

Title: Information on the prevalence of learning disabilities in the prison population

Date: May 2016

Request: Could you provide information on the prevalence of learning disabilities (in particular, dyslexia and literacy issues) in the adult prison population and in the population of incarcerated juveniles?

Response:

We have prepared the following memo with references on the prevalence of learning disabilities in the adult and juvenile prison population. Citations include a link to a free online version, when available. All citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the document. We have not done an evaluation of the methodological rigor of these resources, but provide them for your information only.

References

Berzofsky, M., Bronson, J., & Maruschak, L. L. (2015). *Disabilities among prison and jail inmates, 2011–12*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved on May 16, 2016, from <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/dpji1112.pdf>

Abstract: Presents the prevalence of disabilities among prison and jail inmates, detailing the prevalence of six specific disability types: hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living. Important differences in each type of disability are highlighted by demographic characteristics. The report also assesses the prevalence of disabilities with other health problems, such as a current chronic condition, obesity, ever having an infectious disease, and past 30-day serious psychological distress. Findings are based on prison and jail inmate self-reported data from BJS's 2011–2012 National Inmate Survey (NIS-3). Data from the 2012 American Community Survey (ACS) and 2009–2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) were used to compare the incarcerated populations to the noninstitutionalized general population. Highlights:

- An estimated 32% of prisoners and 40% of jail inmates reported having at least one disability.
- Prisoners were nearly 3 times more likely and jail inmates were more than 4 times more likely than the general population to report having at least one disability.
- About 2 in 10 prisoners and 3 in 10 jail inmates reported having a cognitive disability, the most common reported disability in each population.
- Female prisoners were more likely than males to report having a cognitive disability, but were equally likely to report having each of the other five disabilities.

- Non-Hispanic white prisoners (37%) and prisoners of two or more races (42%) were more likely than non-Hispanic black prisoners (26%) to report having at least one disability.
- More than half of prisoners (54%) and jail inmates (53%) with a disability reported a co-occurring chronic condition.
- Compared to those without a disability, prisoners with a disability were about 4 times more likely and jail inmates with a disability were nearly 2.5 times more likely to report past 30-day serious psychological distress.
- Thirty-three percent of prisoners and 47% of jail inmates with a cognitive disability reported past 30-day serious psychological distress, compared to 11% of prisoners and 24% of jail inmates with a disability other than cognitive.

Greenberg, E., Dunleavy, E., & Kutner, M. (2007). *Literacy behind bars: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy Prison Survey* (NCES 2007-473). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved on May 16, 2016, from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/2007473.pdf>

Abstract: The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) included the first assessment of the English literacy of incarcerated adults since 1992. The assessment was administered to approximately 1,200 adults (age 16 and older) incarcerated in state and federal prisons, as well as approximately 18,000 adults living in households. Three types of literacy were measured: Prose, Document, and Quantitative. Results were reported in terms of scale scores (on a 500-point scale) and four literacy levels—Below Basic, Basic, Intermediate, and Proficient. The findings in this report—*Literacy Behind Bars*—indicate the changes in literacy among incarcerated adults between 1992 and 2003. The report also compares the literacy of adults in the prison and household populations and across groups of prison inmates with different characteristics, including race/ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, age, language spoken before starting school, and parents' educational attainment. The report looks at the relationship between literacy, education, and job training, including traditional academic education, vocational education, and skill certification. Additionally, the report examines the relationship between literacy and experiences in prison other than education, including prison work assignments, library use, computer use, and reading frequency. Finally, the report looks at the relationship between literacy, criminal history, and current offense. The results show how the relationship between literacy, type of offense, expected length of incarceration, expected date of release, and previous criminal history has changed since 1992.

National Center on Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice. (n.d.). *Special education in correctional facilities*. College Park, MD: Author. Retrieved on May 16, 2016, from http://www.edjj.org/Publications/pub05_01_00.html

Excerpt: More than one in three youths who enter correctional facilities have previously received special education services, a considerably higher percentage of youths with disabilities than is found in public elementary and secondary schools (Leone, 1997). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), youths with disabilities in correctional facilities are entitled to special education and related services. Providing appropriate services for these students, however, can be extremely challenging. Several issues have been identified as having an impact on the provision of appropriate special education services in correctional facilities, including transience of the student population, conflicting organizational goals for security and rehabilitation, shortages of adequately prepared personnel, and limited interagency coordination. This module synthesizes available information on youths with disabilities in correctional facilities and efforts to provide this population with a free appropriate public education. The first section describes the number and characteristics of incarcerated youths with disabilities. The second section portrays special

education services in correctional facilities. The third section discusses particular challenges associated with the provision of services in correctional facilities, and the fourth reports results for incarcerated youths with disabilities.

Quinn, M. M., Rutherford, R. B., Leone, P. E., Osher, D. M., & Poirier, J. M. (2005). Youth with disabilities in juvenile corrections: A national survey. *Exceptional Children*, 71(3), 339–345. Retrieved on May 16, 2016, from http://helpinggangyouth.homestead.com/disability-best_corrections_survey.pdf

Abstract: Improving our knowledge of the number of incarcerated youth with disabilities can assist educators, other professionals, and policymakers to develop more effective services for youth. This article reports the findings of a national survey conducted to determine the number of youth identified as having disabilities in the juvenile corrections systems in the United States. The data show that, when compared to the national average, there is an overrepresentation of students identified as having disabilities, especially emotional disturbance, in those systems.

Reingle Gonzalez, J. M., Cannell, M. B., Jetelina, K. K., & Froehlich-Grobe, K. (2015, December 2). Disproportionate prevalence rate of prisoners with disabilities: Evidence from a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*.

Abstract: Previous research suggests that prisoners have a higher rate of disability than non-institutionalized adults. This study used nationally representative data to update the prevalence rate, identify correlates of disability, and evaluate disability-related disparities in use of prison-based educational services, vocational programs, and work assignments. Data were obtained from 18,185 prisoners interviewed in the *2004 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities*. Survey logistic regression procedures were conducted using Stata 13. Disability prevalence remained substantially higher among prisoners than among the non-institutionalized population. Prisoners were more likely to report specific learning, sensory, and speech-related disabilities than non-institutionalized adults. Prisoners with at least one type of disability had more criminogenic risk factors and come from a more disadvantaged background than prisoners without disability. Prisoners with disabilities were also less likely to utilize vocational programs and work assignments but were more likely to use educational programs than prisoners without disabilities. In summary, 41% of prisoners reported a disability, most commonly, learning disabilities. Prisoners with disabilities were identified as an at-risk group for recidivism, given their pre-incarceration experiences, and limited vocational and work-related training received in prison.

Rutherford, Jr., R. R., Bullis, M., Anderson, C. W., & Griller-Clark, H. M. (2002). *Youth with disabilities in the correctional system: Prevalence rates and identification issues*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved on May 16, 2016, from <http://cecp.air.org/juvenilejustice/docs/Youth%20with%20Disabilities.pdf>

Excerpt: The purpose of this monograph is to review and describe the nature and prevalence of disabilities among youth detained in this country's correctional system. While the advantages and disadvantages of labeling youth, have been—and in all probability will continue to be—debated for some years to come (e.g., Hobbs, 1975), the fact remains that delivering services to incarcerated minors is predicated upon having the right label. For example, to receive special education services an individual must have a special education disability. Further, due to the interdisciplinary nature of the juvenile correctional system—including education, special education, mental health, and rehabilitation programs—a disability label also is critical for connecting persons with appropriate social service agencies in the community. Special education and mental health terms and categories are not always clearly defined and show overlap, a fact which may act as a barrier to service delivery because the presence of a recognized disability is the “ticket” to receive services.

She, P., & Stapleton, D. (2006). *An inventory of disability information for the population living in institutions*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University. Retrieved on May 16, 2016, from <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1201&context=edicolle>
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Abstract: The population living in institutions is excluded from most major national surveys. We evaluate the implications of this exclusion for disability statistics and research by compiling and examining existing disability information for the population living in institutions, with an emphasis on working-age people. The population living in institutions is a very small share of the entire population, but increased considerably from 1990 to 2000, especially for those ages 18–64. Working-age people accounted for a much larger proportion of the population living in institutions in 2000 (56 percent) than in 1990 (45 percent). As of 2000, 86 percent of the institutionalized working-age population resided in correctional institutions, and the remaining 14 percent were approximately evenly split between nursing homes and other institutions, many of which specialize in care for people with disabilities. When disability is defined as having at least one of the four disabilities in the 2000 Census—self-care, mental, physical, or sensory disabilities—the vast majority of the population with disabilities lives in household units; 8.7 percent live in group quarters (GQs), 6.4 percent live in institutional GQs, and 2.3 percent in non-institutional GQs. For working-age people with disabilities, the share of males living in institutional GQs is much larger than the share of females (7.7 percent versus 1.7 percent), in part reflecting the fact that more than nine out of ten inmates in correctional institutions are male. Working-age people with disabilities residing in institutional GQs are also disproportionately African American (38.6 percent of those ages 18–49 and 22.4 percent of those ages 50–64). Increased incarceration rates and the relatively high prevalence of disability in the incarcerated population suggest that growth in incarceration could have a substantial impact on disability prevalence in the household population, and on the characteristics of the household population with disabilities, most notably for young male African Americans. The nursing home residence rate declined for all age groups, but for those under 65 the decline is very small relative to the size of all persons in that age group, and thus seems unlikely to have much impact on disability statistics for the household population.

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

("Adults/juveniles in jail/correctional facilities/prison") OR ("incarcerated adults/juveniles") AND ("learning disabilities/special education")

Search of Databases

EBSCO Host, ERIC, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, Google, and Google Scholar

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources. For this search, we narrowed our search to publications since 2000.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the West Region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.