

# Parent and teacher ratings on Gender differences in social skills, problem behaviours and academic competence of children with mild intellectual disability in inclusive education

G.Sasikala\* & DR. P.SWARNAKUMARI\*\*

\*Research Scholar, P.G & Research Department of Rehabilitation Science, Holy Cross College (Autonomous) Trichy-620002

\*\*Associate Professor & Research Advisor, P.G & Research Department of Rehabilitation Science, Holy Cross College (Autonomous) Trichy-620002

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**ABSTRACT:** *Quality social skills are critical to successful functioning in life. These skills enable us to know what to say, how to make good choices, and how to behave in diverse situations. The extent to which children with mild intellectual disability and adolescents possess good social skills can influence their academic performance, behaviour, social and family relationships, and involvement in extracurricular activities. Social skills are also linked to the quality of the school environment and school safety.*

*While most children pick up positive skills through their everyday interactions with adults and peers, it is important that educators and parents reinforce this casual learning with direct and indirect instruction. We must also recognize when and where children pick up behaviors that might be detrimental to their development or safety. In the past, schools have relied exclusively on families to teach children important interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. However, increased negative societal influences and demands on family life make it imperative that schools partner with parents to facilitate this social learning process. This is particularly true today given the critical role that social skills play in maintaining a positive school environment and reducing school violence.*

*The study aims to investigate gender differences on social skills, problem behaviors and academic competencies of children with mild intellectual disability based on their teachers and parent ratings in inclusive education. The study is descriptive in nature. The data was collected through SOCIAL SKILLS RATING SYSTEM (SSRS)-Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Obtained data were transcribed and analyzed using Descriptive and Differential analysis. Results showed that girls scored higher than boys on social skills. Conversely, teachers and parents scored boys higher than girls on the externalizing and hyperactivity problem behaviors with no gender differences on internalizing. Also, girls scored higher than boys on academic competences.*

**Key Words:** *Social Skills, Problem behaviour, Academic competence, Inclusive Education, Children with mild intellectual disability.*

## INTRODUCTION

Intellectual disability is one of the distressing impairment in the society. Development of an individual with intellectual disability depends on the type and extent of the underlying disorder. Social development means acquisition of the ability to behave in accordance with social expectations and it involves 3 processes i) learning to behave in socially approved ways, ii) playing approved social roles and iii) development of social attitudes. For children with intellectual disability, their eventual level of social development has implications for the degree of support needed in their academic competence and their integration in the community with increasing emphasis on mainstreaming the attainment of skills in personal, domestic and community functioning. It also contributes to quality of life. Children with intellectual disabled due to low intellectual growth, function with limited capacity in comparison to normal children. Hence the social functioning of these children is found to be affected.

The social skills, academic competence in existence with problem behaviour considered these three concepts as subdomain of social competence by the Researchers (Gresham & Elliot, 1990; Parkhurst & Asher, 1992; Manz, Fantuzzo & McDermott, 1999). It is considered as one of the most important accomplishments of childhood years (Bracken, Keith, Walker & 1994; Janyang- Tshring, 2004).

Research study shows that the development of social skills relationships and problem behaviors often differ by gender, starting at early age. While girls are more likely to possess higher social skills and academic competence, boys have often more problem behaviors (Grasham & Elliot, 1990; Lioyd & Smith, 1986;

Benenson, 1996; Roberts & Strayer, 1996; Nemeth, 1999; Taylor, Liang, Tracy, Williams & Seigle, 2002; Huaqing & Kaiser, 2003, Keane & Calkins, 2004, Margets, 2005). Clearly, further research is needed to help to understand the gender differences on social skills.

On the other hand, in most studies, a single informant was used to categorize the social skills and problem behaviors of children, such as peers (Pakaslahti & Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2001), or teachers (Rodkin et al., 2000). In the present study the ratings of different informants, namely teachers and parents, because both informants can share valuable information about the child's social behaviors (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1989; Jamyang- Tshring, 2004). Thus, it is important to measure social skills of children with intellectual disability both girls and boys in several environments, both at home and at school.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To study the social skills in mild intellectual disability with regard to cooperation, assertion, self control, responsibility and empathy.
- 2) To study the problem behaviour in mild intellectual disability with regard to externalizing, internalizing factors.
- 3) To study the academic competence of children with mild intellectual disability.

### METHOD

#### Participants

The sample for this study was drawn from inclusive education schools in Trichy district. The teachers (n = 400) and parents (n = 400) of 400 children with mild intellectual disability (200 girls and 200 boys) were asked to rate the social skills of the children who were in the age group of 11-14 yrs. The respondents rating the subject's behaviors were mothers (50.75%) and fathers (49.25%). The teachers participated in this study were female (80.8%) and males (19.3%).

#### Materials

##### The Social Skills Rating System-parent and teacher forms (SSRS-T, SSRS-P):

The Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990) is a collection of non-referenced and multirater instruments for the assessment of children's social skills. Teacher (SSRS-T) and Parent (SSRS-P) rating scales contain the domains of Social Skills (Cooperation, Assertion, and Self- Control.) In addition to these subdomains, the Parent Form measures a Responsibility subdomain), Problem Behaviors (Internalizing Problems, Externalizing Problems and Hyperactivity subdomains), and academic competence (only the teacher form). The SSRS-T form is a 51 item rating scale comprised of 30 social, 12 problem behaviors and 9 academic competence. The SSRS- Parent form contains 52 items; there are 40 items that belong to social skills and 12 pertain to problem behaviors. The Frequency rating provides information on "how often" a perceived behaviour occurs in the classroom and at home (2 = very often, 1 = sometimes. and 0 = never).

The procedure in this study included two phases: the translation and adaptation of the instruments, and the data collection. First, the researcher translated the original measures from English into Tamil. To ensure accuracy of the translation, a Tamil professor checked the translated items and some modifications were made. The teachers were asked to assess the children on the SSRS-T. After teachers completed their ratings, the parental rating was collected. The collected data was analyzed by the researchers using SPSS software 13.0 for windows.

### RESULTS

To find whether statistically gender differences exist between social skills, problem behaviors and also academic competence of Children with mild intellectual disability in inclusive education, statistical comparisons of the SSRS results were conducted using descriptive statistics and independent Z-test analyses between the girls and boys based on parent and teacher's ratings. As shown in Table 1, the results showed that according to parents and teachers, girls scored higher than boys on total and all subscales of social skills (except Assertion ( $Z = -0.751, p < 0.05$ ). There is no difference between the two based on teacher and parents' ratings ( $Z = .575, p < 0.05$ ) on the externalizing and internalizing behaviour ( $Z = .0591, p < 0.05$ ). Also, teachers scored girls higher than boys on academic competences ( $Z = 0.027, p < 0.05$ ).

Table 1.Descriptive statistics and independent sample Z-test results of study variables for girls and boys

| Social Skills Subscales   | Sex    | N   | TEACHER |        |        |       | PARENTS |       |         |        |
|---------------------------|--------|-----|---------|--------|--------|-------|---------|-------|---------|--------|
|                           |        |     | Mean    | SD     | Z      | P     | Mean    | SD    | Z       | P      |
| Cooperation               | Male   | 200 | 9.68    | 4.356  | -1.160 | 0.247 | 9.29    | 4.080 | -1.728  | 0.085  |
|                           | Female | 200 | 10.20   | 4.523  |        |       | 10.04   | 4.641 |         |        |
| Assertion                 | Male   | 200 | 9.54    | 4.274  | -0.751 | 0.453 | 9.13    | 3.723 | -1.514  | 0.131  |
|                           | Female | 200 | 9.87    | 4.513  |        |       | 9.75    | 4.436 |         |        |
| Self control              | Male   | 200 | 9.78    | 4.248  | 1.082  | 0.280 | 8.91    | 3.579 | -2.147  | 0.032* |
|                           | Female | 200 | 10.27   | 4.794  |        |       | 9.79    | 4.561 |         |        |
| Responsibility            | Male   | 200 | -       | -      | -      | -     | 9.44    | 3.812 | -2.2259 | .024*  |
|                           | Female | 200 | -       | -      |        |       | 10.38   | 4.443 |         |        |
| Overall social skills     | Male   | 200 | 29.00   | 12.056 | -1.054 | 0.293 | 10.44   | 4.388 | -0.978  | 0.328  |
|                           | Female | 200 | 30.34   | 13.248 |        |       | 10.86   | 4.195 |         |        |
| <b>PROBLEM BEHAVIOURS</b> |        |     |         |        |        |       |         |       |         |        |
| Externalizing             | Male   | 200 | 4.89    | 2.899  | 0.575  | 0.566 | 5.54    | 2.520 | -1.062  | 0.289  |
|                           | Female | 200 | 4.72    | 2.839  |        |       | 5.28    | 2.472 |         |        |
| Internalizing             | Male   | 200 | 4.90    | 3.018  | 0.591  | 0.555 | 5.32    | 2.277 | -0.689  | 0.492  |
|                           | Female | 200 | 4.73    | 2.729  |        |       | 5.17    | 2.225 |         |        |
| Overall behaviours        | Male   | 200 | 9.78    | 5.538  | 0.625  | 0.532 | 10.86   | 4.388 | -0.978  | 0.328  |
|                           | Female | 200 | 9.45    | 5.167  |        |       | 10.44   | 4.195 |         |        |
| Academic Competence       | Male   | 200 | 21.24   | 7.633  | 0.207  | 0.837 | -       | -     | -       | -      |
|                           | Female | 200 | 21.09   | 7.376  |        |       | -       | -     |         |        |

\*P&lt;0.05-Significant

## DISCUSSION

The intention of this study was to determine whether statistically significant differences exist on the social skills, problem behaviors and academic competence of children with mild intellectual disability as assessed by Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) Teacher and Parent Questionnaire.

The above Table-1 indicates whether statistically differences exist between social skills, problem behaviors and also academic competence of children with intellectual disability in inclusive settings, statistical comparisons of the SSRS results were conducted using descriptive statistics and independent Z-test analyses between the girls and boys based on parent and teacher's ratings. As shown in Table -1, the results showed that according to parents and teachers, girls scored higher than boys on total and all subscales of social skills. Conversely, teachers and parents scored boys higher than girls on the externalizing and internalizing problem behaviours. Also, teachers scored girls higher than boys on academic competences.

The authors of the SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) found gender to be the most important characteristic of the child associated with differences in social skills. They provided separate norms for boys and girls in the SSRS manual in the SSRS standardization study, girls were rated higher on the social skills subscales, whereas, boys were rated higher on the problem behaviour. Gender was associated with social skills and problem behaviors. The findings indicated that female were rated as having higher cooperation, assertion, responsibility and self- control and total social skills. Also, informants rated boys more on externalizing, internalizing, and total problems behaviors.

On average, girls were rated higher on positive behaviour than boys. These gender differences likely reflect societal expectations. According to Deaux (1998), appropriate sex-roles and sex-typed behaviors are learned, guided and transmitted by cultural stereotypes and reactions. Female children are expected to identify themselves more with the motherhood role and be more cooperative in household tasks than boys. They also expected to be more submissive, kind, gentle, responsive, empathic, and prosocial than boys from early age (Nourani, 1998). The boys are seen as outgoing and less cooperative in household tasks. The stereotypic gender roles prescribing more other-oriented and well-controlled behaviour for girls than for boys, it is possible that the pressure to display such behaviour is stronger for girls than for boys.

Problem behaviour in early childhood, characterized by internalizing and externalizing has been the focus of considerable developmental research. This focus is due largely to the observation that these problems are highly stable across childhood among boys compared to girls. Keenan and Shaw (1997) suggest that these gender differences are initially due to the fact that girls have a more distinct pattern of problem behaviour than boys across the course of development. Boys who engaged in aggression early in development continued to display such problems, whereas girls did not.

The consistent results in scoring girls are higher than boys on social skills and lower than boys on problem behaviors identified in different cultures have theoretical importance. It implies that social skills and problem behaviors may not be culture-bound. Ghorbani (2004) gives reasons that collectivist and

individualist values correlated positively in both societies.

Differences between teacher and parent rating on cooperation, self- control, assertion and responsibility of social skills can be interpreted as because parents and teachers observe different aspects of the child's behaviour it is reasonable that their information is not equal, but can be seen as completing (Frauenglass&Routh, 1990). Parents' reports, in fact, may improve and deepen a teacher's understanding of a child. Also, girls scored higher than boys on academic competencies. It can manifest higher academic motivation of the girl. On the other hand, it may reflect gender roles expectations in which teachers expect more academic competence from girls than the boys, then rate them higher, although this area needs moreresearch.

Carteledge and Milburn (1995) reported the results of Milburn (1974) study suggesting that "Teachers rated the skills concerned with order, cooperative behaviour, accepting consequences, following do'sand directions, avoiding conflict, and basic self-help behaviour as more important. They rated as less important the skills that involved initiating contact with others, greeting and conversation, being assertive in interpersonal relationships, and performing for others.

The implication of these differences in assessment is that parents and teachers differ in terms of behaviors they are better qualified to rate. According to Edelbrock (1983) parents are generally better qualified to rate behaviorswhich occur primarily at home (such as eating, toileting, bedwetting, and sleeping). Teachers, on the other hand, are better qualified to rate behaviors related to classroom, peer group, academic skills, and inattentiveness.

Social behavior is a broad construct that includes both positive social skills that may lead to desirable social outcomes and negative social behaviors (antisocial and aggressive behavior) that may lead to negative outcomes (Merrell, 1993).

Social skills are socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact effectively with others and to avoid socially unacceptable responses (Gresham &Elliot, 1984). Problem behaviors tend to interfere with social skills and may involve verbal or physical aggression towards others, poor control of temper, or arguing. Both social skills and behaviour have an effect on academic competence in children. Therefore, it is acceptable to believe that there is a relationship between social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence.

## CONCLUSION

Social skills domain is very closely related to theemergence of behavioural problems in children with mild intellectual disability. Children with better social skills performance have less problem behaviors and higher academic competence vice versa. It is confirmed that, more cooperative and more responsible children with mild intellectual disability, problem behaviors occur much less frequently.

These results confirm the need for a systematic approach to empower children, teachers and parents in the domain of social functioning.

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