

WILL LEARNING DISABILITY LEAD OUR CHILDREN TO DELINQUENCY?

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Abstract

The history of juvenile delinquency suggested a correlation between antisocial behavior and lack of success at school. The first link between learning disability and delinquency basically constitutes a social-psychological explanation. The second theoretical rationale linking learning disability with delinquency is more biologically based than the first. To explain the relationship discovered between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency, Dunivant has formulated five hypotheses, they are: the school failure hypothesis, the susceptibility hypothesis, the differential arrest hypothesis, the differential adjudication hypothesis and the differential disposition hypothesis. There are some studies which do not support the link between learning disability and juvenile delinquency. It is also important to keep in mind that research has indicated that numerous factors other than learning disability might put individuals at risk for delinquency. Since most the research work have been done in other countries and not in India regarding the link between learning disability and juvenile delinquency, there is no proof to support that learning disability will lead our children to a life of delinquents with special reference to Indian setting. Captivating the seriousness of the problem, prevention and intervention measures must be taken to overcome learning disability and thereby reducing the risk of delinquent behavior among children in future.

Keywords: Disability, Delinquency, Correlation, Antisocial

INTRODUCTION

Is there any link between learning disability and delinquent behavior among children? And the experts answer is, the risk of being delinquent is more among learning disabled children than normal children. The theories of learning disabilities suggested some characteristics of the learning disabled children, such as distractibility, impulsiveness, hyperactivity, low self-concept, low tolerance level of frustration, gullibility etc., may easily render them vulnerable to delinquency (Pickar, 1986). This has been proved from the anecdotal experiences of many foreign delinquent children where they have been identified with the history of learning disability. The history of juvenile delinquency suggested a correlation between antisocial behavior and lack of success at school (Silberberg & Silberberg, 1971). This article discusses whether learning disabilities lead our children to a life of delinquents? and also analyses the causes for such delinquent behavior in detail.

THE LINK BETWEEN LEARNING DISABILITY AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

The first link between learning disability and delinquency basically constitutes a social-psychological explanation. The organic cause of delinquency, the learning disability, is a precondition and probably only one of many preconditions. The more proximate cause of delinquency is the combination of school failure, social rejection and association with bad companions

The second theoretical rationale linking learning disability with delinquency is more biologically based than the first. The suggestion that learning disabilities affect cognitive development and processes of understanding, which, in turn, render one less appreciative of social rules and sanctions, represents a combination of biological and psychological concepts in the explanation of delinquency. This type of collaborative conceptualization is related to one's ability to learn and appreciate social rules.

HYPOTHETICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING DISABILITIES AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

To explain the relationship discovered between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency, Dunivant (1982) formulated five hypotheses:

1. The school failure hypothesis - Academic failure results from learning disabilities. This failure begets more academic failure. Frustrated because of school failure, students become aggressive, problematic, labeled, and grouped with other students who are behavior disoriented. The continuous rejection of teachers and principals may contribute to students' withdrawal, involvement in inappropriate behavior, and, ultimately, delinquency.

2. The susceptibility hypothesis - Learning disabled students have unique characteristics, such as impulsivity, inability to anticipate consequences, problems with social perception, irritability, suggestibility, and the tendency to act out their feelings. For this reason, they are more inclined to become delinquent than their non-learning disabled peers.

3. The differential arrest hypothesis - More learning disabled students will be apprehended by police since they are not as skilled as others in planning strategies to conceal their true intentions, feelings, and activities. In addition, learning disabled students cannot effectively interact with police because of poor social perception and abrasiveness.

4. The differential adjudication hypothesis - Delinquents with learning disabilities arrested and charged with a violation run a greater risk of being adjudicated than non-learning disabled adolescents because of poor self-control, irritability, abrasiveness, inability to understand legal procedures, and the inability to respond effectively to questions. Moreover, learning disabled students are unable to vindicate their feelings and concerns regarding the criminal charges.

5. The differential disposition hypothesis - On the basis of the reasons cited in the preceding hypotheses, learning disabled delinquents face a higher probability of receiving harsher dispositions than non-learning disabled delinquents; for example, commitment to a juvenile detention facility.

THE STUDIES THAT DON'T SUPPORT THE LD-JD LINK

Pickar and Tori (1986) conducted a study to contrast learning and non-learning disabled adolescents on three variables: Erikson's Stages of psychosocial development, self-concept and delinquent behavior by using the Erickson Psychosocial Stage Inventory, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-concept Scale, the Delinquency Checklist and the Demographic questionnaire. A sample of 86 adolescents drawn from a large urban high school participated in this study. The 2 by 2 ANOVA was employed to analyze the data. The result shows that learning disability was not

found to be significantly associated with juvenile delinquency.

Groff & Hubble (1981) applied Bannatyne's classification scheme to male juvenile offenders in order to determine possible parallels Bannatyne's category scores for these offenders and for learning disabled youth. The intragroup comparisons indicated similar patterns of category scores for the delinquents and learning disabled youth at three levels of intelligence. Their findings failed to support the theory that learning disabled youth possess a unique pattern of recognized scores. They stated that finding similar Bannatyne patterns for Learning disabled youth and juvenile delinquents does not mean that all learning disabled children become juvenile delinquents.

Samenow (1984) didn't support the school failure theory. He admitted that perhaps a tiny minority of delinquent children is truly learning disabled, but it has not been conclusively shown that there is a causal connection between learning disabilities and delinquency. He indicated that many disabled children have psychological conflicts, but only a minority becomes delinquents. Furthermore, he showed that there are several problems with learning disability theory. Many criminals who appear learning disabled are highly capable of learning but simply chose not to because school was incompatible with what they wanted to do.

FACTORS OF DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR OTHER THAN LEARNING DISABILITY

It is also important to keep in mind that research has indicated that numerous factors other than learning disability might put individuals at risk for delinquency. These factors include:

- demographics (e.g., age, gender, minority status)
- biology (e.g., exposure to toxins)
- psychological conditions
- peer associations
- family (e.g., poor parental supervision)
- socioeconomic standing
- community (e.g., socially disadvantaged neighborhoods)
- school situation (e.g., truancy, suspension)
- situational (e.g., illicit drug market)

CONCLUSION

Although research has not found adequate evidences to prove significant causal relationship or exists between learning disability and juvenile delinquency, more extensive research should be conducted in this area before definitive conclusion could be drawn. Since most the research work have been done in other countries and not in India regarding the link between learning disability and juvenile delinquency, there is no proof to support that learning disability will lead our children to a life of delinquents with special reference to Indian setting. However, considering the learning disability percentage and the rate of increasing the juvenile crimes it is investable to conduct research in this area. From the light of the research findings, prevention and intervention measures must be taken to overcome learning disability and thereby reducing the risk of delinquent behavior among children in future.

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