

Early Risk Factors and Juvenile Justice Outcomes in Youth with High-Incidence Disabilities

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

In this study, we were interested in understanding patterns of early risk factors in youth with high-incidence disabilities (HID) and how those patterns are associated with juvenile justice outcomes. We employed latent class analysis to identify distinct patterns of early risk factors and a logistic regression model to analyze the association between the identified patterns and juvenile justice outcomes. This study identified three meaningful subgroups of youth with HID based on underlying patterns of early risks they experienced: low risk, academic risk, and child welfare risk. The findings suggest that such within-group differences account for the varying developmental outcomes among these youths. Academic challenges and child welfare involvement experienced by youth with HID increased the likelihood of juvenile justice involvement.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. This study found that youth with HID facing academic or child welfare risks were significantly more likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system. Why is it important to understand the link between early risk factors and juvenile justice involvement? What factors or policies contribute to this? Do you observe similar patterns in your practice, and how do they impact your work with youth?
2. What approaches or practices you can implement to reduce juvenile justice involvement among youth with HID facing academic or child welfare risks? How can we better support these youth to prevent negative outcomes? Do existing programs or solutions in your area effectively address these issues? What resources or policies could enhance your ability to help this vulnerable population?
3. What strategies can you employ to identify youth with HID who are at increased risk for juvenile justice involvement due to academic or child welfare risks? How can early identification help mitigate these risks? Are there existing programs or screening tools in your practice that support early identification? What additional resources or policies could improve early detection and intervention for this population?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. Policies regarding early identification of academic and child welfare risks among youth with HID may need improvement to reduce juvenile justice involvement. What does your state policy look like in terms of this issue? What barriers exist? What available practices, resources, systems, agencies, policies, or community or systemic supports can address this issue? How can we advocate for better early identification and intervention practices?
2. Policies concerning cross-system collaboration between education, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems may need improvement to reduce the high rates of juvenile justice involvement among youth with HID. How does your state facilitate cross-system collaboration? What barriers exist? What existing resources or policies can support this collaboration? How can we strengthen community and systemic supports and advocate for more effective cross-system collaboration to protect vulnerable youth?
3. The overrepresentation of youth with HID in the juvenile justice system highlights significant social justice issues. What does your state's policy look like regarding the support and protection of youth with HID? What barriers exist in addressing this overrepresentation? What community resources and systemic supports can help mitigate this issue? How can we advocate for more equitable policies and practices to better support these vulnerable youth within our systems?