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Injury Research on People with Developmental Disabilities

- In a 1999 Medicaid study of 8.4 million children in 26 states, 37% of children and adolescents with "mental retardation" (the term used in the study) were treated for an injury compared to 23% of children without mental retardation. The highest rates of injury were among males with mental retardation ages 1-4, where 44% were treated for injury compared to 18% without mental retardation. Children with mental retardation were 60% more likely to suffer a burn injury and almost four times more likely to suffer a poisoning injury as children without mental retardation. (1)
- A recent literature review found that the unintentional injury risk for children with developmental disabilities was **double** that of the general population. The review concluded that the issue of injury prevention for individuals with intellectual disability has not been sufficiently addressed and that injury prevention programs are needed to protect the quality of life of this population. (2)
- In day care settings children with disabilities had higher rates of injury than those without disabilities. (3)
- Children with disabilities (physical, mental, and developmental) sustain 17% of all school-related injuries, but represent less than 2% of student population in the US. (4)
- In a study examining a broad definition of disabilities (including ADHD and asthma), children with disabilities were found to be significantly more likely to experience a non-fatal injury than peers without disabilities. (5)
- Higher rates of injury hospitalization were reported among children with intellectual disability compared with the general population in Australia. (6)
- In the 1988 National Health Interview Study children with disabilities had higher injury rates than did controls.(7)

The definition of disability, as well as the methodology and samples, varies greatly between studies, presenting a somewhat inconsistent picture of the issue. However, the largest study, referenced in the first bullet above, successfully shows an increased risk of injury and specifically burn injury for children with mental retardation and developmental disabilities.(1)

Posited Reasons for Injury Rates

- a) physical issues and/or co-occurring physical disabilities, b) reduced functional capacity (i.e. limited problem solving skills, propensity for impulsivity), c) higher rates of disturbed behavior and psychopathology, and d) the tendency for higher rates of epilepsy and seizure disorders. (1)
- a) complex and inappropriate environments that fail to accommodate the special needs of some users, b) increased exposure to these environments, and c) conditions that reduce effective supervision. (8)

References

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