

ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN ABOUT SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

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SUMMARY

Introduction: Specific learning disorders include dyslexia - reading disorder, dysgraphia - writing disorder, dyspraxia and discoloration - difficulties with mathematical tasks. Along with these disorders, hyperactivity disorder and attention deficit are often associated with these disorders. According to available data, 2/3 of children who have difficulty reading, writing, and counting have a lack of attention. Diagnosing these disorders is an important task for parents, preschools and schools, because it is prerequisite for understanding and treatment.

The aim of the research was to gain information how the parents of preschool children get information and knowledge about learning disabilities at children, were they able to recognize the symptoms, what was the main source of their information and whether information was understandable and reliable.

Methods: Five hundred (510) respondents participated in the survey. The survey was conducted from July to August 2016 and was conducted through a "google" application. The survey was placed at different social networks, and the participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous with the note that parents of preschool and school children were participating. A survey of 10 questions with the offered answers was used in the survey.

Results and conclusion: The results have shown that parents majority of information get from Internet /which is understandable for this sample, because the survey was done through Internet/. Most parents received information through online pages, which did not always mean getting the correct information.

They expressed a need for expert education and more public talk about children's learning disabilities. Parents have been interested in this topic, so it is necessary to organize different workshops and lectures that will be led by experts to provide reliable and useful information and to put more professional information on Internet for parents.

Key words: learning disabilities – parents – education - children

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INTRODUCTION

Specific learning disabilities are states that cause a disparity between the potential and the reached levels of learning according to the anticipated intellectual capabilities of a person. They include concentration and /or attention disturbances, speech development disorders, or visual or auditory data processing (Cvitković 2010, Bjelica et al. 2005). The literature also mentions specific learning difficulties affecting the ability to use spoken or written language, performing mathematical calculations, coordinating movement or directing attention to the task. They include reading, math and writing, as well as problems in understanding verbal and non-verbal expression (Lenček et al. 2007, Fletcher et al. 2007).

There are many definitions of learning difficulties and they are not significantly different from the first definition given by Kirk (1962) which defines learning difficulties as a retardation, disorder, lag in development in one or more processes (speech, language, writing, math, etc.) resulting from a psychological deficiency caused by possible dysfunctions and /or emotional disturbances and behavioral disturbances. It is not a result of mental retardation, sensory impairment or cultural and educational factors (Kirk 1962, Hammill et al. 1981).

It is important to emphasize the overlap of difficulties and although dyslexia is related to literacy, we need to be aware of overlapping between dyslexia and other difficulties (dyscalculia, dysgraphia, ADHD, ADD) (Cutting & Denckla 2003). Thus, Kaplan et al. (2001) present an outline focused on specific syndromes and names and suggest that there are no clear diagnostic categories of disorder and that overlap is a rule rather than an exception.

According to available data, 2/3 of children who have difficulty reading, writing, and counting have a lack of attention (Cutting & Denckla 2003, Mayes et al. 2000, Denckla et al. 2013). Diagnosing these disabilities is an important task for parents, preschools and schools, because this is a prerequisite for understanding and treatment.

According to some data, 5.5% of children aged 6-17 years need support and assistance for specific learning disabilities, twice as many boys as girls (NCLD 2014). There are no precise data in the Croatia and it is considered that the number of children with specific learning disabilities ranges from 5 to 10% of the population (DSM-V 2013, Kocijan-Hercigonja et al. 2004).

Disabilities may vary by the severity, intensity and presence of individual symptoms, so it is very difficult to diagnose them and this is one of the reasons why there are so many unexplored cases. It is important for

these learning disabilities to be different from learning difficulties encountered by each child, which are the result of environmental, emotional, cultural or economic factors, or visual, auditory or motor impairment or mental retardation (Cvitković 2010, Bašić 2001).

Also it is important to support and understand the environment, as parents who will actively help the child to master the materials, to the teacher who will try to bring the material closer and adapt to the child (Buyse et al. 2001). Equally important is the education of both parents and teachers, general practitioners, education of the general population and the media, precisely because a large part of the disorder is not diagnosed at all (Ivančić & Stančić 2013, 2002; Kocijan Hercigonja et al. 2004, Reid 2013).

Survey of Public Perceptions of Learning Disabilities (LD) arranged by National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD 2012) collected data from a random sampling of 1,980 adults in the United States, evenly distributed across males and females, via an online survey. Almost two-thirds of people know someone who has a learning disability. When they asked about different types of learning disabilities, most people are familiar with dyslexia. Two-thirds of people do not know what dysgraphia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia are. Some parents of children with learning disabilities (20 percent) say they're most comfortable consulting the Internet for information regarding their child's learning disability. Most (83 percent) say that early intervention can help, but over half incorrectly cite medication and mental health counseling as treatments (NCLD 2014).

Aim

The aim of the research was to gain information how the Croatian parents of preschool children get information and knowledge about learning disabilities at children, were they able to recognize the symptoms, what was the main source of their information and whether information was understandable and reliable.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey was conducted from July to August 2016 and was conducted through a "google" application. The survey was placed at different social networks, and the participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous with the note that parents of preschool and school children were participating. A survey of 10 questions with the offered answers was used in the survey. Five hundred (510) respondents participated in the survey.

RESULTS

The study involved 510 parents of preschool and school children. The largest percentage, 41.4%, has two children and the majority of parents, 67.1%, have children up to 10 years of age. 53.5% of parents are known and partially acquainted (39%) with specific learning disabilities (Figure 1).

Are you familiar with the concept of learning disabilities, hyperactivity disorder, and attention deficit?

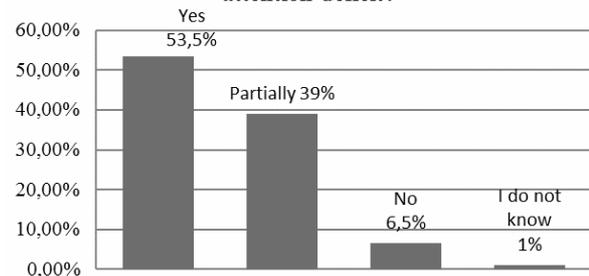


Figure 1. Percentage of familiarity with the concept of learning disabilities, hyperactivity disorder, and attention deficit

Are you familiar with the symptoms?

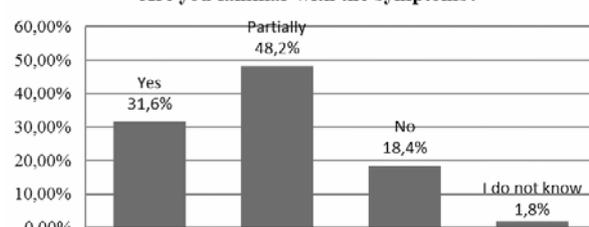


Figure 2. Percentage of familiarity with the symptoms

When asked whether they are familiar with the symptoms of the disabilities, 246 or 48.2% of the examined parents is partially acquainted with the symptoms. 161 or 31.6% answered that they were familiar with the symptoms. 94 or 18.4% parents answered that they were not familiar with the symptoms, while nine (9) or 1.8% said they did not know (Figure 2).

Parents mostly (62.5%) access information across different Internet sites, which is not good because the information source is unknown. Very little percentage (5.7%) comes from information on TV and different magazines (3.1%) (Figure 3). Information for the most parents (54.5%) is partially accessible and understandable (Figure 4).

When they asked about more education about specific learning disabilities, most parents (470) or 92.2% agree that education is needed (Figure 5).

When they asked about the public needs of more information about learning disabilities, 465 of the examined parents, or 91.2%, was agreed that the public should be better informed (Figure 6).

How to get information about the disabilities?

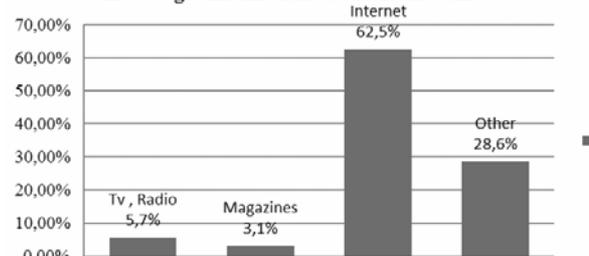


Figure 3. Percentage of getting information about the disabilities

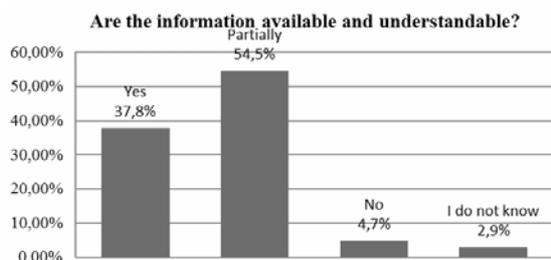


Figure 4. Percentage of understanding and availability of information

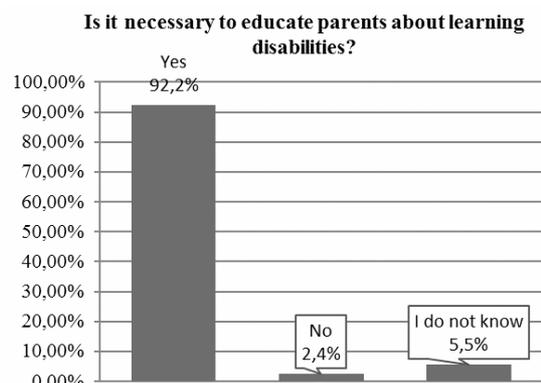


Figure 5. Percentage of need for education about learning disabilities

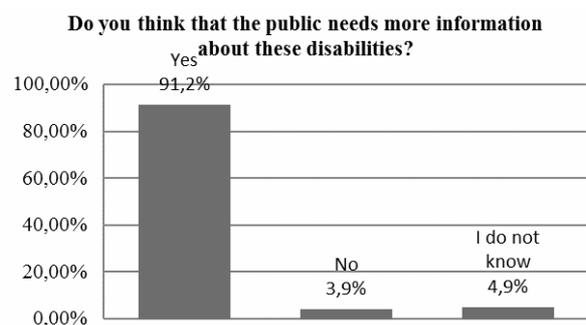


Figure 6. Percentage of the need for public education on disabilities

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research results shown that more than half of the parents who use Internet are only partially introduced to the concepts of learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder. This result is in accordance with a Survey of Public Perceptions of Learning Disabilities (LD) arranged by National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD 2012) which collected data from a random sampling of 1,980 adults in the United States, evenly distributed across males and females, via an online survey (NCLD 2014).

The result of Croatian sample is not just because of the language barrier, Croatian parents who use Internet do not get enough information because they are not familiar with English language and there is not enough available professional information in Croatian language on Internet. It could be the reason why half of them think that the information on this subject is only partially understandable and available.

Over 90 % of parents who participated in the Survey think that it is necessary to educate parents and 90 % declare that public need to learn more about these disorders, so different types of learning should be offered by society. More professional and understandable information on Internet in Croatian language should be provided for this group of people because they get the most information in this way, but also more TV shows and articles in journals and magazines, lectures and workshops in schools and kindergartens on this topic should be provided.

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Contribution of individual authors:

Ivana Zivoder: design of the study, literature searches and analyses, interpretation of data, writing of the report

Sanja Martic-Biocina: literature searches and analyses, interpretation of data, writing of the report

Jelena Miklečić: design of the study, recruitment and collection of data, statistical analyses, writing of the report

Goran Kozina: interpretation of data, statistical analyses, writing of the report

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