learning issues must be checked for in all at-risk youngsters. The right educational interventions should be given to kids who are struggling with their learning. All parents and kids who are worried about their academic performance require expert examination, and scientific solutions must begin as soon as feasible.

The council for disabilities states that children and teenagers who have been diagnosed with specific learning disabilities typically have a condition in one or more of the fundamental psychological actions involved in comprehending spoken or written language, manifesting in a subpar ability to, think, listen, spell, read, write, and/or perform mathematical calculations. Individuals with particular learning difficulty struggle in a condensed area or areas of cognitive functioning that are denoted to as

psychological processing deficits. These difficulties include deficits in perception, attention, memory, metacognition, and organization (Novella and Samuolis, 2022). Given the average intellectual potential, these deficiencies lead to academic challenges and achievement that is far below expectations.

When there is a significant gap between intellectual capacity and performance in at least one of the above mentioned areas, a learning disability is suspected. The gap cannot be caused by any economic, cultural, or environmental disadvantages and cannot be resolved by any regular or categorical services provided as part of the usual educational curriculum (Khasawneh, 2020). For easier understanding, it might be said that children with learning impairments show a statistically significant difference between their intellect (ability) and at least one aspect of their academic assessment (achievement) (Kim et al., 2022).

Cultural sensitivity should be taken into account when screening for specific learning disabilities and referring students because a number of racial/ethnic subgroups have been mistakenly labelled as having certain learning disabilities due to language barriers, culturally inappropriate educational practices, learning difficulties associated with poverty, and cultural differences in behavioral expectations between teachers and students. Due to cognitive deficits in social perception or the perception of being different as a result of academic challenges, social adjustment may be a supplementary area of need for individuals with specific learning problems.

A long-term therapeutic strategy built on the tenets and theories of psychoanalysis is known as psychodynamic therapy (Novella and Samuolis, 2022). The learning disabled kid and the counsellor collaborate closely to examine suppressed feelings and wants that influence the child's present beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships. The person with learning difficulties gains the ability to create or enhance their interpersonal interactions as therapy goes on and learns new ways to detect and solve problems.

Authors have endorsed the function of counsellors in helping students succeed academically by addressing the social and personal factors in kids' lives that result in their academic failure (Bech et al, 2018). Academic challenges brought on by learning disabilities have become risk factors for dropping out of school over time, particularly as the inclusion movement has brought more children with learning disabilities into the mainstream classroom. Lakioti et al. (2020) evaluated the special education issues and predicted that the inclusion movement would have a significant impact on the field of school counselling. The solution to this is; Counsellors should serve as the team's leader, organize input from other disciplines, inform parents, and promote collaboration between the team and the parents.

## CONCLUSION

The future of all countries lies in the hands of today's students. A certain group of young individuals called learners with learning difficulties may be particularly vulnerable to social and emotional problems and may benefit from specialist treatment. The work of school counsellors can be very helpful in quickly and accurately identifying students with learning issues. Additionally, as part of a continuous needs assessment process in their school counselling programs, school counsellors should help identify academically gifted students with learning disabilities because the requirements of learners who are both talented and learning disabled are comparable with the objectives of a comprehensive developmental program. Counsellors may be able to stop these students from underachieving and foster their positive social and emotional growth by attending to their social and emotional needs. Education is crucial to the development of human resources. Therefore, there is a pressing need to raise awareness among parents, teachers, and others about children's learning difficulties. Children's learning problems should be recognized as soon as possible and treated scientifically so that we can guide them toward a very bright future. The study found that, counselling and psychotherapy could reduce academic stress among school students. Hence, the present study concluded that there is a vital role of counselling and psychotherapy in reducing stress of students with learning difficulties.

### LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

L1: One of the most significant issues the researcher encountered during the investigation was the respondents' unwillingness to adequately respond to the questions.

L2: Additionally, the study's sample size was very small and it was restricted to just one district in Kerala.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author of the present study declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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