

Learning Disabilities in Prison

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Outline

- Definition
- Socioeconomics and Learning Disabilities
- Crime and Prison Population
- Prison Integration
- Information processing deficits
 - Input, integration, storage, output
- Specific learning disabilities
 - Reading, writing, math
- Diagnosis

Outline

- Treatment and Intervention
- Impact
- Importance of Identification
- Strategies to Improve Communication and Patient Outcomes



Think about how this potentially impacts your interaction with patients

Definition: Learning Disabilities

- Heterogeneous group of disorders that affect a range of academic and functional skills
 - Speaking
 - Listening
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Spelling
 - Reasoning
 - Organizing information

Definition

- 15% of the population has a learning disability
- Up to 50% of the prison population has some type of learning disability
- Not indicative of low intelligence
- Average to above average intelligence
- Deficit in the processing of information
- Discrepancy between a person's apparent capacity to learn and his level of achievement

Socioeconomics and Learning Disabilities

- High risk neighborhoods and poor living conditions
- Socio-economic indicators: poverty, subdivided housing, lower adult educational attainment
- Rely more heavily on public assistance/welfare because of lack of education

Crime and the Prison Population

- Students with learning disabilities are more likely to:

HAVE A LEARNING DISABILITY



RECEIVE POOR GRADES



REPEAT A GRADE



DROPOUT

SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS



SOCIAL EXCLUSION



RISK OF CHALLENGING AND OFFENDING
BEHAVIOR

Path to Behavioral Problems

Ignored or chided

↳ Offending/negative remarks

↳ Harassment

↳ Bullying

↳ Act out

↳ Slide into behavior problems

Education system did not address needs

Learning Disabilities: Substance Abuse, Education, Employment

- Up to 60% of adolescents in treatment for substance abuse have learning disabilities
- 35% of students with learning disabilities drop out of high school
 - This is twice the rate of their nondisabled peers
- 62% of learning disabled students were unemployed one year after graduation

Learning Disabilities and Criminality

- 31% of adolescents with learning disabilities will be arrested 3-5 years out of high school
- 50% of juvenile delinquents tested were found to have undetected learning disabilities

Learning Disabilities and Criminality

- 20% of the prison population have some form of learning disability
- Half of the prison population have literacy difficulties (seventh grade reading)
- 2/3 of all prisoners are below seventh grade in numeracy
- 4/5 are below seventh grade in writing

Prison Integration

- Ridicule and harassment by guards and other inmates
 - Protocol of conduct > memory
 - Highly regimented > memory
 - Answer on command > retrieval of information
 - Taken advantage of > unable to “see big picture”
- Little privacy
 - More difficult to hide/compensate
 - Schoolyard mentality- do not want to be different
- Filling out forms to access care > write and spell; convey correct information

Prison Integration

- Buy goods at the canteen > math
- Do not take advantage of opportunities to learn new jobs in order to hide deficits > cannot fulfill tasks
- Paroled > inability to read/write can affect housing and job opportunities

Information Processing Deficits: Input

- Information perceived through sense (visual and auditory perception)
- Visual: difficulty recognizing shape, position, size of items
- Auditory: difficulty screening out competing sounds in order to focus on one of them

Information Processing Deficits: Integration

- Interpretation, categorization, sequencing of input
- Unable to tell a story in the correct sequence
- Unable to memorize sequences of information (days of the week)
- Unable to generalize concepts
- Unable to see the “big picture”

Information Processing Deficits: Storage

- Short-term/working memory: difficulty learning new material without many repetitions
- Long-term memory

Information Processing Deficits: Output

- Spoken language: answering a question on demand (retrieve information, organize thoughts, put into words)
- Motor ability: Gross and fine

Specific Learning Disabilities

- Reading Disability
 - Most common
 - Difficulty with word recognition, word decoding, reading rate, comprehension
 - Ex: dyslexia
- Writing Disability
 - Handwriting, spelling, organization of ideas, composition
- Math Disability
 - Dyscalculia

Diagnosis

- School psychologists, clinical psychologists, neurophysiologists
- Intelligence testing, academic achievement testing, classroom performance, social interaction and aptitude
- Academic performance is not commensurate with cognitive ability

Treatment and Intervention

- Skills can be improved with targeted interventions
- Mastery model
- Direct instruction
- Classroom adjustments
- Special equipment
- Classroom assistants

Impact on Affected Individuals

- Shame- poor literacy, attention or memory difficulties
- Fear of failure, criticism, ridicule, rejection
- Fear of discrimination
- Fear others will think they are stupid
- Left out of everyday discussions due to lack of understanding
- Depressed
- Alone
- “Learned helplessness”

Importance of Identification

- “Second chance” in learning and employment
- Reduce re-offending
- Prison education should recognize approximately 50% of inmates will need support
 - Screening, direct teaching, appropriate educational and vocational training

Education in Prison

Reception Center Processing



TABET Testing
(Grade Level)

Mental Health Services
(Developmental Disabilities)



Mainline \neq Reception Center



GED



Fail

Job

Should CDCR Screen for Learning Disabilities?

- Right to education
 - Do prisoners have the same rights to accommodations?
- Outcome measures for cost/benefit analysis:
 - Vocational training in prison and upon release
 - Reduce parole violations
 - Reduce rates of recidivism

Strategies to Improve Communication and Patient Outcomes

- Do not make assumptions about a person's ability to communicate or the way in which they do it
- Face the person directing when speaking
- Rephrase sentences rather than repeat
- Communicate in writing or with pictures, if necessary

Strategies

- Ask if any particular assistance is needed
- Offer to read written information when appropriate
- Give clear instructions (ex: “Take 1 pill of each of the 2 BP medications in the morning and 1 diabetes medication pill in the evening” rather than “Take all your medications as indicated”)

Strategies

- Listen patiently and avoid completing sentences for the person unless he looks to you for help
- Don't pretend to understand

Summary

- Not indicative of low intelligence
- Deficit in the processing of information
- Discrepancy between a person's apparent capacity to learn and his level of achievement
- Skills can be improved with targeted interventions

Summary

- “Second chance” in learning and employment
- Reduce re-offending
- Prison education should recognize approximately 50% of inmates will need support

QUESTIONS?