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The Statistical Significance of Juvenile Delinquency and Learning Disabilities

Collette Erica Scandrett
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Collette Erica Scandrett

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

The Statistical Significance of Juvenile Delinquency and Learning Disabilities

by

Collette Erica Scandrett

MA, Purdue University Global, 2018

BS, DeVry University, 2016

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Criminal Justice

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Abstract

Juvenile delinquency and recidivism have been consistent issues that seem to continually produce substantial numbers. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine learning disabilities among juveniles and determine their statistical significance to delinquency and recidivism. Durkheim's theory of anomie and Merton's anomie/strain theory were used as the theoretical framework to guide the study. Archived cases for 15,900 juveniles, 2,633 of whom were learning disabled, were collected from the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and the South Carolina Department of Education. To provide additional context, age, race, and sex were also analyzed. Chi-square tests were used to analyze the data. The results showed that there was no statistical significance in juveniles with learning disabilities becoming delinquent versus those lacking learning disabilities. However, there was a statistical significance for juveniles with learning disabilities succumbing to recidivism versus those without learning disabilities. The positive social change implications of this study include recognizing the juvenile learning-disabled population and their contribution to the numbers of incarcerated juveniles and recidivism. This recognition could serve as a starting point for juvenile justice systems and education departments in the way of an overlooked population. From this point these stakeholders could determine if more tailored educational and diversion programs would serve as a way to lessen the number of learning-disabled juveniles becoming incarcerated and in turn recidivism.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this work to my mother (Frances M. Grant). Although my mother transitioned from this life in October of 2018, she has remained an influence on my life. My mother always instilled the importance of an education and this accomplishment is the greatest form of gratitude I am able to show her. She will always influence my life and live on in my heart and hopefully now she can also live on forever in my words and accomplishments.

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First and foremost, I would like to give thanks to God for giving me the strength to not only pursue this accomplishment but gave me the strength to endure with everything going on in and around my life. My aunts and uncles for not only pushing me to continue on my academic journey but also continually encouraging me throughout the process. My cousins that encouraged and helped me through this long journey. My dissertation chair, Dr. Dennis, who not only helped me navigate this journey but always provided kind words that were so helpful during this process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

While there are numerous studies that reflect not only juvenile delinquency but also the fact that there is a link between learning disabilities (LDs) and juvenile delinquency, there are not many extant studies that focus on just the statistics of the situation. Most previous researchers looked into factors that lead to this population turning to delinquency, including peer influence, environment, and school achievements or lack thereof, and not many have established the numbers within the system of the learning-disabled population (Poon, 2015; Shelton, 2006). In other words, although it is known that they exist, it is not necessarily known just how much of the delinquent population is made up of learning-disabled youth. When considering recidivism, most researchers have seemed to look past underlying conditions like that of LDs and their likelihood to affect recidivism.

The purpose of this study was to establish if there was legitimate statistical evidence reflecting a significance in the juvenile learning-disabled with regard to juvenile delinquency and whether there was a significant statistical occurrence of recidivism. The age, race, and gender were also examined in this study. It has been established that there are a number of risk factors, including environment, parental involvement, and peer influence, that can help lead to juvenile delinquency, but there was a gap in showing those with LDs that may not have been capable of comprehending not only their wrong actions but the possible consequences that might occur because of these actions. Part of this gap was in the statistical sense of not only their percentage of the juvenile delinquent population but also in the relevance of these numbers. The vulnerability within the

juveniles with LDs population could lead to not only misinterpretation by those in positions of authority, but the possibility of these authorities having felt it better to seclude juveniles with LDs from their peers without LDs and punish them for behaviors and actions they may not only not have much control over but also not fully comprehend the magnitude of. When considering misinterpretation, it could be in considering the juveniles hostile, like they are ignoring commands, labeling them as trouble makers, or even thinking that they have a mental health disorder.

The implications for social change in this study were the possibility of lessening the number of juveniles with LDs turning to delinquency and lessening their frequency of doing so. In helping this population, there might be other things discovered that could have been helpful not only to this population but also for delinquent youth without disabilities. The findings of this study could help these youth become more functional members of society, which in turn, could lead to more and better opportunities for their success in all aspects of life. The study could show a need for programs to curb LD youth from being incarcerated including diversion and more tailored educational programs. These responsibilities would fall on stakeholders like the juvenile justice system and education departments.

Background

In this section, I describe selected articles relating to juvenile delinquency and LDs. The following keyword search terms were used to locate these sources in the SAGE Journals database and Walden University Library: *juvenile delinquency and learning*

disabilities, juvenile delinquents with learning disabilities, and learning disabilities within juvenile justice system.

Brier (1994) studied a diversion program for older adolescents with learning disabilities that offered psychosocial, educational, and vocational treatments. The main aim of the program was to build certain skills, including reasoning, problem solving, and social skills. The recidivism rate of the juveniles who finished the program was compared with those that did not participate in the program to show the program's effectiveness. The study was conducted over a 2-year period with 73 participants. The inclusion criteria for the study were youth aged 16 to 21, with two or less arrests prior to the current one, nonviolent crimes, no mental health or substance abuse issues, and of high risk for learning disabilities. All participants were referred to the program by the personnel from the Bronx County, New York district attorney's office. Brier concluded that targeting treatment like that used in the study reduced recidivism in the youth with learning disabilities that were treated. This would suggest that this type of treatment should help reduce recidivism in youth with learning disabilities. As the results were just reflective of the 73 participants, there should be more studies done on a broader scale with this type of treatment to see if the results are the same.

Cavendish (2014) examined academic achievement during commitment and beyond by focusing on 4,066 youth in juvenile justice facilities in Florida with or without disabilities and their educational outcomes after their release. Educational outcomes 3 years after release from various justice facilities for juveniles in the state of Florida were also examined. During commitment the youth with LDs and emotional and behavioral

disorders performed as well academically if not better than those without disabilities, although all typically performed below a level considered to be satisfactory (i.e., C or better). Cavendish concluded that those with or without disabilities perform well academically after release. Since the study was only done on participants in Florida, it would stand to reason that a broader study in more states would produce a more representative outcome. From the study results, it can be concluded that something is missing academically for those with and without disabilities, not only in juvenile justice facilities, but also in their communities. Further studies might be able to pinpoint the most effective ways to reach these delinquent juveniles so they can be successful academically.

Chin (2017) suggested that juveniles that have LDs and are not treated properly are more likely to have increased recidivism rates. The author proposed the implementation of problem-solving and treatment courts as a way to curb recidivism in youth with LDs. Chin also provided the definition of a LD, federal protections for those with disabilities, screening methods, stigmatization, and counterarguments for problem-solving courts. The author concluded that the benefits to the youth with LDs outweighs the cons and costs of adopting nationwide, problem-solving courts that do not require an order or referral to take part.

Although problem-solving courts are available, there are certain requirements to take part. Because many juveniles are not referred or ordered to take part, they are not able to benefit from the resources it provides (Chin, 2017). Since most juveniles do not take part in this type of court, it is hard to know if it is as effective on a larger, nationwide

scale. This leads to a gap in knowledge as to the real effectiveness of these courts on learning-disabled juveniles and their effect on recidivism. Knowing the effectiveness of these courts could prove helpful in discovering ways to help juveniles with LDs receive proper treatment and, possibly, curb recidivism.

Chin-Chih et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study on disadvantaged, mostly racial-ethnic minority juveniles taking part in the Chicago Longitudinal Study to determine whether there was a link between LDs and future juvenile delinquency and/or adult crimes. Another factor covered was whether LDs severed certain relationships and lead to future antisocial behavior. The original study sample contained 1,539 juveniles, while the primary study sample was 1,370 juveniles, with approximately half being female, 121 having LDs, 36 having emotional disabilities, 79 with other disabilities, 250 with histories of grade retention but lacking special education placement, and 884 general education juveniles without remedial services. Their study helped predict the legal outcomes of adults that had certain risk factors and records as juveniles. For example, if a juvenile has unmet LDs, they may be more likely to turn to crime in adulthood. Although this study was helpful as a predictor, it could use additional research to solidify the results. Further studies could prove helpful with this population as well as produce more widespread results that could be more representative of the actual population of juvenile delinquents with LDs.

Hellenbach (2012) reflected the opinions and general attitudes of 15 sergeants about juvenile offenders with LDs. The study took place in Manchester, United Kingdom. All the sergeants had at least 2 years of experience in their current roles. All

the sergeants in the study except one lacked proper understanding of LDs, often mistaking LDs for mental illness. Hellenbach concluded that just changing the laws and rules with regards to LDs was not going to change much if the attitudes of the professionals involved are not changed. The professionals involved have to be open to the ideas and understand the many facets that come with those within the learning-disabled population, including what they are and are not capable of doing and understanding. This study provides a good understanding of the minds of the professionals that deal with the juvenile with LDs population while incarcerated. Although these professionals may care, their lack of resources and understanding of these disabilities will continue to show in the recidivism of the juveniles involved. It is important to not only identify juveniles with some sort of disability but also determine what the disability is and the best way to move forward with treatment.

Hirschinger-Blank et al. (2019) studied a program that helped with the literacy of juveniles between the ages of 11 and 14 years old on probation. The program was implemented as a response to the low reading level of most of the adjudicated youth according to standardized tests for reading. The authors concluded that the juveniles that participated in the study showed more educational aspirations. The results also showed the importance and benefit of one-on-one programs or those tailored for individual juveniles. The authors also concluded that keeping juveniles in continual programs or continually participating in educational goals seemed to lead to less recidivism.

These results are important, but it is also necessary to realize that until they are implemented on a larger scale to not take the findings as a firm representation of results

that will occur within this population. Although the lack of academic success as a causation for delinquency and continued recidivism seems well documented, the success of this type of program on a larger, more continual scale has yet to be proven. Making continued efforts for juveniles on probation and incarcerated by way of identifying and providing the proper resources for any types of disabilities are still necessary.

Kumagami and Kumagai (2014) focused on Japanese juvenile delinquents and their link, if any, to learning disabilities by using the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children II. The study participants included 22 juvenile delinquents, 28 nondisabled high schoolers, and 12 special education high schoolers with disabilities of the intellectual type. The results showed the marked difference in scores for delinquents as opposed to the nondisabled high schoolers and also showed that some of these high schoolers presented with undiagnosed LDs. Their study showed the need for appropriate resources and more widespread testing for these disabilities. Their results indicated that there are many students that are not identified as having disabilities and, therefore, who will not receive the proper resources they need for success. Identifying and helping those with disabilities with their academic understanding and achievements could result in a high number of juveniles not turn to delinquency and possibly with their recidivism as well.

Although the summarized research literature contained information addressing delinquent youth with LDs, there was a gap concerning the statistical significance between LDs, juvenile delinquency, and recidivism. The current study was meant to address this gap concerning the juvenile with LDs population, juvenile delinquency, and recidivism.

Problem Statement

Juveniles have a tendency to turn to delinquency when there is discord or some type of inefficiency in their life (Savolainen et al., 2018). Addressing and resolving these issues when permitted should lead to a decrease in the number of juvenile delinquents. One population among juvenile delinquents is those with learning deficiencies. It has been thought that factors like learning deficiencies could be used as predictors of delinquency or even recidivism, reflected by studies like that of Barrett (2014) and Nkoana et al. (2020). These two studies focused on delinquency and recidivism, early adverse experiences, mental health issues, disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries. The studies reflect an understanding of the educational needs of those with different types of disadvantages and disabilities and the use of information as a type of predictor for delinquency and recidivism with juveniles within this population. Zhang (2011) and Gagnon and National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (2018) reported that juveniles with LDs are more vulnerable to patterns of recidivism.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was significance in the links between juvenile delinquency, recidivism, and LDs. Juveniles with LDs have been shown to have a tendency for juvenile delinquency and likely recidivism in numerous earlier studies (Chin, 2017). In this study, I attempted to determine if these already established links have any statistical significance. Secondary data were used to both show these links and their possible significance. In this study, I compared the statistics of juvenile delinquents with LDs to that of juvenile delinquents without them. From these

comparisons, I was able to see the amount of recidivism between the two groups and was able to decide if there was significant recidivism in one group more than the other. I was also able to conclude if there was significance in those with LDs versus those without them. This project was unique in the sense that it worked from the known of their being an established link among variables and looked for the possible significance within the links.

In this study, I focused on three main variables: The independent variable was the learning-disabled juveniles, and the dependent variables were delinquency and recidivism. The data were collected using archived data from the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (SCDJJ) and the SC Department of Education (SCDE). I gained access to the data by making a data request through the South Carolina Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (SC RFA), which had a data warehouse that stored the data from the SCDJJ and the SCDE. Information on the learning-disabled population came from the SCDJJ, and this data was compared to that of their nondisabled peers.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: What is the statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs?

*H*₁1: There is a high statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs.

*H*₀1: There is no statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs.

RQ2: What is the statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs?

H₁₂: There is a high statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs.

H₀₂: There is no statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base for this study was Durkheim's anomie theory (see DiCristina, 2016). The lack of appropriate social norms within those with LDs could lead to juvenile delinquency. Durkheim's anomie theory provided a deeper understanding of how the lack of these social norms leading to juvenile delinquency held significance. A significance that could hold true more with those having learning disabilities as opposed to those lacking these disabilities. A significance that could affect recidivism within the LD population. The literature related to this theory showed the relationship between anomie theory and juvenile delinquency among juveniles with LDs.

A lack of conventional means to achieve success might lead to a turn to delinquency or unconventional means for attainment (Yu et al., 2019). Even so much so that some people so focused on attaining monetary success were unaware of the lengths to which they are going to achieve this success (Yu et al., 2019). In other words, there were those that would do whatever to achieve their wanted success while somewhat unconsciously making their way to this success. Operating with "blindness" to their

actions and their legality with their focus solely having been on that of their future success.

For example, a youth that was hungry might take something to eat without paying for it (Yu et al., 2019). As far as they were concerned, they were successful in abating their hunger, but they stole food in order to make the hunger subside. This could also be true for those with disabilities because they might have been unaware that taking the food without paying was not acceptable behavior. Because it might be difficult for those with LDs to understand or comprehend societal norms and laws, breaking them can be done while the youth are unaware their actions are inappropriate. In this sense, strain from lack of things seen as necessities could lead to unconventional attainment without the knowledge of the severity of punishment that could have resulted and unawareness of the inappropriate nature of the actions in general.

In regard to the anomic way of accomplishing goals, there seemed to be almost an acceptance for having achieved even by illegal means in certain social classes (Hughes, 2017). For those that fell within the lower socioeconomic statuses, it was considered innovative to have achieved success without the same opportunities and privileges as those in upper classes (Hughes, 2017). Since those in lower socioeconomic status had less resources to properly educate learning-disabled youth in all that was appropriate, it could have been seen as innovative when they achieved certain successes having used unconventional means. This innovation was a way of excusing inappropriate behavior because of a lack of appropriate means and resources to have accomplished things in a conventional manner.

Nature of Study

In this quantitative study, I used secondary data to determine if there was significance in the links between juvenile delinquency and LDs. There were three variables of focus: The independent variable was the learning-disabled juveniles, and the dependent variables were delinquency and recidivism. The data were collected from archived data within the SCDJJ and the SCDE. The data encompassed in these databases were accessible through requests to the research and statistics team associated with the databases. As most of these data are already available to the public or accessed through specific requests, the SCDJJ has already provided the necessary protections needed for the juveniles within their system.

Definitions

Adjudication: When the prosecution decides to go ahead with formal proceedings against a juvenile through family court (SCDJJ, 2020). When the facts of the case are discussed and legal procedures are determined (Gann, 2019).

Commitment: The removal of a juvenile from their community to a placement within the Department of Juvenile Justice (Cunningham, 2004; SCDJJ, 2020).

Competency: A juvenile's ability to understand proceedings. A few factors could lead to a referral for competency evaluation (SCDJJ, 2020):

- If a juvenile is younger than 12 years of age, which can change based on the state. For South Carolina the age is 12.
- The juvenile does not appear to understand questions presented to them by the judge and/or attorneys. The juvenile could also display a lack of

understanding for the procedures occurring in court and/or conference with their counsel.

- The juvenile has a history of mental health diagnoses, recurrent hospital visits, and/or is currently or previously took medication.
- The juvenile has some sort of disability, including: LDs, an emotional handicap, or is enrolled in a special education program.

Detention age restriction: Juveniles younger than 10 years of age are not to be incarcerated under any circumstances (SCDJJ, 2020). This age can range from 6–12 years old depending on the state law.

Diversion: A program that diverts juveniles' cases from the juvenile justice system. Instead of going through family court, the juvenile would go through another program like drug court, a behavior contract, or an arbitration program. With successful completion of one of these programs the juvenile will have their charges dismissed (SCDJJ, 2020).

Evaluation: This is requested by a family court judge to assess a youth's psychological, social, and/or educational status. Typically used in helping a judge determine how best to proceed with a youth (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020; SCDJJ, 2020)

Intake: A process by which a juvenile's needs and circumstances are evaluated by the Department of Juvenile Justice (SCDJJ, 2020). During this process the juvenile is interviewed, the parent or guardian of the juvenile is interviewed, background information is gathered, and releases are signed for school and medical records to be collected (Birckhead, 2013).

Juvenile: Any person under the age of 18 years old (Gordon 2010; SCDJJ, 2020).

LD: A disability in which a person has difficulty understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia (Chin, 2017, p. 620).

Recidivism: Acts committed that resulted in adjudication, rearrest, and a return to incarceration (National Institute of Justice, 2021; Vacca, 2008).

School-to-prison pipeline: The removal of students from grade school (i.e., kindergarten–Grade 12) to that of an incarcerated setting (Bell, 2016).

Assumptions

I made a few assumptions concerning this study. One of the assumptions was that the SCDJJ kept record of incarcerated juveniles with LDs and recorded this information with the rest of the juvenile's records. Another assumption was that this information would be available along with the rest of the public records that could be accessed regarding juveniles incarcerated in the SCDJJ, making it possible to use this information as secondary data. My last assumption was that the information gathered in this study would in some way prove valuable with helping shine a light on the learning-disabled population and things that might have been considered outside of their control that led to their delinquency or being considered delinquent.

It stood to reason that since it was required with intake that disabilities were considered that the SCDJJ would have record of the occurrence of disabilities within their system. Arrests and court cases were information of public knowledge and accessible through databases. Since all knowledge was helpful in some way, it seemed a reasonable assumption that the information gathered from this study would also be helpful in some way to someone. I provide these assumptions as a way of ensuring that what was assumed in this study was differentiated from what was hypothesized or determined as a result of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

I used the quantitative methodology to determine the significance of the relationship between juveniles with LDs and delinquency and recidivism. This study centered on delinquent juveniles within the SCDJJ. Within this population, the main focus was on juveniles with LDs compared to those without LDs. With strain and anomie theories used as the theoretical framework, it was important to have seen the population as a whole before having determined the subset within this population used to conduct the study.

Limitations, Challenges, and/or Barriers

One possible barrier was that of using secondary data because it resulted in being reliant on the accuracy of those that previously collected the data. There was so much that was out of my hands as a researcher when dealing with secondary data. However, there was not really an issue with bias with regard to this study because all the data were secondary, restricting the possibility of the researcher having any control over the

outcome. Any needed paperwork or parental approvals were likely signed or given during the court process and original collection of information. Information about disabilities was usually submitted to the court from the juveniles' schools; unfortunately, this was only helpful if the juvenile had a known LD. The only measures that I could take with regard to limitations were to state them in hopes that future research would be able to take them into consideration and avoid these same issues in the future.

Significance

I conducted this study to fill the gap in knowledge concerning whether there was significance in the links between LDs, juvenile delinquency, and recidivism. Although some studies, including those of Brier (1994) and Hoogsteder et al. (2018), showed that certain treatment and academic achievement during commitment could lead to less recidivism in those juveniles with LDs, I also attempted to determine if this lessening of recidivism was enough to have any real significance. It has been shown that certain things like therapy and alternative justice can positively affect recidivism rates (Hoogsteder et al., 2018; Riley & Hayes, 2018), but was it was unclear if therapy and alternative justice in juveniles with LDs would decrease overall recidivism. This study was meant to show if the links between LDs and juvenile delinquency had enough significance to warrant changes with the treatment of those juveniles with LDs.

Potential social change that could occur as a result of this study includes increasing knowledge regarding juveniles with LDs and their interactions with delinquency and recidivism. Although the focus of this study was limited to only a part of the detained population of juveniles, it was necessary to start somewhere. Positive social

change within the learning-disabled population could bring the potential of helping the rest of the delinquent juvenile population.

Summary

Although there was a lot of research available providing a link between LDs and juvenile delinquency, there was not much examining the statistical significance between the two variables or recidivism. The research questions for this study focused on determining the statistical significance, if any, that existed between juvenile delinquency, LDs, and recidivism within the learning-disabled delinquent population. Since there is always a push to lower recidivism rates, focusing on one population in which there was the potential to considerably lower those numbers seemed like an imperative task. Since the current treatments and programs were not proving to be the most effective, finding populations with the potential for lowering their recidivism rate seemed necessary.

In Chapter 2, I will provide the theoretical foundation for this study, the anomie and strain theories, along with a review of literature reflecting the topic at hand. The literature reviewed concerns learning-disabled juveniles and their interaction with delinquency as well as their likelihood and tendencies regarding recidivism. In Chapter 3, I will focus on the research design, methodology, population and sample size, statistical tests, and ethical procedures. Chapter 4 will encompass the data collection process and the results of the study, while Chapter 5 will include interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

For many years, there has been a recurring presence of youth with disabilities within the juvenile justice system (Cavendish, 2014; Ochoa, 2016). Within this group, there has been a prevalence of youth with LDs in substantial numbers. Previous researchers have attempted to determine the risk factors and establish a possible link between LDs and juvenile delinquency (Ochoa, 2016). Although the link has been proven by previous research, there are still those that argue that it is more of a passive link that along with other risk factors could lead to delinquency. The purpose of this study was to show if there was statistical significance between juvenile delinquency and LDs.

In this chapter, I provide a review of relevant literature regarding the juvenile justice system and youth with LDs. Some of the topics covered apply to both youth with or without disabilities, while other topics were more specific to youth with LDs. The theoretical framework of this study comprised Durkheim's anomie theory and Merton's anomie/strain theory.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate literature for this review, I searched databases accessible through the Walden University Library. The following key words were used to find articles relating to LDs and juvenile delinquency: *learning difficulties, juvenile delinquency, juvenile justice, learning disabilities, delinquent youth, theory of anomie, and Durkheim and Merton*. I also searched Google for scholarly articles pertaining to the topic of young offenders with LDs. The last method I employed for finding relevant articles was using the reference sections of articles already deemed relevant. The literature reviewed

encompassed websites, books, and peer-reviewed articles with publication dates ranging from 1994 to 2021.

Theoretical Foundation

The two theories used as the foundation for this study were Durkheim's theory of anomie and Merton's anomie/strain theory. I chose these theories because they reflected factors and/or risks seeming to have led to or influenced delinquent behavior. The theories served as a way of understanding some of the mindsets that youths experienced within a societal setting that had a tendency to veer toward delinquent behavior (Yu et al., 2019). There were a number of studies that had previously used these theories to produce and/or support results (e.g., Bonjar, 2017; Lo et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2019). These theories helped me only explain some of the causations of delinquency and shed light on some of the possibilities that could have led to recidivism.

Durkheim and Merton were both well-known sociologists that helped build the theory of social anomie and strain theory (Durkheim, 1897; Merton, 1957). Although Durkheim focused more on strictly anomie, Merton built from this theory to include other factors leading to deviance along with anomie, including that of strain theory (Bonjar, 2017). Durkheim provided more of a blanket or vague theory, while Merton narrowed the theory down by adding more specifics and factors beyond just that of anomie. I discuss both of these theories in more detail in the following subsections.

Durkheim's Theory of Anomie

Durkheim is regarded as the first sociologist to develop anomie, so it is not surprising that the sociologist's own experiences and environment may have influenced

the theory's development. Since the theory was based on the concept of normalcy (Inderbitzin, 2016), it stands to reason that this would differ for those of different classes and backgrounds. One argument that was commonly used by Durkheim (1897) was that people could not be happy unless their needs were proportionate to their means. In other words, not trying to live beyond one's means would bring them the greatest possibility of happiness. Durkheim also thought that society held a sort of power over one's expectations and passions.

According to Durkheim's (1897) earlier works, an unstable society led to deviance. This type of unstable environment would lead to outlandish and unreasonable aspirations that typically led to deviance as a way of accomplishing them. Durkheim described three abnormal forms of the division of labor: the "anomic division of labor," "the forced division of labor," and a "badly coordinated division of labor" (DiCristina, 2016, p. 313). These divisions of labor were established to help explain some forms that took place that had a propensity to end up in deviant or delinquent behavior.

Durkheim's (1897) work showed a sort of cause and effect of societal and economic crises and were a way of indicating how these phenomena not only reflected a sort of relationship but how entangled this relationship had become. The sociologist's work also showed the absence of certain societal norms could in turn influence the thought process of those within this environment and result in a shift in what is considered normal. When the changes that occurred happened in a rapid and unexpected manner, society would adapt with a less than ideal response. The normal societal restrictions would disappear or lessen, making way for different ideals and innovations to

emerge. This also led to the possibility of youth violating rules by way of not wanting to listen or comply with imposed rules and limitations (DiCristina, 2016).

Merton's Theory of Anomie/Strain

Merton (1938) built on Durkheim's anomie theory by narrowing the focus while expanding on other parts of the theory. Merton's main argument was that anomie was mainly a result of the relationship between societal goals and legal means of attaining them. Unlike Durkheim, Merton did not believe that anomie was just a result of ungoverned goals. Although it was established that this environment could result in a sense of anomie, Merton felt that there were other factors that also contributed to anomie or the semblance of it.

Merton (1957) also reflected the stance that class affects people's ability to achieve certain wealth by legal means. There were certain opportunities that existed more so for those of higher classes that those of the lower or middle class may have needed to struggle more to achieve. In this sense, the lack of opportunities pertaining to education and jobs may have led to deviance to achieve certain goals. Merton also suggested five adaptations to anomie regarding attaining wealth and the means by which they are obtained.

1. **Conformity:** Those considered conformists have not only accepted societal goals but are trying to accomplish them through legal means.
2. **Innovation:** Innovative people have accepted societal goals but have chosen to accomplish them using illegal means.

3. Ritualism: Ritualists are those who have chosen not to accept societal goals but are achieving different goals using legal means.
4. Retreatism: Those following retreatism have chosen not only to reject societal goals for their own but also strive to reach them using illegal means.
5. Rebellion: Those people that fall within the rebellion adaptation have chosen not to follow the rules and try to conform the system to fit their opinions on what the rules should be.

Believing that anomic strain could cause deviance but was not necessarily something that would inevitably lead to crime set Merton (1957) apart. Some would choose to achieve financial success by any means necessary, including illegal means, citing strain and/or lack of opportunity while trying to achieve societal goals. Merton suggested that most people would not choose to turn to illegal means but would actually conform, stating that most would choose to live within their means and conform on some of their goals. But for those with some of the higher goals without the legal means of achieving them, it could lead to deviance (Antonaccio & Smith, 2015; Bonjar, 2017).

Another consideration was when materialistic goals were internalized. In such a scenario, whether there were legitimate means for achievement or not, materialistic attainment became the goal (Lo, 2018). This turned the actions of the person into a sort of second nature. The person may not have been aware of the inappropriateness of their actions used to attain their internal definition of success, which could lead to deviance and the use of illegal and dangerous means to attain the type of success they feel is necessary. This is a feasible situation for those with LDs because it may be hard for them

to determine the appropriateness of their actions in alignment with societal norms and expectations.

Review of Related Literature

Prevalence of LDs

With the high numbers of individuals within the juvenile justice system, it becomes imperative to identify those that may need different or extra attention to learn or understand. There is a large number of juveniles with LDs within this system; it is one of the diagnoses that is most often seen within this population (Grigorenko & Macomber, 2006; Nkoana et al., 2020). One good indicator of a LD of some sort is the level of reading proficiency juveniles may exhibit. Difficulty with the subjects of reading and/or math tend to be major issues for those with LDs.

National statistics in Japan reflect that the majority of juvenile delinquents have lower reading proficiency level scores (Kumagami, 2014). According to Kumagami (2014), 45% of juvenile delinquents were identified as having a LD. This reflected a higher number than the less than 30% typically identified in high school students. When looking at the juveniles within the U.S. juvenile justice system, there is also a high prevalence of learning-disabled youth (Krezmien, 2008). From a mental health professional standpoint, reading and LDs are often encountered (Rucklidge, 2013).

Poon and Suk-Han (2015) conducted a study in Sweden showing that nearly 40% of the delinquent males displayed a reading deficiency. While reading disabilities are most often seen within this population, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder was also highly prevalent. Although it is not considered a LD, it is often seen coexisting in those

with LDs. This coexistence makes it important to note with those with LDs as to not be overlooked.

Another LD within this population is dyslexia (Baker, 2007). When looking at difficulties with reading and writing, short-term memory is often a related factor (Selenius & Daderman, 2006). Those with dyslexia have a tendency to have a poor short-term memory coupled with the inability or difficulty to decode and/or spell (Selenius & Daderman, 2006). There have been several studies that have found there is a marked presence of dyslexics within the juvenile justice system (Baker & Ireland, 2007). There is also a higher prevalence of dyslexia within the population of juvenile offenders than with nonoffenders (Baker & Ireland, 2007). Another consideration for those with dyslexia is the often-observed negative effect on self-esteem.

Vulnerability

Along with the presence of LDs is the vulnerability that coexists within the learning-disabled population. Chen (2011) suggested that this population was vulnerable and more likely to have an unsuccessful transition back to the community. This vulnerability also has the tendency to lead to higher risks of detainment and more frequent returns to detainment than that of non-learning-disabled peers (Mallett, 2014; Nkoana et al., 2020; Weinberg & Smith, 2019). In other words, there tends to be higher recidivism rates within this vulnerable population than those without LDs.

Along with the vulnerability that occurs in those with LDs, there comes poor grades and a negative connotation regarding learning and experiences with it (Mallett, 2014). Grades tend to be poor because the youth have an issue with understanding and

have lesser feelings of themselves (Geis, 2014). They develop feelings of inadequacy when comparing themselves to peers without LDs. The failures encountered have a tendency to lead youth down less than desirable paths that can lead to delinquent and/or criminal activity (Poon & Suk-Han, 2015).

Although LDs are seen by some as a nonspecific risk factor (Amitay & Gumpel, 2015), they are also known to cause self-efficacy affecting the academic and social domains. Because of the tendency to put learning disabled students in a special education environment, these students are put at a disadvantage when trying to establish how to fit in with nondisabled peers. These separations also make it harder for these students to know how to compare themselves academically with their nondisabled peers.

Researchers have suggested a number of reasons for this population to have an increased likelihood to lead to deviant behavior like arson (Tranah & Nicholas, 2013). As mentioned earlier, isolation from peers, inability to accurately voice communications, and a need to be heard are some of these characteristics leading to arson. Some of the other traits include frustration, effort at establishing power/control, and lashing out in an act of revenge (Tranah & Nicholas, 2013). Although arson is just one deviant behavior that can result from some of these characteristics, many can lead to other types of deviant behavior as well.

Although the justice system and the pathways within it seem straightforward, it may not be so for youth with LDs. With the deficiencies that come with these disabilities, it can be hard for these youth to understand the processes within the juvenile justice system (Jones & Talbot, 2010). The process itself might seem overwhelming, and the

youth could be unaware of the gravity of their situation and what is expected of them (Jones & Talbot, 2010). This is likely why these youth are arrested more and recidivate at higher rates than their peers without disabilities.

There have been studies that reflect a major issue with juvenile offenders and their difficulty with learning how to read (Vacca, 2008). Although this tends to occur within the school system, this difficulty can be frustrating and lead possibly lead to negative and/or delinquent behavior. It has been shown that inappropriate responses by youth within the learning environment can be misinterpreted as hostility or lack of cooperation, leading teachers and/or schools to discipline these students possibly entering them into the juvenile justice system or at the least starting them on the path (Shelton, 2006). Research shows that racial-ethnic minorities with these disabilities have a greater risk of the suspension/expulsion form of discipline (Bell, 2016). Along with discipline like suspension, the possibility of being rejected by peers can have an impact on how these youth develop and learn.

There is a tendency to exclude learning disabled students from their non-disabled peers by moving them into an exclusive and separate special education program. Unfortunately, these programs are often lacking resources or ill-equipped in other ways. This type of isolation may serve well if properly equipped and resourced in the way of comfort, but has a tendency to create a socially awkward future for these students when interacting with non-disabled peers. This also opens the door for other issues concerning emotional and academic shortcomings in the future (Stanford & Muhammad, 2018).

Not only do those with LDs face vulnerabilities of not understanding scholastically, but there is also the possibility of others taking advantage of them. As was shown by the murder of Brendan Mason, who was killed by two men he thought to be his friends. Not only did they try to label him a pedophile but they tortured him, which led to his death in the hospital the next day. Mason had injuries including broken ribs, a collapsed lung, and brain damage (Matthews, 2018). This is just one prominent example of a person with a LD not understanding and correctly reading a situation. When two men who were formerly friends lured him into a dark park, Mason did not seem too wary of accompanying them.

Learning Disabled Youth More Likely to Engage in Delinquent Behavior

According to Chen et al. (2011) and Shandra and Hogan (2012), learning disabled juveniles are more likely to engage in delinquent offenses than their non-disabled peers. This claim is reflected by Chen (2016). With the showing of a 7.1% higher delinquency rate than that of their nondisabled peers, it is a clear showing that there is a higher delinquency rate in those with learning disabilities as opposed to those without them. Along with this greater showing of delinquency there is also the increased showing of risk-taking behavior. A sample from a Canadian study shows some of these risk-taking behaviors, engaging in delinquency, substance use and abuse, aggressive actions, and gambling (Grigorenko & Macomber, 2014; McNamara & Willoughby, 2010; Segeren et al., 2018).

When looking at this population it helps to know not only some of the likely behaviors and factors that led to them but also when some of these things should be paid

careful attention. By the age of 14 juveniles with LDs are twice as likely to have committed their first offense (Barrett & Katsiyannis, 2010; Segeren et al., 2018). Not only this but the crimes this population commits has a tendency to be more serious in nature in comparison to their peers without disabilities. Because of these statistics, learning disabled juveniles are a lot more likely to have some sort of interaction with the juvenile justice system in comparison to those juveniles without these disabilities (Chitsabesan et al., 2007; Nkoana et al., 2020; Rucklidge, 2013).

Many of the above-mentioned risks and activities lead learning disabled youth to be under court supervision and commit more offenses than that of their peers. Since offenses tend to start at younger ages, having more offenses would statistically make sense. With this young age also comes the possibility of impulsive decisions that are made in youth. Along with this impulsive nature, learning disabled youth also have to try to overcome differential treatment from those of authority and less positive outcomes with regard to school (Mallett, 2014).

As this is a lot for any young person to overcome, it can be overwhelming for those who truly may not understand the dynamics or the situation at hand because of a learning disadvantage produced by a disability. Coupled with emotional and/or behavioral issues, learning disabled youth have a more frequent interaction with delinquency (Shandra & Hogan, 2012). This could be seen as inevitable or as something that should be carefully observed and likely intervene. Although there are many things that have been observed with regard to the increased rates of delinquency within the juvenile learning-disabled population, there is still a lot that stands to be understood.

Proper Training and Communication for Staff

When looking at the concept of training for staff within the juvenile justice system it helps to start in a place that there is the most interaction, within incarceration. Hellenbach (2011) interviewed 15 custody sergeants to get their views and attitudes regarding those juveniles with learning disabilities. All of these sergeants except one were willing to admit that they did not feel they had a full and accurate understanding of learning disabilities. They also said they referenced juveniles as having a mental health issue instead of a LD. Another confusion or misunderstanding that has a tendency to do more harm in good in the misdiagnosis or misinterpretation of a LD being a mental health issue.

Another thing to look at within the path through the juvenile criminal justice system is the pathway through it along with the communication or lack thereof that occurs within it. Even though it would seem pertinent to have school records with a defender in the discovery packet, this is often not the case (Geis, 2014). These records are often not even available for inspection during the intake of a juvenile. The exchange of this documentation could take from days to weeks, even when received containing minimal data (Hart et al., 2012). Although the lack of information could be due to truancy issues with the youth, the turnaround time for receipt is unacceptable as it could have either helped their defender or a judge considering sentencing.

Another issue within this population is the lack of adequate or appropriate services and programs for juveniles with these disabilities. It has been determined that a lack of adequate programming for these populations has a tendency to lead to increased

recidivism (Cruise & Evans, 2011). Sometimes the lack of adequate services can lead to inappropriate behavior including that of inappropriate sexual behavior. Studies completed by Fyson (2007) and Nyokangi and Phasha (2016) found it commonplace to have instances of sexual abuse, including that of rape in the special education schools. The lack of timely or appropriate intervention has led to there have been many juveniles with learning disabilities that have been required to register as sex offenders.

Within this population remains the matter of misidentification. There have been studies documenting the failure to identify these disabilities. As a way to counteract or improve this problem there has been a Child Find provision added to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Failure to comply with act can not only lead to legal action but can place agencies outside of compliance with mandates on state and federal levels (Krezmien & Mulcahy, 2008). Later in 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act was passed as another way to help children with special needs get proper and necessary services. This act was not only meant to help youth with disabilities but for those incarcerated youth to be able to receive proper educational, therapeutic, and transitional services (Gagnon & National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2018).

These measures can be seen as a way of forcing agencies to do their part to properly identify these disabilities so they can be adequately helped. Under the Child Find act the responsibility of finding and helping these youth fall on the state (Geis, 2014). Unfortunately, this provision has also brought a trend of those that want to avoid the responsibility of finding youth with these disabilities. As a way of avoiding the responsibilities that come after the determination of these disabilities, there are those that

try to avoid identifying these youth (Jones & Talbot, 2010). Whether because of feelings that facilities were unable to adequately address these youth or they felt they lacked appropriate skills, this type of response is not only inappropriate but further the issue that already exists. Although there still remains the valid issue of overcrowding and understaffing within these programs (Shelton, 2006).

Lack of Understanding or Misinterpretation

There is a sizeable gap between the understanding of LDs and the reality and depth of the disabilities. Because of this lapse of understanding there are shortcomings with regard to proper environments for those with LDs This misconception has led to separate learning environments for those with and without LDs This separation tends to lead to less understanding of those without disabilities, including a judge and their expectations of the juvenile (Mallett, 2014). The most common lack of understanding comes in the way of peers. These juveniles typically will not have the necessary information to make comparisons to those without disabilities to establish proper behavior in their presence (Amitay & Gumpel, 2015).

This separation can also lead to lapses or improper understanding of what is appropriate moral judgement. It has been established that moral judgement is a risk factor with importance with regard to recidivism. Since moral judgement helps determine how one acts and reacts to certain things, behavior associated with it can vary based on how well it is understood. Learning disabled youth tend not to have the greatest understanding that their inappropriate behavior is not only against the norm but more importantly against the societal rules (van Vugt & Asscher, 2011). Another important factor is

whether or not it is thought that the appropriate moral judgement can be instilled in these juveniles or if it beyond their reasonable understanding. This is important when reasoning the accountability of a juvenile for their actions.

Other issues within the learning-disabled population are misrepresentation and labelling. There are those that would categorize those within this population as “special” or “eternal children.” There seems to be a frequency of a negative connotation being attributed to this population (Matthews, 2018). This can not only draw unnecessary or unwanted attention to those with LDs, but can also lead to feelings of indifference toward them. As misrepresentation and labelling might lead to misunderstanding and intolerance, it is important to properly represent those within the disabled community.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

It is important to first have an understanding of the definition of the school-to-prison pipeline before understanding its purpose and shortcomings. It can be defined as “the systemic removal from the k-12 education environment into settings of incarceration (i.e., jails and prisons)” (Bell, 2016, p. 698). Another definition is “a metaphor used to describe the pathway followed by students who, because of their demographic and psychological characteristics and educational disadvantages, are caught in a web of circumstances that propel them from school into the juvenile justice system” (Nelson, 2014, p. 91).

With these definitions in mind, it stands to reason that many juveniles with multiple suspensions and/or expulsion end up in the juvenile justice system (Geis, 2014). Much of this could be a reflection of the zero-tolerance policy that many schools have

established, some now including weapons, drugs, and what is considered problem behavior (Stanford, 2018). Numbers of youth with LDs in this position may be directly referred to the juvenile justice system by their schools (Read, 2014). These referrals are reflected in the rising rates of incarceration for youth arrested while attending school (Stanford & Muhammad, 2018).

Another unfortunate statistic seems to emerge when looking into the school-to-prison pipeline. There seems to be a large number of not only children with disabilities but also within this group a majority of underrepresented youth (Stanford & Muhammad, 2018). This seems to be a reflection that underrepresented students with disabilities of an intellectual nature reflect a greater risk of not only suspension but expulsion more so than that of their nondisabled peers (Bell, 2016). These suspensions and expulsion further fuel the pipeline that is continually propelling youth with less fortunate circumstances through it.

Differing Opinions About LDs and Juvenile Delinquency Link

Although there have been many studies that examine the apparent link between LDs and juvenile delinquency, there are still those that feel this may not be the case. There have been recent studies conveying the idea that although criminal behavior may be indirectly related to criminal behavior it is not an indicator of future criminal behavior. Not only this but that LDs are typically just an indicator for economic problems and/or small or minor misbehavior (Kumagami, 2014). There have been those like Chitsabesan et al. (2007) who have felt that the cause of poor academic performance within juvenile offenders is not clearly linked to learning disabilities.

Others have suggested that there is not enough known about the nature of LDs making it hard to understand the full extent of a possible link and/or pathway to delinquency (Maniadaki & Kakouros, 2010). Without a full and true understanding of all the intricacies of LDs it can become difficult to feel comfortable in conveying definite pathways to delinquency. Studies have shown that there is a link between criminal activity and level of education. This goes to say that certain levels of achievement or lack thereof could either lead to criminal activity or serve as a barrier from committing criminal acts (Vacca, 2008).

Despite the considerable amount of evidence linking juvenile delinquency to reading disabilities, there is still not enough research about certain strategies to help. The one strategy in particular that would seem useful within juvenile corrections being remediation (Shelley-Tremblay, 2007). Remediation could serve as a tool that could give these juveniles the extra time that they need to adequately grasp and understand concepts that those with these disabilities may not grasp as easily or quickly as their peers without disabilities. All it really seems to suggest is that there is much more research that is needed to truly understand the influence these disabilities truly have on delinquency (Shelton, 2006).

Learning Disabled Youth Referred to Juvenile System More Frequently

There have been many scholars that have recognized that juveniles with LDs tend to be referred to the juvenile justice system more than their peers without learning disabilities. One possible reason noted that many of these juveniles did not have the appropriate services available to address their education or behavioral needs (Cruise &

Evans, 2011; Read, 2014). This seems to be a problem reflected more in communities of less means. With this in mind it does not seem unreasonable that male African American youth with familial history of delinquency were referred more to the juvenile justice system (Zhang et al., 2011).

With the many definitions associated with learning disabilities and conditions associated with them, it can become difficult finding the most appropriate one and adopting it (Grigorenko & Macomber, 2016). When there is no universal understanding of a condition it becomes difficult to know how best to help with it. For this among other reasons, students in special education programs with improper or untreated diagnoses have a tendency to increasingly enter the juvenile justice system (Stanford & Muhammad, 2018). Although it is helpful to be in these programs the full potential of the student can't be fulfilled if the student is either undiagnosed or improperly diagnosed.

Differential Treatment and Youth Giving Up

One big problem that seems to show up with regard to this population is the differential treatment they receive. Juvenile court is said to be largely encountering those with learning disabilities because of not only school failure but differential treatment (Mallett, 2014). Another problem within this population is the tendency to put labels on these juveniles. Studies have shown a trend within those within the population of those with LDs that have been labeled as such have a higher risk of committing delinquent actions (Matta Oshima & Huang, 2010).

Along with labeling and differential treatment comes the possibility that the juvenile reaches the point of frustration to which they feel like giving up. Sometimes the

youth get so tired of their situation and the frustrations that come with it to the point where they stop going to school altogether (Geis, 2014). This can become a reality if the school has not already started to push them out by way of suspensions or expulsions already. When the juvenile has reached the point of quitting, they may also be scared or trying to seem bold. Because of this possibility it can be difficult to have discussions with these students about their education.

Appropriateness of Charges

When considering the appropriateness of charges, it is necessary to consider many things. One thing that should be taken into consideration is how much a defendant can understand not only the charges against them but the actions that led to the charges. In other words, it is necessary to know whether or not they can understand that what they did was wrong and if this was understood when the crime was committed. Different countries have different ages and factors when considering criminal responsibility. For example, in England and Wales the age of responsibility is 10 years old. When looking at the study conducted by Chitsabesan et al. (2007), more the half of the juveniles had a comprehension and reading ability of below 10 years old. It also should be considered whether the actions of the juvenile were a direct result of their disability, as this should be considered mitigating circumstances with regard to the charge (Geis, 2014).

Another big consideration is that of intellectual understanding. Intellectual disabilities can play a role in not only intelligence but also in functioning and behavior. An intellectual disability is defined as a lack of complete development of the mind (Mosotho et al, 2020). In other words, individuals failed to fully develop intellectually

during their developmental stage. This type of disability could affect a person's reasoning, ability to dress themselves, bathroom abilities, and ability to feed themselves. This type of disability is important as it is one of the biggest causes of impairment within not only adults but also youth (Mosotho et al, 2020).

Shift in Purpose of Juvenile Justice System

The original purpose of the juvenile justice system was to intervene with the youth and divert them from criminal behavior. This was working on the original thought that they were still young and moldable and that their immature nature and actions could be changed, unlike that of many adult offenders (Shelley-Tremblay & O'Brien, 2007). This sentiment or purpose seemed to have a vast change over the years as the system seems to lean more in the direction of punishment as opposed to intervention. Now the new 'get tough' stance seems to be a way of placating communities that want to remove delinquent youth to keep them from further harming the community (Shelton, 2006). Although this tends to be the typical attitude of those managing the youth, there are still those still believe that diversion is an appropriate and necessary option for youth within the system (Nelson, 2014).

Link to Recidivism

There are a number of factors that are seemingly predictors for recidivism in the juvenile population. It has been proven that needs of a special education type is one of the predictors of recidivism (Smeets, 2014). One could draw the conclusion that focusing on and meeting the needs of juveniles with these disabilities could help with regard to recidivism. Vacca (2008) concluded that the juvenile offenders with disabilities exposed

to the proper programs had lower recidivism rates than those that were not exposed to these types of programs. A couple of other things that seem to curb recidivism rates within this population are education and employment (Hart et al., 2011).

Although there are a number of reasons for juveniles to have high recidivism rates, there have been numerous studies focusing on these factors. It has been determined that LDs tend to increase the risk of recidivism. Even more focused within the LD population, those with reading disabilities seemed to have higher rates of recidivism than those without this disability (O'Brien et al., 2007). With many risk factors with regard to juveniles and their immature and impressionable nature, there has been more focus given to those with disabilities. One study (van Vugt & Asscher, 2011) identified moral judgement or lack thereof a risk factor in juveniles.

Violent Offenses

There is a found correlation between LDs and violent and property delinquency as well as truancy. Some other behaviors linked to this population is that of usage like that of tobacco and marijuana (Evans & Clinkinbeard, 2015; Segeren et al., 2018). It has been shown statistically that many incarcerated juveniles have been shown to have reading disabilities. Even more so than this many of these youth are incarcerated for aggressive felonies (Houchins et al., 2021; Shelley-Tremblay & O'Brien, 2007;), furthering the argument that if the proper help and education are not received that these youth have a tendency to turn to delinquent and/or criminal activity. Many youth that show the antisocial or violent behavior at an early age typically continue this behavior into adulthood, often escalating in the nature of offense (Chester et al., 2019). Early diagnosis

of these disabilities along with the proper education could help deter some of these juveniles from going down the path to criminal activities.

Mistaken for Attention Disorders or Co-occurring

Although there have been many studies that have focused on LDs more thorough research needs to be done on co-occurring conditions. Even though LDs within themselves need to be addressed if there is a co-occurring condition that is ignored there could still be unforeseen or unwanted results within these juveniles. There have been those that have voiced the need to be careful when interpreting results from this population as there has typically not been the consideration with these studies for these co-occurring conditions (O'Brien et al., 2007). One condition that has started emerging as co-occurring is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Maniadaki & Kakouros, 2010). This disorder could affect not only the impulsive nature of juveniles but also their aggression and defiance levels.

Summary

The rise in juvenile delinquency rates was a disturbing yet understandable trend. With the number of juveniles not getting the proper care and/or educational help needed to cope or maintain with their disabilities, it was more than fathomable that many would end up in the juvenile justice system. With issues having led from vulnerability and differential treatment to the school-to-prison pipeline and the shift in the purpose of the juvenile justice system, it would have seemed unavoidable that the system is overcrowded with youth. Not just any youth but many that suffered from disabilities that could have left them as prey to a system that they could not even understand. For those

youth, the rates of recidivism rose with their decreased lack of understanding. As these youth fall into the cycle of repeated offenses, their academic and emotional goals become not only things of the past but things that seem unobtainable.

It was known that there were links between delinquency and LDs, but there was much to be gained from a statistical standpoint. As most studies seemed to focus on disabilities in general, offenses, and the recidivism that typically followed not many looked at just the numbers. This study was meant to look at the numbers within one facility with regard to those in the system with and without LDs, not disabilities as a whole or mental health issues. This type of statistical information could have provided evidence of the necessity of certain programs for those with these disabilities. Programs that should help lower recidivism rates in this population as well as provide them with a more stable foundation to succeed within their community.

In this chapter, I focused on literature reflecting youth with learning disabilities along with their pathway through the juvenile justice system. Along with this there were risk factors leading to a higher likelihood of delinquency within this population as well as its impact on recidivism. There are some factors that dealt with shortcomings with regard to the school system and those dealing with feelings and frustrations felt and exhibited by the youth. The theoretical framework was a reflection on the works of Durkheim and Merton and their theories of anomie and strain. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology used in the further completion of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was significance in the link between juvenile delinquency and LDs. It was also meant to reflect whether these types of delinquent youth warranted a more detailed exploration to see if there was a way to aide them in avoiding recidivism. The youth in this study were convicted juveniles within the South Carolina juvenile justice system.

In this chapter, I provide a more complete description of the study at hand as well as the methodology used for answering to the research questions. The research design and study population are also discussed in greater detail. Additionally, I explain the measures taken to collect and analyze the data as well as justify the specific analysis measures used.

Research Questions

Although there was existing literature addressing the research questions at hand, these previous studies tended to focus less on statistical significance and more on risk factors. When considering the frequency of learning-disabled youths becoming delinquent as opposed to those without these disabilities, studies like that of Chen et al. (2011), Chin (2019), and Barrett and Katsiyannis (2014) reflected this idea or conclusion. There were also studies that focused on specific actions or crimes committed by this population, like that of Tranah and Nicholas (2013) who focused on the crime of arson. When considering recidivism, previous studies have focused on different types of LDs that tended to lead to higher recidivism rates (i.e., O'Brien & Langhinrichsen-Rohling,

2007) or factors and programs that affected recidivism (i.e., Hart et al., 2011; Vacca, 2008).

With so many studies having focused on the nature of factors within this population that led to becoming a part of the juvenile justice system and recidivism, it was important to note the statistical importance of this population. In other words, I wanted to establish if there was statistical data showing that the money and time that would be spent on helping this population was warranted. The following research questions and corresponding hypotheses guided this study:

RQ1: What is the statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs?

*H*₁1: There is a high statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs.

*H*₀1: There is no statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs.

RQ2: What is the statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs?

*H*₁2: There is a high statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs.

*H*₀2: There is no statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs.

Research Design

In this study, I employed a quantitative methodology to evaluate secondary data and determine whether there was statistical significance in the relationship between youth with LDs, juvenile delinquency, and recidivism. Conclusions were made from evaluating hypotheses, obtained secondary data, and analysis of the data. Using quantitative methodology was appropriate because secondary data were used to consider links between delinquency and recidivism with regard to LDs.

I collected data from conviction records from the SCDJJ and the SCDE. A request was made to the SC RFA for the data within the required time period. It was necessary to go through the SC RFA so the records of the juveniles in the SCDJJ could be linked to their records in the SCDE as the SCDJJ were not required to fill out the special needs/disability category. Data for this study were records collected and maintained by the state of South Carolina. The data consisted of juveniles' ages, crimes for which they were convicted, if it was their first offense, their last offense date, gender, presence or lack of LD, and race. This information was necessary to determine whether a juvenile had reoffended after an initial conviction.

Population and Sample Size

The sample population was youth convicted and incarcerated during the time periods of 2010 through 2019. I completed sampling using secondary data. The units of analysis were youth incarcerated during 2010–2019 in the South Carolina juvenile detention center data, which included data from all the facilities in the state. I evaluated the number of juveniles within this demographic to establish the extent to which it may

have influenced validity. To determine what youth to include in the current study, I mainly focused on those with LDs who could be compared to youth without LDs to determine a possible statistical significance based on the number of youths that were evaluated during this period. Because this comparison required all of the youth incarcerated during the established time period, there was an appropriate number of participants in the current study.

Statistical Tests

I used a Pearson chi-square test to test the null hypotheses and determine if there was any statistical significance in delinquent youth with LDs and their possibility of recidivism. Descriptive statistics and crosstabulation were also used to analyze the data in this study. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software package was used to run these analyses. The results of this study could add to the existing knowledge concerning detained juveniles. A more comprehensive qualitative anomie/strain project could provide a fuller evaluation of the variables and factors for the incarcerated, learning-disabled youth population, including, but not limited to, mental health, education level of parents, race, class status, and the parents' criminal history or lack thereof.

Ethical Procedures

The data used in this study came from existing, secondary, archival data sources (IRB approval number: 08-23-21-1016313). The population consisted of youth offenders between the ages of 6 and 20 years old. Since juveniles are a protected class that typically require special considerations as research subjects, I used secondary data in this study to avoid any issues in this regard. This meant there was no direct contact with any of the

juveniles whose statistics and data were used in the study. The data from these juveniles was previously attained and is completely anonymous. The archival data came from the SCDJJ and the SCDE.

Summary

Current and future research will continue to observe juvenile delinquency, recidivism, and learning-disabled youth. With the continued numbers of juvenile incarceration, it was evident that a gap still remained within the literature on this topic. It is the responsibility of those working within the juvenile justice system to stay abreast of current literature regarding the juvenile justice system and make changes deemed necessary for the bettering of the youth involved in the system. Addressing the gap in the literature could also possibly help youth coming from impoverished or crime-ridden environments. The move from more of a rehabilitative or bettering mindset to that of punishment with regard to the juvenile justice system has not been one that has helped to curb recidivism (CITE). In this study, I focused on quantitatively establishing statistical links and viabilities between learning-disabled youth in the juvenile justice system and recidivism within this population. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the data collection process and results of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I provide as the results of the data analysis. The purpose of this study was to determine the possible significance of LDs as a contributor to delinquency and recidivism among learning-disabled juvenile delinquents. For this study, recidivism was defined as acts committed that resulted in adjudication, rearrest, and a return to incarceration (see National Institute of Justice, 2021; Vacca, 2008). The following research questions and corresponding hypotheses guided this study:

RQ1: What is the statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs?

H_{11} : There is a high statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs.

H_{01} : There is no statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs.

RQ2: What is the statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs?

H_{12} : There is a high statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs.

H_{02} : There is no statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs.

Data Collection and Identification

I collected data for this study after putting in a request for the data in question from the SC RFA office. The request had to receive approval for the conduction of the

study and to link information on the juveniles between the SCDJJ and the SCDE. I used the SCDJJ information to derive data about juveniles incarcerated during the 2010–2019 time period and the SCDE data was used to link these juveniles to their disability status or lack thereof. Written consent was not necessary from the juveniles or their guardians because the information used was available to the public. As the researcher, I did have to sign a confidentiality agreement agreeing to protect the confidentiality of the juveniles included in the study.

The data consisted of RFA ID, decision charged script, decision charges weight, sex, race, client prior history, first referral date, last referral date, disability status, and school year. The incarcerated population during this time period was 15,900 juveniles with 2,633 of whom had a diagnosed LD.

Population Demographics

The study population demographics included race, gender, and age. The demographics for the incarcerated population as a whole during the 2010–2019 time period was as follows. American Indian/Alaskan Native individuals made up .2% ($n = 31$) of the study population, one of the smaller populations. Asian or Pacific Islander individuals made up .1% ($n = 13$) of the population, the smallest population in the study. Black individuals made up 62.2% ($n = 9,889$) of the population, the largest population in the study. Hispanic individuals made up 2.9% (456) of the population. Individuals categorized as Other made up 1.4% ($n = 218$) of the population. White individuals made up 33.3% ($n = 5,293$) of the population, the second largest population in the study.

The breakdown of races within the learning-disabled population was similar in percentage to that of the population as a whole. The percentages were the same for the American Indian/Alaskan Native and Asian or Pacific Islander races, .2% ($n = 4$) and .1% ($n = 2$), respectively. The Black race showed a slight increase, making up a 63.2% ($n = 1,664$) of the learning-disabled population. The Hispanic race showed a slight increase with 3.4% ($n = 89$) of the learning-disabled population. The Other race showed a slight increase with 1.9% ($n = 50$), while the White race showed the only slight decrease with 31.3% ($n = 824$) of the learning-disabled population.

The frequency of the gender in the juveniles incarcerated during the study period showed a much greater number of males than females. Males represented 81.5% ($n = 12,955$) of the total population ($N = 15,900$), while females only represented 18.5% ($n = 2,945$) of the population.

With regard to gender frequency within the learning-disabled population, the results reflected a similar trend and percentage. Males represented 82.1% ($n = 2,162$) of the total learning-disabled population ($N = 2,633$) and the females represented 17.9% ($n = 471$).

Of the 15,900 juveniles, the youngest age was 6 years old, while the oldest was 20 years old. The mean age for the juveniles within this population was 15.3 years old. I calculated the standard deviation ($SD = 1.206$) to reflect how the ages of the juveniles varied from the average age of juveniles incarcerated during the study period. There was

a coefficient of variation of .079 or 7.9%, which reflected a low percentage of variation between the ages of the juveniles in this population.

Of the 2,633 juveniles in the learning-disabled population, the youngest age was 10 years old, while the oldest was 20 years old. The mean age for the juveniles within this population was 15.3 years old. In this population, the standard deviation was 1.251. There was a coefficient of variation of .082 or 8.2%, which reflected a low percentage of variation between the ages of the juveniles in this population. The descriptive statistics of the LD population reflected similar numbers to that of the whole population.

Chi-Square Tests

I used chi-square tests in this study as a way of comparing gender with recidivism and whether gender had an influence on the likelihood of recidivism. Table 1 displays the results of this test on the whole incarcerated juvenile population of the study. Although the value and the degree of freedom are shown, the asymptotic significance or p value gives the significance of the results. The p value of .091 was not significant because $p > .05$. This result showed the lack of a significant association between gender and recidivism.

Table 1*Chi-Square Tests Within Whole Population Based on Gender*

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson chi-square	4.802	2	.091
Likelihood ratio	5.176	2	.075
<i>N</i> of valid cases	15,900		

The chi-square test for gender and recidivism within the learning-disabled population is shown in Table 2. The p value of .392 was not significant because $p > .05$. This result showed the lack of a significant association between gender and recidivism within the learning-disabled population.

Table 2*Chi-Square Tests Within Learning-Disabled Population Based on Gender*

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson chi-square	.732	1	.392
Likelihood ratio	.768	1	.381
<i>N</i> of valid cases	2,633		

Recidivism

As one of the research questions dealt with recidivism, the following tables addressed recidivism within the population of this study. Table 3 reflects the recidivism numbers within both the learning-disabled and the non-learning-disabled population. The non-learning-disabled population recidivated at far greater numbers than those who did not recidivate with 12,859 juveniles to 408 juveniles, respectively. Within the learning-

disabled population, the numbers showed a similar trend with 2,531 juveniles recidivating compared to 102 juveniles not recidivating.

Table 3

Recidivism Rates for Total Population

Recidivism	LD	Non-LD	Total
No	102	408	510
Yes	2,531	12,859	15,390
Total	2,633	13,267	15,900

Another consideration for recidivism was that of gender, so it was necessary to note the amount of recidivism among genders, as shown in Table 4. For the learning-disabled population, females recidivated more than not with 456 juveniles to 15 juveniles. As for the males, 2,075 juveniles recidivated while 87 did not.

Table 4

Recidivism by Gender Within the Learning-Disabled Population

Gender	No	Yes	Total
Female	15	456	471
Male	87	2,075	2,162
Total	102	2,531	2,633

It was also necessary to consider the data for those juveniles that were not learning disabled to compare the recidivism rates within both populations. Table 5 shows information related to gender with regard to recidivism in the non-learning-disabled population of this study. For this population, 2,377 females recidivated compared to 97 who did not. As for the males, 10,482 recidivated while 311 did not.

Table 5*Recidivism by Gender Within non-Learning-Disabled Population*

Gender	No	Yes	Total
Female	97	2,377	2,474
Male	311	10,482	10,793
Total	408	12,859	13,267

Findings Summary**Research Question 1**

In an effort to answer this question, I conducted a chi-square test to determine if there was statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs. The independent variables were the learning-disabled juveniles and non-learning-disabled juveniles. The dependent variable was delinquency. The chi-square test revealed that there was no statistically significant difference. With a p value of .36, there is no significance because $p > .05$. Because there is no statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Research Question 2

In an effort to answer this question, I conducted a chi-square test to determine if there was statistical significance in juveniles with LDs succumbing to recidivism versus those without LDs. The independent variables were the learning-disabled juveniles and non-learning-disabled juveniles. The dependent variable was recidivism. The chi-square test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference. With a p value of .034, there is significance because $p < .05$. There is a high statistical significance in recidivism

among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs, resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

In Chapter 5, I will provide my interpretation of the findings. The chapter will also include a discussion of the nature of study, theoretical framework, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine the statistical significance between LDs, delinquency, and recidivism. It has been suggested that there is a high prevalence of youth with LDs within the juvenile justice system and learning-disabled juveniles have a tendency to have more interaction with the justice system than those lacking these disabilities (Nkoana et al., 2020; Rucklidge, 2013). Some of the percentages suggested for the number of incarcerated juveniles with learning disabilities range from 10% to 32% (Borschmann et al., 2020). The results of this study showed that within the SCDJJ during the years of 2010–2019, the percentage of the incarcerated population that were diagnosed with a LD was 16.56%, falling on the lower end of the range suggested by previous research.

With respect to recidivism, there have been studies like that of Smeets (2014) who suggested that special education needs like that of students with LDs is a good predictor for recidivism. Although the majority of the learning-disabled juveniles in the current study succumbed to recidivism (i.e., 96.13%), this only accounted for 16.45% (i.e., 2,531 of 15,390) of the whole recidivism population within the SCDJJ during the study period. Compared to the 83.55% of the whole recidivism population, the recidivism numbers of the learning-disabled students were much lower when accounting for contributions to recidivism within the SCDJJ population. When examining the amount of recidivism that occurred, the learning-disabled population contributed to a 15.92% recidivism rate compared to their nondisabled counterparts with an 80.87% recidivism rate of the SCDJJ population as a whole. Although the numbers were high within the learning-disabled

population for recidivism, this population was a relatively small percentage of the recidivism that occurred within the population as a whole.

Nature of Study

In this quantitative study, I employed a design that used secondary data that was consistent with determining the significance or lack thereof in the links between juvenile delinquency and LDs. The results showed the different significance levels in the two populations (i.e., learning-disabled and non-learning-disabled juveniles) and their different statistical aspects. This quantitative analysis also showed significance in the link between LDs and recidivism as opposed to those without LDs. The results also indicated the lack of a significant link between LDs and juvenile delinquency

There were three variables of focus of in this study: The independent variable was the learning-disabled juveniles, while the dependent variables were delinquency and recidivism. Data from this study were provided by the SCDJJ and the SCDE by way of the SC RFA. There was a total of 15,900 juveniles, of whom 2,633 possessed LDs. The juveniles were between the ages of 6 and 20 years old. The time period of focus was for juveniles incarcerated in the SCDJJ system was between January 2010 and December 2019. The following research questions were addressed and answered in the study:

RQ1: What is the statistical significance in juveniles with LDs becoming delinquent versus those without LDs?

RQ2: What is the statistical significance in recidivism among juveniles with LDs versus those without LDs?

Interpretation of the Findings

I conducted a Pearson chi-square test to answer each research question. The results for Research Question 1 indicated no significant statistical significance in juvenile delinquency risk between learning-disabled juveniles and juveniles without LDs. After calculating the results, I rejected the null hypothesis. The statistical finding for Research Question 1 was a p value of .36, showing no significance because $p > .05$. Research Question 2 addressed the possible statistical significance in recidivism risk between learning-disabled juveniles and those without LDs. The results indicated a significant difference in recidivism risk between the two groups. In this instance, I rejected the null hypothesis. The statistical finding for Research Question 2 was a p value of .034, showing a significance because $p < .05$.

LDs were the focus of this study as was how they may or may not affect the likelihood of juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Many of the findings confirmed things that were described in the previous literature. Nearly a third of the total juvenile population in this study committed probation violations. Males had a higher likelihood of both delinquency and recidivism in both learning-disabled and non-learning-disabled populations.

Theoretical Framework

From a theoretical perspective, it can be said that the struggle of LD youth within their educational constraints might lead to delinquency and, in turn, recidivism. As their disability can lead to a lack of educational success, studies have suggested this can be a factor leading to delinquency (Lo et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2019). Many of the juveniles

could also be considered to be falling in line with some of Merton's five adaptations of anomie, mainly conformity, innovation, and/or rebellion. Because it was not the purpose of this study to reflect on what personal obstacles or impediments outside of LDs may have led to the path of delinquency and/or recidivism, this study only showed statistical data.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations I encountered while conducting this study was the use of the SCDJJ real time data and trends website (<https://djj.sc.gov/research-and-data/interactive-reports>). Since some of the data given on this website dealt with approximate numbers, it was necessary to request the specific information needed for the population under study during the time period in question from the website using a data request form. Although there was a timely response from the statistician answering requests from the website, I determined that all of the information that would be required for this study would not be available and accurate through just the SCDJJ.

Another limitation of the study was that it was necessary to go through another agency to get the information needed with regard to the disability status of the juveniles incarcerated in the SCDJJ for the period that was in question. The SCDJJ has some information about disabilities but because it is not a field of information they are required to fill and include in records; the information would not be the most accurate. This required me to go through the SC RFA to access records from the SCDE to get information about juveniles' disability status. Through my request, the SC RFA was able to get the information from the SCDJJ and the SCDE as well as link the information for

the juveniles using an RFA ID. Through this linkage I was able to see both the SCDJJ information and the SCDE information regarding any disability these juveniles had on record.

The last limitation was in the way of factors leading to delinquency and recidivism. Because I had no contact with the juveniles included in the study, it was impossible to determine any of the factors leading to their incarceration whether these factors were related to their inability to understand rules, comprehend expectations of probation, peer pressure, or a general lack of regard. Statistical data were helpful in determining delinquency and recidivism but not the factors that led juveniles to take part in either.

Recommendations

Further research on the topic is needed from a more qualitative standpoint. Although this study was helpful from a statistical standpoint, there were many angles dealing with LDs and delinquency that could not be addressed through statistical means. There are some things like mindsets, factors, and backgrounds that would be more appropriately determined with a more engaging and hands-on type of study. The results from a more engaging study could be helpful when considering changes within the juvenile judicial system and educational departments that would be most helpful for a juvenile based on their background and ability to understand and comprehend.

It would also be helpful to include the school system in future research. Because the school is where most juveniles spend most of their time outside of the home, it would be a place where a researcher would likely observe the most about the juveniles. Since

past studies have suggested that criminal behavior is linked to academic success (Vacca, 2018), including information from schools would prove a good source. I would also recommend that future research include more programs focused on identifying those with LDs and helping them achieve more academic success. Studies have shown that more academic success leads to less delinquency and recidivism within this populations (Hirschinger-Blank et al. 2019).

Implications

The findings of this study showed the high level of delinquency and recidivism in the incarcerated juvenile population in South Carolina, especially among those that were learning disabled. The high level of recidivism within the learning-disabled juveniles that were incarcerated during the study period conveys the need for further evaluation. The findings of this study provide a place to start this further evaluation from. Since the learning-disabled population is smaller, it would be a better sample population when considering the development of new programs or other ways to better affect these juveniles and try to lower recidivism numbers. The SCDE would be an ideal place to start with regarding educational programming because the SCDE already has information on the incarcerated juvenile population concerning their disabilities. Because the SCDE already has the resources to establish educational programs catering to the specific needs of certain populations, they seem to be an ideal point of focus to help in lowering these recidivism rates. Lowering these recidivism numbers would go a long way toward creating more functional members of society among this population.

Another area that could use some attention from policymakers and the DJJ would be with the requirements for the SCDJJ. It would be helpful to have LDs and disabilities in general as a required category that has to be completed for a juvenile during intake. This information would provide not only a more accurate picture of the juvenile in question but how best to help them if it is known that they possess some type of disability that could use some extra time or attention.

Conclusion

In this study, I examined the likelihood and significance of LDs affecting juveniles with regard to their delinquency and recidivism. South Carolina showed not only a high recidivism level among juveniles with LDs but also for those without LDs. With continued scholarly attention and research, more ways can be developed to help these youth decrease their recidivism rate. Policy changes regarding these juveniles could lead to lower numbers of delinquency with regard to juvenile incarceration.

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