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PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT AMONG INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes and discusses the significance of IQ in the psychological adjustment of adolescent children. In considering these variables, we have focused our research on intellectually gifted secondary school children, and their comparison with intellectually non-gifted counterparts. Out of 197 participants; 93 secondary school children were intellectually gifted with IQ scores 130 or above and 104 were non-gifted secondary school children with IQ scores between 90 and109. The age range of the participants was from 12 years to 16 years. Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scales (RIAS; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2003) and Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (RAASI; Reynolds, 2001) were administered to assess the intellectual functioning and psychological adjustment of the participants respectively. The results showed significant mean difference on the scores of adjustment [t (195) = -9.46, p<.05] between intellectually gifted and non-gifted secondary school children. Findings of present study reflect that the gifted children tend to show lower level of adjustment problems in comparison to their non-gifted counterparts.

Keywords: Adjustment; secondary school; gifted children; intelligence

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INTRODUCTION

Rathus and Nevid (1992) define adjustment mechanisms as processes that people use to respond to environmental demands. The successful adjustment thus described as a mechanism through which people can regulate behavior, fulfill their needs to achieve favorable outcomes and attain successful solutions to the problems. They interpret their experiences which help them perceiving the way out to the problems and thus minimize chances of over aroused emotions.

A person's way of countering the environmental forces usually reflects his adjustment level; when he cope up with them effectively he is considered as a well adjusted person and when he lacks efficient use of those coping mechanisms he is at a greater risk for maladjustment. There is a controversy in the existing findings related to the adjustment of gifted children. Many researchers found that high ability children are better or at least as well, if not better, adjusted than other children (Baker, 1995; Grossberg & Cornell, 1988; Howard-Hamilton & Franks, 1995; McCallister, Nash, & Meckstroth, 1996; Nail & Evans, 1997; Neihart, 1991). Some strongly favor the superior environmental adjustment (Kitano & Lewis, 2005), and psychosocial adjustment (Luthar, Zigler & Goldstein, 1992) of children with high intelligence, while few consider that characteristics associated with giftedness place gifted children at a higher risk for specific social and emotional problems (Neihart, 1999; Shek, Chan & Lee, 1997; Tannenbaum, 1997).

The proponent of the first view considers that higher level cognitive abilities prevent gifted to maladjustment and support them to have self as well as other's orientation. That's why they easily cope with stress and interpersonal conflicts (Garland & Zigler, 1999). In the opinion of Beer (1991), people with higher intelligence may be distinguished with people of average and lower intelligence on the basis of positive thinking, emotional resilience and mental flexibility that certainly leads to good emotional adjustment.

Interestingly, it was also found that intellectually gifted adolescents are generally psychologically well adjusted as compared to other adolescents, but their emotional as well as social development may be in threat in risky conditions. This can be happened to them when their special needs are not met. Higher maturity level also play an important role in maladjustment of gifted pupils, they probably have problem in maintaining friendships, finding compatible friends and sometimes to receive acceptance by their peers and to

satisfy social needs these gifted students deny their actual talents. They find it difficult to cope with their sense of being different (Genshaft et al., 1995; Swiatek 1995). Neihart et al. (2002) highlighted three possible ways in which gifted children may develop the vulnerability towards social and emotional problems. These include their high concerns related to their development and scholastic progression; perfectionist behavior as an indicator of their psychological response to their giftedness; as well as presence of any clinical diagnosis such as attention deficit or learning disability. Other reason as discussed by Archambault, Westberg, Brown, Hallmark, Zhang and Emmons (1993), is teachers less sensitivity to gifted pupil's special needs which may contribute in developing emotional problems.

Despite variety of psychosocial issues faced by the gifted individuals, studies about gifted children and adolescents have generally reported that most of them have effective ways of coping, as evidenced by positive self-concepts and efficient psychosocial adjustment (Ahmad, 1993). Gifted usually are more mature in regulation of emotion (affect) that is healthy management of experiences of emotional nature (Keiley, 2002).

A basic assumption about the concept of giftedness is that it is the interaction of intellectual ability and non intellectual characteristics (Lee & Kubilius, 2006). Lee and Kubilius further identified a number of nonintellectual characteristics including task commitment or motivation; personality attributes (like resilience, risk taking, independence, emotional intensity, assertiveness, and persistence); an internal locus of control; self-efficacy; self-concept; and creativity; which according to them allow cognitive strengths to be developed fully, enabling them to be used and applied to meaningful study and work.

Present study is an effort to analyze whether the intellectual capacities or abilities are interrelated to children's level of psychological adjustment. The notion previously evidenced in a number of related studies as a significant literature supports that gifted students are socially and emotionally mature than their non-gifted age peers (Neihart, 1999). Based on the above literature thus it is hypothesized that if differences in adjustment occur, gifted students will display better adjustment than their non gifted counterparts.

METHOD

Participants

Sample of the present research comprised of 197 secondary school children, from Karachi (Pakistan). The sample comprised of two groups, that is 93 children screened as intellectually gifted (IQ = 130 and above); and 104 as non-gifted secondary school children (IQ of 90-109). The age range of the entire sample was from 12 years to 16 years with mean age of 14 years (*SD*= 1.02). The mean age of gifted children was 13.7 years (*SD*= 1.05), while mean age of non gifted sample was 14.4 years (*SD*= 0.87). The education level of the participants was between grade 7 and grade 10.

Measures

Personal Information Form

Personal and demographic information was obtained through items which focused on the participant's age, gender, education, parental education & occupation, family structure, and monthly income of family.

Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scale (RIAS)

Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scale (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2003) is an individually administered test of intelligence requires 20 - 25 minutes for administration. The RIAS is comprised of two subtests that is Verbal and Non Verbal. RIAS can be administered from age 3.0 to 94. The Reynolds intellectual assessment scale has seven IQ categories. i.e. significantly above average = 130 and above, moderately above average = 120-129, above average = 110-119, average = 90-109, below average = 80-89, moderately below average = 70-79, and significantly below average = 69 and below. Reliability coefficients ranged from .90 to .95 for the six RIAS subtests and from .94 to .96 for the four RIAS indexes.

Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (RAASI)

Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (Reynolds, 2001) is a 32 items, brief screening measure of adjustment for use with adolescent's ages 12 to 19 years. It provides clinicians and researchers to administer evaluation of

adjustment problems in adolescents. RAASI renders an Adjustment Total (AdjT) score and scores on four factorially derived scales. It includes Antisocial Behavior (AB), Anger Control Problems (AC), Emotional Distress (ED), and Positive Self (PS). For the purpose of current study total adjustment scores on RAASI were computed. RAASI is reported to have adequate psychometric properties. It may be noted that the higher scores on sub scales and adjustment total of the inventory indicate greater problem in this area. It has high internal consistency (.92), two weeks test retest reliability (.89) for total developmental sample. High internal consistency coefficients were found for RAASI scales ranging from (.71-.88) and test retest reliability coefficients ranging from (.83-.86).

Procedure

A list of English medium secondary schools (Private) situated in the urban area of Karachi was obtained from official website of Govt. of Sindh, Pakistan. Fifteen schools were randomly selected for data collection. After getting permission from authorities of the schools the participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and confidentiality was assured. First the examiner filled in the Personal and demographic Information Form. It consisted of items focusing on the participant's age, gender, education, residence, parental education, family structure and family income. Initially students were assessed through use of Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scales (RIAS; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2003) to assess their IQ's. 93 students were screened as intellectually gifted having IQ of 130; While their non gifted counterparts (n=104) having IQ between range of 90-109, were also identified. Then Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (RAASI, 2003) was administered to assess the level of psychological adjustment of both groups of children.

Statistical Analysis

In order to examine the data statistically, SSPS, Vol. 12 was used for statistical analysis. 't'-test for independent sample was computed to determine the difference between Intellectually gifted and non-gifted secondary school children on the variable of adjustment.

RESULTS

Table 1
Difference between Gifted and Non-gifted Students in level of Adjustment

Group	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation	*t*	*df*	Sig.
Gifted	93	15.03	6.72	-9.46	195	p< .01
Non-gifted	104	26.48	9.78			

Table 2
Difference between Gifted and Non- gifted Students in level of Adjustment for both male and female participants

Variables	Group	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation	*t*	*df*	Sig.
Male	Gifted	43	15.74	7.02	-5.480	119	p<.01
	Non-gifted	78	24.93	9.67			
Female	Gifted	50	14.42	6.46	-9.45	74	p<.01
	Non-gifted	26	31.11	8.71			

DISCUSSION

The results showed a significant difference [table 1; t (195) = -9.46, p <.05], as intellectually gifted secondary school children obtained lower mean scores (M = 15.03) on the variable of adjustment as compared to non-gifted peers (M = 26.48), reflecting higher adjustment compared to their counterparts. Consistent with previous research (Neihart, 1999), our results suggest that compared to other students of their age, gifted students have strengths in psychological adjustment; they function well in, without significant adjustment or discipline problems. These results are also supported by previous studies

conducted globally that the label of "intellectually gifted students" is attributed to better psychological adjustment as compared to their non-gifted counterparts (Howard, Hamilton, & Franks, 1995; Jarosewich & Stocking, 2003; Nail & Evans, 1997). Similar findings were found when males [t (119) = -5.480, p<.01] and females [t (74) = -9.45, p<.01) were studied separately.

There are certain reasonable explanations for better psychological adjustment in children with higher level of IQ. Giftedness is not only characterized by high cognitive abilities, it also serves as a protective factor against risk situations because of associated effective problem solving skills. The explanation is supported by past researches as Buescher (1985), and Wertlieb, Weigel, and Feldstein (1987) recommended that intellectually gifted children prefer to get quick and proficient solutions to their difficulties and most of them selecting action-oriented approaches to solve their problems. Interestingly, some other studies have also suggested that those children who utilize better problem-solving approaches have healthier adjustment (Carson, Swanson, Cooney, Gillum, & Cunningham, 1992; Compas, Malcarne, & Fondacaro, 1988).

Despite having problem solving abilities some other factors associated with better adjustment include social understanding and better ability to form healthy relationships. Past researches indicate that the gifted children have heightened sensitivity towards others and environment and also deeply empathize with other people (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Piechowski, 1997). The resulting healthy relationships thus help them in better adjustment and enhance the sense of self efficacy.

Gifted children may have unique social and emotional developmental characteristics and more intense need to achieve their goals. The attainment of goals may in return lead to appreciation and encouragement from others that could also lead to positive adjustment.

Conclusion

The current research suggests that a high IQ in children is associated with psychological wellbeing indicating lower level of psychological adjustment problems. The research findings are consistent with the interpretation that intellectually giftedness is a protective factor. Conclusions drawn from extensive reviews of the literature related to gifted children suggest that having superior

cognitive abilities children with high intelligence are able to utilize resources adequately that reduces the risk of psychosocial problems.

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