

# Prevalence And Psychosocial Correlates of Learning Disabilities in Lebanese Middle Schools: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis

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## Abstract

Learning disabilities (LDs) remain an underexplored area in the Middle Eastern context, particularly within school systems that face unique structural and socio-cultural challenges. This study investigates the prevalence, associated outcomes, and psychosocial correlates of LDs among a stratified random sample of 665 middle school students (grades 7–9) from public and private schools in the greater Beirut area. The sample was nearly evenly divided by gender (48.3% male, 51.7% female), with students ranging in age from 12 to 18 years ( $M = 13.85$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ). A total of 42.9% attended public schools and 57.1% attended private schools. The average family size was 2.8 children, and most fathers (93.8%) were employed, compared to 36.2% of mothers. Parents' education levels varied widely, with the mean level being grade 11.

Data were collected using standardized instruments to assess academic achievement (z-standardized GPA), behavioral and emotional functioning (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire), family and school environments (Family Environment Scale, School Environment Scale), and coping strategies (Ways of Coping Questionnaire).

Approximately 46.2% of the children reported academic difficulties, primarily in mathematics (27.8%) and language (9.2%), or in both areas (8.1%). Students identified with LDs were significantly older, more likely to be in lower grade levels, and had lower academic performance compared to their peers without LDs. They exhibited higher levels of hyperactivity and conduct problems, as measured by the SDQ. However, no significant differences were found between LD and non-LD students in emotional symptoms or peer problems, suggesting that internalizing difficulties may not be as prominent in this group.

In terms of school environment, children with LDs reported significantly more negative perceptions, including reduced social support from teachers and peers, fewer meaningful relationships with classmates, and less academic assistance from teachers. These findings highlight the role of school climate in either exacerbating or buffering the challenges faced by students with LDs.

Contrary to expectations, no significant differences were found between LD and non-LD students in family environment factors, including cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict, as measured by the Relationship domain of the Family Environment Scale. This suggests that familial relational dynamics may not distinguish children with LDs from their peers in this

population. Similarly, there were no significant differences in coping strategies, whether emotion-focused (e.g., avoidance, distancing, self-control) or problem-focused (e.g., seeking support, problem solving), indicating that students with LDs do not necessarily differ in how they manage stress.

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and psychosocial dimensions of LDs in Lebanese middle schools. The findings underscore the urgent need for inclusive educational policies, targeted school-based interventions, and systemic support to address the academic and behavioral challenges faced by this population.

**Keywords:** Learning disabilities ; behavioral and emotional functioning; family and school environments; Coping styles