

Scheyett, A., Vaughn, J., Taylor, M., & Parish, S. (2009). Are we there yet? Screening processes for intellectual and developmental disabilities in jail settings. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 47(1)*, 13-23.

Research suggests that individuals with ID that come into contact with the criminal justice process may be at a disadvantage. Because of the possible risks that exist such as limited understanding of legal terms and processes, and difficulties processing information, it is important that this unique group of offenders with ID be identified early on in their interactions with the criminal justice system.

The objective of the research study was to determine how people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are identified as they enter a jail. Specifically, the authors wanted to determine (a) jail administrators' awareness of the prevalence of inmates with intellectual and developmental disabilities; (b) the screening process for disabilities at jail intake, including both the questions asked during intake and whether the intake setting was private; and (c) the characteristics of the individuals performing the intake, including their training regarding disabilities. 80 telephone interviews with jail administrators were conducted to determine existing procedures for the identification of individuals with mental illnesses or intellectual and developmental disabilities. Training materials for jail staff were also reviewed to assess the level of preparation given to staff when dealing with offenders with mental health issues or ID.

Key Findings:

1. Awareness of the Rate of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:

Nearly 70% of respondents felt that 1% or fewer of their total inmate populations had disabilities, although the literature suggests that an estimate of less than 1% is low. Jail administrators have widely different and likely inaccurate, views on the prevalence of individuals with disabilities in their jails.

2. Screening Process for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are not being consistently screened or reliably and effectively identified when they enter the jails. Jails are not using reliable and valid screening tools for disabilities, and, moreover, screening is done primarily by jail officials who have not received adequate and ongoing training in identifying and working with individuals with these disabilities.

3. Jail Intake Personnel:

Of the 42 participants who reported screening for disabilities, 35 (83%) reported screenings were done by a jail officer, 4 (10%) reported the medical portion of the intake was completed by jail medical staff, and 2 (5%) reported that intakes were completed by jail staff and subsequently reviewed by jail medical staff.

4. Jail Staff Training in Disabilities:

Only 28 participants (35%) reported that their officers received continuing education in any area of mental disorder or disability, which could include intellectual and developmental disabilities. None reported that their officers received training in co-occurring mental illnesses and developmental disabilities.

Findings suggest that few jails are operationalizing best-practice screening processes for intellectual and developmental disabilities.