Dyslexia and psycho-social functioning: An exploratory study of the role of self-esteem and understanding

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Abstract: Individuals with dyslexia may have lower self-esteem and exhibit more emotional and behavioural difficulties than those without reading problems. However, the nature of any relationship between self-esteem and psychopathology remains unknown. This exploratory study assessed levels of self-esteem using the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Manual for the Self-Perception Profile for Children. University of Denver, CO: Denver; 1985) and psycho-social adjustment using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (J. Child Psychol. Psychiatry, 1997; 38: 581-586) and examined child and parent understanding, attitudes and the perceived impact of reading difficulties on daily life. Sixty-eight children assessed as dyslexic on the basis of discrepancy scores (mean age 11.2 years; 44 male), and their parents, participated. No global self-esteem deficit was found, but the mean score for both child and parent-rated scholastic competence was significantly lower than that of the general population. Rates of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties were significantly higher than in the general population and were correlated with self-esteem. For children who had high global selfworth, both children and their parents had more positive attitudes towards their reading difficulties and were less likely to perceive a negative impact on relationships. The association between academic self-esteem and emotional symptoms is consistent with the proposed link between dyslexia and internalizing difficulties. Good self-esteem and a good understanding of dyslexia may help children avoid some of these difficulties. Further research with larger more representative samples is necessary as understanding the factors that promote successful psycho-social adjustment is essential to the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies. Copyright © 2009 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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