

The Prevalence and Correlates of Involvement in the Criminal Justice System Among Youth on the Autism Spectrum

Julianna Rava, MPH; Paul Shattuck, MSSW, PhD; Anne Roux, MPH; Jessica Rast, MPH

Background

Previous research suggests individuals with developmental disabilities are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system (CJS) than persons without disabilities.

A lack of social and communication skills can contribute to violating social norms.

There is limited research into what individual characteristics increase risk for criminal justice system involvement among this population.

Research Questions

What is the prevalence of involvement in the CJS for young adults on the autism spectrum?

Which factors are associated with involvement in the CJS?

Are there significant differences for young adults on the autism spectrum when compared to peers with an intellectual disability after adjusting for wide range covariates?

At what age did young adults experience police contact?

Sample & Methods

Data Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study-2

Data are from Wave 2 and Wave 5 surveys of both parents and youth. Questions in 2003 (while in high school) asked about risk and protective factors; those in 2009 asked about involvement in the CJS.

Univariate point estimates and 95% confidence intervals were computed for describing the independent variables. We tested for significance using logistic regression with dummy coding.

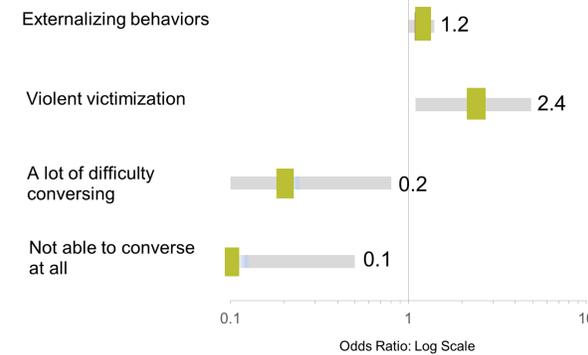
Covariates: gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, household income, parent education, conversation ability, ADD/ADHD diagnosis, violent victimization, externalizing behaviors.

1 in 5 young adults with autism ages 21-25 had ever been stopped and questioned by police



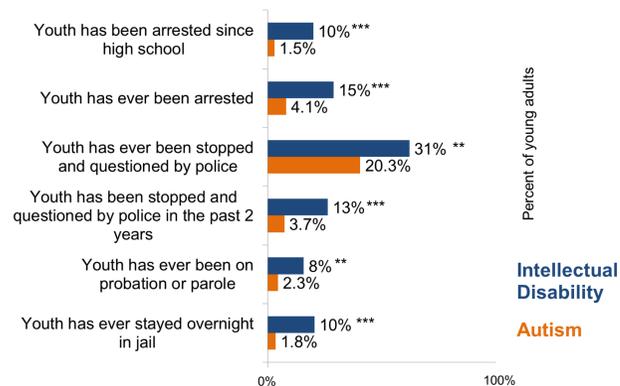
Factors associated with criminal justice involvement among young adults on the autism spectrum

Externalizing behaviors, violent victimization, difficulty conversing and not being able to converse at all were significant factors associated with ever being stopped and questioned by police among young adults with autism.



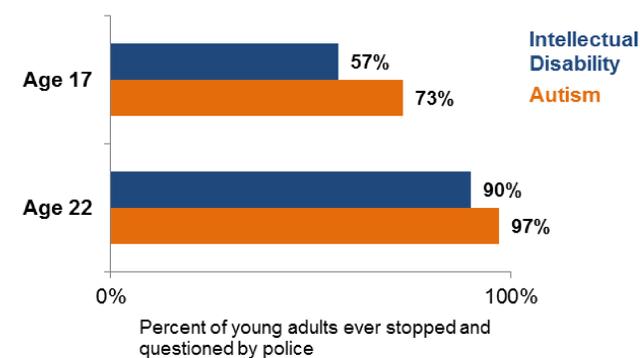
Rates of involvement in the criminal justice system among young adults with an intellectual disability compared to those with autism

Prevalence of CJI among young adults. Test of significance versus the ASD group.



*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Covariates: gender, age, ethnicity, household income, parent's education, conversation ability, ADD/ADHD diagnosis, violent victimization, externalizing behaviors.

Of those ever stopped and questioned, most had experienced police contact by age 17.



No significant difference in criminal justice involvement among young adults

CJI among young adults with an intellectual disability compared to those with autism, controlling for covariates (Odds ratios and 95% CI, Wave 5).

CJI variable	Intellectual Disability OR (CI)
Youth has been arrested since high school	2.3 (0.6-8.5)
Youth has ever been arrested	2.0 (0.5-7.6)
Youth has ever been stopped and questioned by police	1.4 (0.7-3.0)
Youth has been stopped and questioned by police in the past 2 years	2.2 (0.7-7.0)
Youth has ever been on probation or parole	1.7 (0.3-11.2)
Youth has ever stayed overnight in jail	1.3 (0.5-3.6)

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Covariates: gender, age, ethnicity, household income, parent's education, conversation ability, ADD/ADHD diagnosis, violent victimization, externalizing behaviors.

Conclusion

20.3% of young adults with autism had ever been stopped and questioned by police, excluding traffic violations.

After testing for all the covariates, externalizing behaviors and violent victimization increased the likelihood of involvement in the CJS. Those that had great difficulty conversing, or not be able to converse at all were less likely to be involved in the CJS.

After controlling for covariates, there was no significant difference in criminal justice involvement among young adults with intellectual disabilities compared to those with autism.

Most young adults with autism who had ever been stopped and questioned by police had been stopped by age 17.