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Delineating Gender Disparities in Cognitive Abilities and Social Functioning Among Children with Intellectual' Disabilities

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

The current study was aimed at exploring and delineating gender differences in cognitive abilities and social functioning among children diagnosed with intellectual disabilities. The study was conducted on 50 children with intellectual disabilities, both with and without autism (39 of which were male and 11 were female). DST, VSMS, and ISAA scales were administered to the sample. The demographic details assessed the age, gender, residence, and family type of the ID children. The data was computed using statistics including descriptive statistics, Pearson product moment correlation, and the t-test for independent means with SPSS (version 25.0) as statistical software. The t-test was used to determine the mean differences for each of the dependent variables independently based on age, gender, residence, family type, and severity separately for each of the dependent variables (developmental age, developmental quotient, social age, and social quotient). To determine the correlation between the dependent variables, DA, DQ, SA, and SQ, Pearson's product moment correlation was calculated. Statistical analysis revealed no significant difference in developmental age, development quotient, social age, and social quotient. Furthermore, there exists a significant difference between the developmental quotient and social quotient with the severity levels, whereas a positive correlation was found between all the variables. Further investigations into the individual disparities among different age groups within the broader population may involve the inclusion of additional associated factors. Intervention strategies can be performed to support their social development, such as social skills training, peer interaction programs, or therapy focused on emotional regulation and social communication.

Keywords – Intellectual Disability, Gender disparities, Developmental Quotient, Social Quotient, Autism.

Introduction:

During the past few decades, gender disparities in the identification of disability have drawn a lot of attention (Daniel & Wang, 2023). Though there are very little differences in overall IQ between genders (Aluja-Fabregat et al., 2000), there have been reports of gender disparities in several cognitive domains. It was conventional to assume that males were better in maths and spatial skills, while females were better at language (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). The aim of this study is to look for gender disparities in cognitive abilities and social functioning among children with intellectual disabilities.

Children diagnosed with intellectual impairments (ID) exhibit severe limits in their ability to think and behave adaptively. They also have delayed motor milestones and impaired sensory-motor function, which impacts the motor, neuromusculoskeletal, and sensory systems (Moussa et al., 2024; Iyer et al., 2024; Jaafari et al., 2023; Gilani et al., 2023; Tantry & Singh, 2016). Cognitive and social functioning are impacted by intellectual disability, which poses a serious challenge to people, especially children, families, and societies globally. Even while research on ID has advanced, there is still a major gap in our understanding of the complex intersections between gender and identity in this population. Children with ID are a vulnerable group, yet they are frequently examined through a monolithic lens that ignores any gender-specific variations that could have a substantial impact on their development and well-being. Identifying rehabilitation programs targeted at enhancing weak skills and comprehending the relationships between functional and

cognitive deficiencies are two major uses of basic cognitive function assessments in individuals with intellectual disabilities (Blasi et al., 2007).

Intelligence:

Intelligence is defined as the ability to learn from experience while also adapting to shaping and selecting situations (Sternberg, 2012). The traditional method of defining intelligence is to use a single number, or IQ, which compares the scores of a group of people of the same age on a series of subtests intended to measure various intellectual abilities. The trials are typically intended to have a standard deviation of 15 and a mean of 100 (Brody, 1999). Intelligence quotient (IQ) plays a key component in the classification of intellectual disability and it's common for IQ testing for the cognitive test done on a child with an intellectual disability (Bertelli et al., 2018).

Gender Differences and Cognitive Abilities:

There has been inconsistent evidence on the differences in cognitive capacities between genders (Palejwala & Fine, 2015). One of the best-supported taxonomies of cognitive skills is Cattell—Horn—Carroll (CHC theory), which classifies cognitive abilities based on factor analysis of over 460 data sets (McGrew, 2009). Based on gender stereotypes, women score better on verbal assessments than men do on maths and spatial tests (Hyde, 2016). However, meta-analyses show that when it comes to maths exams, women and men perform similarly in terms of children and adults (Stumpf & Jackson, 1994). Depending on the kind of ability evaluated, there can be little gender disparity in linguistic abilities (e.g., vocabulary, essay writing). Males exhibit a moderate advantage in 3D mental rotation when compared to females, however, this gender difference is not present in schools where there is no spatial curriculum. The Gender Similarities Hypothesis, which contends that men and women are similar on most psychological variables but not all of them, is supported by meta-analyses examining gender differences across a broad range of psychological attributes (Hyde, 2016).

Gender Differences and Social Functioning:

One of the main characteristics that define intellectual disability (ID) is a limitation in social functioning. Among the two primary features in the (AAMR, 2002) definition of ID is social skills, which has a significant impact on an individual's overall adaptive behaviour (Kraijer, 2000), marked by impairments in cognitive ability and adaptable behaviour as demonstrated by conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. Children with ID have delays in their fundamental social functioning, such as communication, and the more delayed the abilities, the lower the ID level (Gernal et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2023; Tantry & Ali, 2020; Greenberg, 2019; Majeed, 2018a, 2018b; Tantry & Singh, 2017).

Models of Intelligence: Unicomponent and Quotient:

Spearman proposed the first unicomponent model of intelligence. He discovered a correlation between test scores on several cognitive tasks, which he attributed to the 'g' factor (Bertelli et al., 2018). He put forward his two-factor theory of intelligence known as 's' and 'g' factors for specific ability and general factor. His early use of factor analysis techniques indicated that a single component could capture the common variance and that there was correlation between several distinct mental ability tests (Robinson, 1999). It is significant for several reasons, including the fact that it was the first theory that explained the structure of mental abilities, the simplicity with which the theory and its findings were expressed, and the close association that existed between psychological theory and the statistical and mathematical instruments created to test it (Sorour et al., 2024; Al Jaghoub et al., 2024; Mainali & Tantry, 2022; Nivetha & Majeed, 2022; Tantry & Singh, 2018).

Multicomponent Model of Intelligence:

Fluid intelligence (Gf) and crystallised intelligence (Gc) are the two categories of intelligence that make up Cattell's (1963) Gf–Gc hypothesis, which holds that intelligence is not a single entity. Crystallised intelligence is the information and abilities gained through education and experience in a variety of fields, whereas fluid intelligence, according to Cattell (1987), is the capacity to solve abstract issues in fresh contexts (Thorsen et al., 2014). Luria (1980) proposed that there are three fundamental brain structures that interact to produce human cognition, based on the idea that there is no single component that can explain human cognition. These structures include the attentional and arousal unit, integration and executive planning and organisation unit, and sensory input unit.

The Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory proposes that there are various forms of human intellect, and each person possesses each type of intelligence to varying degrees (Al-Qatawneh et al., 2021). Gardner (2000) suggested seven basic intelligences, which reflect seven different methods of showing intellectual abilities: verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, musical, logical/mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and bodily/kinesthetic. Later, three further intelligences were proposed: naturalistic, spiritual, and existential. Gardner (2011) states that the MI theory regards intelligence as a combination of innate capabilities and aptitudes that can develop in multiple ways by means of pertinent knowledge (Gilani et al., 2024; Farooq & Majeed, 2024; Achumi & Majeed, 2024; Hussein & Tantry, 2022).

Intellectual Disability:

Intellectual disability (ID), formerly termed as mental retardation, is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects individuals from early childhood (Djordjevic et al., 2020). It limits intelligence and disrupts abilities necessary for living independently (Panjtan et al., 2023). It is particularly marked by the impairment of developmental skills, including cognitive, verbal, motor, and social abilities, that contribute to the overall level of intelligence (World Health Organization, 1992). It is the circumstance when a child is unable to receive information from their environment, then effectively process it and adapt to the surroundings. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) defines it as a condition characterised by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning (e.g., communication, theoretical learning, abstract thinking, problem-solving) and adaptive behaviour (e.g., cognitive, conceptual skills, everyday social skills, practical skills) (Tassé & Grover, 2013). This limitation can cause a child to develop or learn more slowly or differently than a typically developing child. These disabilities emerge at birth and are apparent before the age of 18 and can be associated with co-occurring conditions such as autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, etc. Intellectual disability is the most common developmental disability, and it is often difficult to diagnose it before the age of 5 years. According to McKenzie et al. (2016), the prevalence of ID is approximately 1%, however, Heikura et al. (2003) found that it can reach up to 3% of the general population (Vibin & Majeed, 2024; Monika et al., 2023a, 2023b; Kendler & Prescott, 2021; Tantry et al., 2019; Gilani, 2014).

Methods:

The current study set intended to compare the levels of intelligence, social quotient, cognitive ability, and activity level between male and female children with intellectual disabilities. Children identified with intellectual disability by a concerned clinical psychologist at a CRC Ahmedabad make up the samples. The sampling technique used was random sampling with a total sample size of 50, among which 39 are males and 11 are females.

Inclusion Criteria:

- 1. Children of the 3-15 age group with Intellectual Disability.
- 2. Children of the 3-15 age group with Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Exclusion Criteria:

- 1. Children below 3 and above 15 age group who have intellectual disability are excluded.
- 2. Children below 3 and above 15 age group who have Autism are excluded.
- 3. Children with comorbid disorders, other than Autism, are excluded.

Tools Used:

1. Developmental Screening Test (DST):

The developmental screening test developed by Dr. J. Bharath Raj was applied to evaluate the children that were chosen with the aim to identify problems with their socio-emotional, cognitive, language, and motor development. Discrete and observable behavioural traits indicative of the corresponding age groups are represented by the 88 items in the DST (Srivastava et al., 2011). With other IQ or developmental tests, the DST had an extremely strong positive correlation, ranging from +.7215 to +.9968. High and good results were also seen for test-retest reliability (.98) and inter-scorer reliability (+.928) (Dhanesh et al., 2012).

2. Vineland Social Maturity Scale (VSMS) Nagpur adaptation:

In 1935, E.A. Doll developed the Vineland Social Maturity scale. It turned out to be a particularly helpful tool for assessing young people's and children's social maturity. The social age and social quotient are estimated, and there is a strong correlation (0.80) with intelligence (Kumar et al., 2009). The VSMS Social Age (S.A.) and the Stanford-Binet test have a strong and constant association, according to numerous tests and studies.

3. Indian Scale for Assessment of Autism (ISAA):

The Indian Scale for Assessment of Autism (ISAA), which measures the severity of autism, was created by the National Institute for Mentally Handicapped (NIMH) in 2009 (Patra et al., 2011). The ISAA is a 40-item scale that is broken down into six domains: behaviour patterns (7 questions), sensory aspects (6 questions), cognitive component (4 questions), speech—language and communication (9 questions), emotional responsiveness (5 questions), social relationship and reciprocity (9 questions), and behaviour patterns (7 questions) (Chakraborty et al., 2015). This measure has demonstrated item and discriminant validity (p < 0.001) in the Indian population.

Hypothesis:

- 1. There will be significant disparities in developmental age, developmental quotient, social age, and social quotient with respect to age, gender, family type, and residence.
- 2. There will be significant differences in DA, DQ, SA, and SQ with respect to severity levels.
- 3. There is a positive relationship among variables.

Result and Discussion:

The analysis was done by using a t-test to see the mean differences for age, gender, residence, family type, and severity separately for each of the dependent variables (developmental age, developmental quotient, social age, and social quotient). Pearson product moment correlation was computed to see the correlation between the dependent variables (DA, DQ, SA, SQ). There were a total of 50 ID children, of which 78% were male and 22% were female.

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Tubieno J. Descriptive statistics										
Age		Gender	Severity	Residence	Familytyp	e Valid50	50			
50	N	50		50						
Missing		0	0	0	0	О				
Mean		7.06	1.22	1.54	1.32	1.28				
Median		7.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00				
Mode		3	1	1	1	1				

Table No 2: Mean differences in DA, DQ, SA, and SQ with respect to gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	SEM	df	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
Male		39	3.62	1.87	.298	48	.174	.863
Female		11	3.51	1.70	.512			
DQ	Male	39	51.1	16.14	2.58	48	901	.372
Female		11	55.9	12.54	3.78			
SA Male	39	3.74	1.88	.301	48	.333	.740	
Female		11	3.52	1.85	·559			
SQ Male	39	52.6	16.53	2.64	48	619	·539	
Female		11	56.0	15.43	4.65			

 $\overline{Table No2: Mean differences in DA, DQ, SA, and SQ with respect to Severity}$

Variable	Severity	N	Mean	SD	SEM	F	Sig.
DA	mild	00	3.869	1.769	.3080	2.348	.085
DA		33				2.340	.005
	moderate	10	3.840	2.067	.6537		
	severe	4	2.275	.5852	.2926		
	profound	3	1.650	.1802	.1040		
DQ	mild	33	61.12	4.328	·753	131.77	<.001
	moderate	10	45.30	7.931	2.565		
	severe	4	23.25	2.986	1.493		
	profound	3	15.67	3.512	2.028		
SA	mild	33	4.003	1.847	.3217	2.083	.115
	moderate	10	3.730	2.094	.6623		
	severe	4	2.550	.4933	.2466		
	profound	3	1.700	.2646	.1528		
SQ	mild	33	62.82	4.510	.785	106.05	<.001
	moderate	10	45.20	10.031	3.172		
	severe	4	25.00	3.830	1.915		
	profound	3	15.00	3.606	2.082		

children with intellectual disability.

Tableno3:Correlationbetweenvariables

	DA	DQ	SA	SQ
DAPearsonCorrelation	1	.376**	.973**	.402**
Sig.(2-tailed)		.007	.000	.004
N	50	50	50	50
DQ PearsonCorrelation	.376**	1	.365**	.960**
Sig.(2-tailed)	.007		.009	.000
N	50	50	50	50
SA PearsonCorrelation	.973**	.365**	1	.424**
Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.009		.002
N	50	50	50	50
SQ PearsonCorrelation	.402**	.960**	.424**	1
Sig.(2-tailed)	.004	.000	.002	
N	50	50	50	50

The study examined gender disparities in cognitive abilities and social functioning among children with intellectual disabilities (ID). Table 2 demonstrates a significant correlation between developmental quotient (DQ) and social quotient (SQ) at the <.001 level. However, no significant differences were found between developmental age (DA) and social age (SA) across severity levels, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis that "There will be a significant difference in DQ and SQ with respect to severity levels." Table 3 illustrates the relationship between developmental age, developmental quotient, social age, and social quotient. Developmental age is positively correlated with developmental quotient (R = .376, P > .01), and is highly positively correlated with social age (R = .973, P > .01). Additionally, developmental age is positively correlated with social quotient (R = .402, P > .01). On the other hand, social quotient shows a high positive correlation with developmental quotient (R = .960, P > .01), but only a moderate correlation with social age (R = .424, P > .01) (Bhardwaj et al., 2023; Sabu et al., 2022; Brown & Barlow, 2022; Tantry & Ahmad, 2019; Majeed, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2018). The issue of gender differences in cognition and social functioning remains complex. In the current study, no significant gender differences were found in these areas among ID children. Hyde (2005), synthesizing 46 meta-analyses, argued for the gender similarities hypothesis, which suggests that cognitive differences between the sexes are minimal. Of the 46 meta-analyses reviewed, 78% showed negligible or nearly negligible differences in psychological traits across genders, including cognitive abilities. The study sample consisted of 50 children with ID, with 66% having mild intellectual disability, 22% moderate, 8% severe, and 5% profound. According to Nagarkar et al. (2014), mild intellectual disability accounts for around 85% of individuals with ID, a finding consistent with the current study. Mild ID generally requires intermittent assistance with daily living tasks and presents challenges in conceptual, social, and practical life skills. The study found a significant correlation between DQ and SQ, with an ANOVA value significant at the <.001 level, indicating statistically significant differences in social development across different levels of ID severity. As the severity of intellectual disability increases, social development decreases, as shown by the following social quotient scores: mild (62.82), moderate (45.20), severe (25.00), and profound (15.00), with corresponding standard deviations of 4.510, 10.03, 3.830, and 3.606. These variations reflect the increasing difficulties in social development as the severity of intellectual disability rises. The analysis also confirmed the correlation between developmental age and developmental quotient. As a child's developmental age increases, their developmental quotient tends to rise as well. However, children with ID may have a developmental age lag compared to their chronological age, meaning they may reach developmental milestones more slowly, resulting in a lower DQ. This indicates a developmental delay compared to typically developing peers. The Pearson correlation coefficient between developmental age and developmental quotient was found to be .376, suggesting a moderate positive correlation. Furthermore, developmental quotient was highly correlated with social age (R = .973), indicating that delays in developmental milestones often affect social development as well. The study found a strong correlation between developmental quotient and social quotient (R = .960), signifying that children with higher developmental abilities tend to exhibit stronger social skills, while those with lower developmental abilities struggle more in social interactions. Bhave et al. (2010) similarly identified a strong link between social quotient and developmental quotient, especially with the mental developmental quotient. Low DQs are typically associated with low SQs, though the reverse is not always true. Regarding the frequency of autism among children with ID, the study found that 11 out of 50 children had autism as a comorbid condition, with autism more prevalent among children with moderate (6%) and severe (2%) intellectual disabilities. Matson & Shoemaker (2009) note that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and intellectual impairment often co-occur, with a higher severity of one disorder influencing the other. Further research is needed to explore the interaction between these two conditions and their impact on cognitive and social functioning.

Conclusion This study aimed to assess gender disparities in cognitive abilities and social functioning among children with intellectual disabilities. The findings indicate no significant gender differences in these areas. However, a positive correlation was observed between developmental age (DA), developmental quotient (DQ), social age (SA), and social quotient (SQ), with significant differences found based on the severity of intellectual disability.

Future Implications The findings from this study underscore the importance of understanding gender and severity differences in cognitive and social development in children with intellectual disabilities. Further research is needed to explore these disparities among different age groups within the broader population. Additionally, interventions such as social skills training, peer interaction programs, and therapies focused on emotional regulation and social communication could support the social development of children with intellectual disabilities.

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