



Examining Potential Predictors of Social Problems in Fifth Graders with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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Background

Many students in United States public schools are recipients of special education services each year. These students receive a variety of services, including social emotional and behavioral services provided by social workers. With the rising number of students with disabilities being included in general education settings, it is important for social workers to understand how disabilities may impact student successes in social functioning at school. Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID and DD) “have problems with adaptive functioning in social situations and peer relations” (van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012, p. 426) that lead to maladaptive behaviors at school. Students with ID and DD are more likely to show aggressive behaviors, mental health issues, and poor social skills (Carter & Hughes, 2005; Laws & Kelly, 2005; Scior & Grierson, 2004; van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens, 2012). Each student can present with different issues, which makes it difficult for social workers to tailor interventions specifically to the student. By examining the history and background of each student and understanding how they predict social problems, social workers may be able to better tailor interventions to help improve social functioning at school.

Methodology

The sample is drawn from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation set and consists of almost 300 fifth graders, and will examine predictors based on other data collected over the course of the study. The hypothesis examines whether gender, race, participation in early intervention services, an ADD/ADHD diagnosis, problems in peer relationships, aggressive behavior, and conflict in the home predict social problems in fifth graders with ID or DD. Multiple regression analysis was run on all control and independent variables to determine possible predictors of social problems.



Results

Descriptive statistics were run on all variables being examined. Initial analysis found that the majority of the sample consisted of males (60.2%), and that 53.9% of the sample was non-white (identified as African-American, Hispanic, or other). Despite the sample being from the EHSRE dataset, the majority of respondents did not participate in early intervention services (67.3%) and did not have an ADD/ADHD diagnosis (59.9%). Independent variables measured continuously were also examined and analyzed for mean and standard deviation. Of the final sample (n=269), 247 respondent provided scores for the SDQ Peer Relations subscale, with a mean score of 3.11 (SD= 0.73), indicating high mean levels of problems with peer relations. Respondents reported moderate mean levels on the CBCL Aggressive Behavior subscale (8.37, SD= 6.56) and low mean levels on the Family Environment Conflict scale (1.5, SD= 0.46) and on the CBCL Social Problems subscale (4.5, SD=3.6).

Following the analysis of descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations were run on all variables to test for significance and collinearity before moving forward with the multiple regression analysis. Upon review, none of the independent variables showed a risk of collinearity with each other.

Finally, multiple regression analysis was run to determine which variables were predictors of social problems. Variables were entered using the step-wise method for the most efficient results. Final results are shown on the table here.

Final MRA Table

Variable	B	S.E.	Beta
Gender	-.910	.412	-.127*
Race	.558	.413	.079
CBCL Aggressive Behavior Raw Score	.312	.030	.596*
Participation in EI Services	1.672	.669	.146*
Constant		1.873	
R ²		.40	
F (4, 181)		32.01*	

* P < 0.05

Implications

For school social workers, it is important to recognize which factors predict social problems on an individual level and to tailor interventions to the specific needs a child may present with at school. It is helpful to know if a child received early intervention services early on and what services were provided, as this gives social workers a baseline from which to start. Knowing a child’s aggression score on a scale such as the CBCL also allows school social workers to have a better understanding of some of the problems students may present with in the classroom that can be addressed in group and individual therapy and with other interventions. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) already has set structures in place to provide accommodations for students with disabilities, including the provision of social-emotional supports for students. This provision gives school social workers the legal responsibility to provide social emotional supports to students that have this need, and knowing what predictors may impact potential social problems is extremely helpful.