

Educational and Occupational Outcomes of Adults with Learning Disabilities

Jennifer J. Pandich & J. Bruce Tomblin
University of Iowa, Iowa City

Background

In recent years it has become clear that communication skills mediate a great deal of children's performance in school. A common component of children with poor school performance regardless of the type of developmental disability is poor spoken language. Research concerning school outcomes of children with speech disorders appears to be better than those with language disorders (Beitchman, et al., 1998). In contrast those with mental retardation or those with developmental language disorders had poorer educational and occupational outcomes (Aram, et al., 1984; King, et al., 1982; Hall & Tomblin, 1978; Hasazi, et al., 1985).

The research concerning outcomes of children with communication disorders has focused upon children and adolescents. There are no studies that provide information on the **adult** outcomes of childhood communication disorder.

As our society enters the 21st century, we will begin to rely more and more heavily on technical jobs rather than manual ones. Education, therefore, will become increasingly important. It is likely that those who will have communication based learning disorders will be particularly affected by this change by this change in the communication and educational demands of the workplace? Therefore, it is essential to investigate the academic and economic outcomes of those adults with these learning disorders. We anticipate that these effects can be currently be seen among women due to the fact that they have fewer options for physical labor than men. Thus, women, today, may provide us with a view of the job opportunities that will be available to men and women in the future.

Questions

Were there differences between categories in terms of educational outcomes? Did various learning disorders adversely affect the amount of education completed?

Were there differences between categories in terms of occupational outcomes? Did various learning disorders adversely affect the type of employment?

Did gender play a role in these outcomes?

Method

Participants

The parents of children participating in an epidemiological study of SLI were interviewed with respect to their history of speech, language, and learning histories as children. Eighty percent of these parents had children who were typical language learners and 20% had children who were SLI. Based upon their report the following communication and learning problems were found in these parents:

Mentally Retarded (M.R.) = 188 (143 fathers; 45 mothers)

Learning Disabled (L.D.) = 87 (45 fathers; 42 mothers)

Speech Impaired and Learning Disabled (S.P. & L.D.) = 36 (19 fathers; 17 mothers)

Speech Impaired (S.P.) = 117 (49 fathers; 68 mothers)

Control (C.) = 1660 (775 fathers; 885 mothers)

Measures

Questionnaire:

Data were gathered from mothers using telephone interviews. Fathers answered questions when mothers were unavailable. Interviewers were trained to use the standardized measure to request clarification question by question. All categorizations were determined by self report.

Acknowledgments

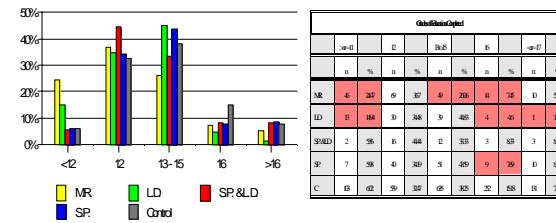
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We extend our sincere thanks to Xuyang Zhang, Marlea O'Brien, and Michael Kitaga.

Results

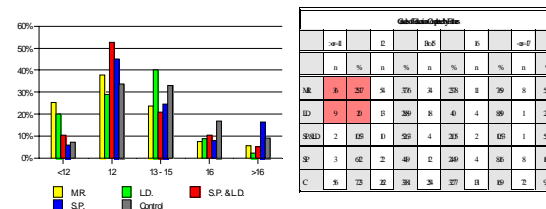
Educational Outcomes

Grades Completed All Parents



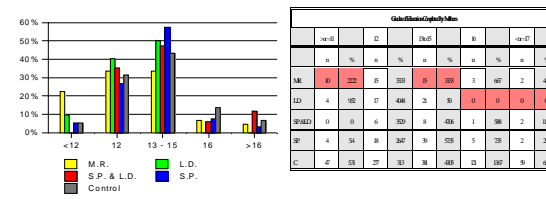
Those who were categorized as mentally retarded were less likely to complete high school as well as less likely to continue with their education. Those who were categorized as learning disabled were also less likely to complete high school as well as less likely to continue with their educations. Those categorized as speech impaired were less likely to finish 16 years of education.

Fathers



Fathers who were categorized as mentally retarded or learning disabled were less likely to graduate from high school.

Mothers

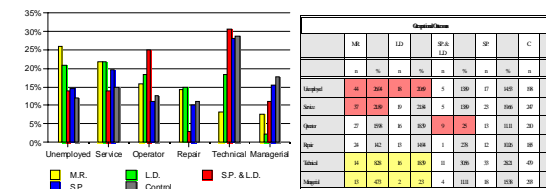


Mothers who were categorized as mentally retarded were less likely to graduate from high school. Mothers who were categorized as mentally retarded or learning disabled were less likely to continue with their educations.

Occupational Outcomes

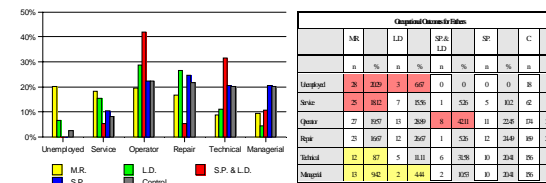
Employment Held

All Parents



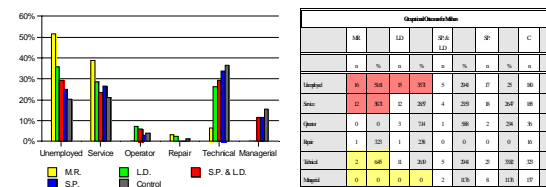
Those who were categorized as mentally retarded were more likely to be unemployed or hold service positions and were less likely to hold technical or managerial positions. Those who were categorized as learning disabled were more likely to be unemployed and less likely to hold technical or managerial positions. Those who were categorized as speech impaired and learning disabled were more likely to hold operator positions.

Fathers



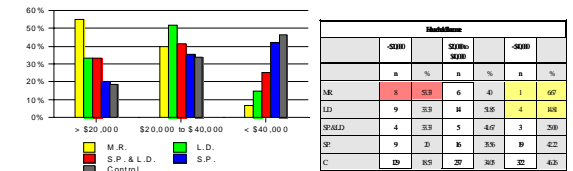
Fathers who were categorized as mentally retarded were more likely to be unemployed or hold service positions and less likely to hold technical or managerial positions. Fathers who were categorized as learning disabled were more likely to be unemployed and less likely to hold managerial positions. Fathers who were categorized as speech impaired and learning disabled were more likely to hold operator positions.

Mothers



Mothers who were categorized as mentally retarded were more likely to be unemployed or hold service positions and were less likely to hold technical or managerial positions. Mothers who were categorized as learning disabled were more likely to be unemployed and less likely to hold managerial positions.

Household Income



In order to investigate whether the high unemployment rate in mothers, income levels were compared across diagnoses. Mothers who were categorized as mentally retarded were more likely to live in homes with a lower income level (<\$10,000 per year) and less likely to live in homes with a higher income level (>\$40,000). Mothers who were categorized as learning disabled were less likely to live in homes with a higher income level (>\$40,000).

Conclusions

Educational Outcomes

Some learning disorders did adversely affect educational outcomes. Those categorized as mentally retarded fared the worst, while those with learning disabilities did not do as poorly as those with mental retardation but still significantly worse than peers. Surprisingly, those categorized as speech impaired and learning disabled did not fare as poorly as did those with just learning disabilities; however, the trend was for them to do more poorly, though the differences were not statistically significant. Those with speech impairment did not look different from the controls.

Occupational Outcomes

Various learning disabilities did adversely affect occupational outcomes. Once again, those categorized as mentally retarded fared the worst, while those categorized as learning disabled did somewhat better but still worse than controls. Those categorized as speech impaired and learning disabled were somewhat affected but not to the degree of those categorized as learning disabled alone. Those with speech impairments alone achieved the best, looking similar to parents with no learning problems.

Gender

The effects of gender are somewhat unclear. Because of a loss of power some of the group effects were not as evident when comparing among genders. However, some differences were still evident. Mothers were more likely to achieve higher levels of education, especially completing 13 to 15 years. These grades are likely to reflect associate degrees. Mothers were more likely to hold service positions and less likely to hold managerial positions. Fathers were more likely to hold repair or operator positions. Mothers were more likely to be unemployed; in control households. This is likely to be a choice rather than an inability to find work.