

Youth with Disabilities in Minnesota's Juvenile Delinquency Courts

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LInK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we investigated whether youth with disabilities were overrepresented in the juvenile court system as a group and whether youth with particular types of disability were overrepresented. In particular, we were interested in the risk of court appearance for youth with disabilities compared to their non-disability identified peers, and in understanding how risk of court appearance varies by disability type as compared to their non-disability identified peers. Overall, findings indicate that youth with disabilities are more likely to make an appearance in juvenile court. After controlling for gender, race and ethnicity, and free- and reduced-priced lunch status, youth with emotional behavioral disorders and other health impairments were 2.11 times and 1.36 times more likely to end up in court than their non-disabled peers, respectively.

Discussion on Practice Implications

- 1.** In this study we learned that youth with emotional and behavioral disorders are twice as likely as their non-disability identified peers (i.e., those without an IEP) to appear in juvenile court. In what ways can you help reduce court involvement and recidivism (for those who have already been involved with the juvenile justice system) for youth with disabilities, and especially for youth with emotional and behavioral disorders?
- 2.** Oftentimes systems that serve youth are unaware of the disability diagnoses of the youth they serve, and privacy and confidentiality laws can prohibit information sharing. In what ways have you found success in sharing pertinent information across systems to support youth with disabilities? What information should be shared, at what point(s) in time, and with whom? How can you engage parents in these conversations?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

- 1.** The author of this research brief suggests a number of ways to reduce court involvement and recidivism, such as providing counseling and skill-building opportunities for youth with disabilities. What programs are available in your school district or county that can support youth with disabilities? What improvements are needed to make these opportunities accessible and effective?
- 2.** What policy changes are needed at the local, state, or national level to better support youth with disabilities and reduce their interaction with the juvenile justice system?