

Sullivan, P.M., & Knuton, J.F. (2000). Maltreatment and disabilities: A population-based epidemiological study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24(10), 1257-1273.

### **ABSTRACT**

**Objectives:** To assess the prevalence of abuse and neglect among a population of children identified as a function of an existing disability, relate specific types of disabilities to specific types of abuse, and to determine the effect of abuse and neglect on academic achievement and attendance rates for children with and without disabilities. **Method:** An electronic merger of school records with Central Registry, Foster Care Review Board, and police databases was followed by a detailed record review of the circumstances of maltreatment. **Results:** Analyses of the circumstances of maltreatment and the presence of disabilities established a 9% prevalence rate of maltreatment for nondisabled children and a 31% prevalence rate for the disabled children. Thus, the study established a significant association between the presence of an educationally relevant disability and maltreatment. **Conclusions:** Children with disabilities are 3.4 times more likely to be maltreated than nondisabled peers. School professionals need to be cognizant of the high base rate of maltreatment among the children they serve. Disability status needs to be considered in national incidence studies of maltreatment.

- P. 1257:
  - **“Objectives:** To assess the prevalence of abuse and neglect among a population of children identified as a function of an existing disability, related specific types of disabilities to specific types of abuse, and to determine the effect of abuse and neglect on academic achievement and attendance rates for children with and without disabilities.”
  - **“Conclusions:** Children with disabilities are 3.4 times more likely to be maltreated than nondisabled peers.”
- P. 1258:
  - “Although the Sullivan and Knutson (1998) study provided strong support for the hypothesized link between disabilities and maltreatment, the use of a hospital-based sample could limit the generalizability of that research...As a result, the present study was designed to be a replication and extension of the Sullivan and Knutson (1998) research. By using an entire school-based population drawn from the same geographical region as the Sullivan and Knutson (1998) study, the present study avoided any subject selection bias.”
  - “The subjects for this study were all 50,278 children enrolled in the Public (OPS) schools of Omaha, Nebraska during the 1994-95 school year.) In addition to the kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade pupils, the population included children who were eligible to participate in various special education programs in OPS (e.g., Zero to Three, Early Intervention Preschool).”
- P. 1259:
  - “...the population ranged in age from 2 to 21. The population was 51.4% male and 48.6% female. The ethnic composition of the total school

population was 66.9% Caucasian, 25.45% African American, 5.1% Hispanic, 1.3% Native American, and 1.1% Asian American or Pacific Islander.”

- “...approximately 11% of the Omaha public school population and 4% of the parochial school population had archival evidence of maltreatment.”
- “In addition to providing the data fields for merging of records, OPS provided electronic information regarding race, disability status and educational placement, year long attendance data, and standardized test scores for the most recent administration of the Reading and Mathematics subtest of the California Achievement Test (CAT). The OPS central records also provided information regarding special education recipients enrolled in the Archdiocese schools. These electronic school records were used to access academic progress of maltreated and nonmaltreated children and to identify maltreated and nonmaltreated children who had a disability.”
- P. 1260:
  - Figure 1 – “Percentage of disabilities in total populations”
  - 1<sup>st</sup> full paragraph, detailed explanation of the documentation model used in this study
- P. 1261:
  - “Table 1. Percentages of Maltreated and Nonmaltreated Children With and Without Disabilities”

maltreatment and disabilities

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Table 1. Percentages of Maltreated and Nonmaltreated Children With and Without Disabilities

	Disabled <i>n</i> (%)	Nondisabled <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)
Maltreated	1,012 (31)	3,491 (9)	4,503 (11)
Nonmaltreated	2,250 (69)	33,458 (91)	35,708 (89)
Total	3,262 (100)	36,949 (100)	40,211 (100)

- Results
  - “Although there was an overall rate of maltreatment of approximately 11% in the population, the overall rate of maltreatment among children who had an identified disability for which they were receiving special education services was 31%, a rate more than three times that of children without an educationally relevant disability.”
  - “Thus, there was a strong association between some form of maltreatment and some disability...”
  - “Among the maltreated children, the following disability percentages were found: Behavior disorders (37.4%), mental

retardation (25.3%), learning disabled (16.4%), health related (11.2%), speech/language (6.5%), physical/orthopedic disabilities (1.2%), hearing impairment (1.3%), visual impairment (.4%), and autism (.1%).”

- “For all disabilities with the exception of autism, the prevalence rate of maltreatment significantly exceeded the 9% rate obtained for children without an educationally relevant disability....[...p<.001].”
- Three patterns are apparent...First, neglect is clearly the most prevalent form of maltreatment for both disabled and nondisabled children. Second, most children endured multiple forms of maltreatment.”
- P. 1262
  - Results (cont.)
    - Third, there were no significant associations between type of disability and type of maltreatment. For each of the disability categories, neglect was clearly the predominate form of maltreatment, followed by physical abuse, motional abuse, and sexual abuse, in descending order of prevalence for all disability groups.”
- P. 1263
  - Results (cont.)
    - “The link between neglect and economic disadvantage is also apparent.”
- P. 1264
  - Results (cont.)
    - “...significantly more children were maltreated from the first time between the ages of 6 and 9 than during the pre, middle, or high school years [...p = .022].”
    - “...it was impossible to determine whether the disabilities antedated the maltreatment.”
    - “Children with disabilities comprise around one-third of the maltreated children between the ages of birth to 9 years, almost one-fourth in the middle school years, and only around one-sixth in the high school years.”
    - “Children with Health/Orthopedic and Communication disabilities have a preponderance of first incidents from birth to 5 years of age suggesting these disabilities are risks for maltreatment.”
    - “In contrast, children with Behavior and Mental disabilities appear to incur maltreatment across the age ranges suggesting these disabilities are both risks and consequences of maltreatment.”
- P. 1265
  - Results (cont.)
    - “Males were more prevalent among maltreatment victims with disabilities while females were more prevalent among maltreated victims without disabilities.”

- “There is a significant association between the familiar status of the perpetrators and type of maltreatment, Immediate family members accounted for the vast majority of neglect (92.4%), physical abuse (82.2%), and emotional abuse (89.5%) while extrafamilial perpetrators (59.3%) were significantly more often the perpetrators of sexual abuse [...p < .001].”
- *Maltreatment and Disability Diagnosis*
  - “Overall, there was a strong association between disabilities and neglect,
    - with disabled children being 3.76 times more likely to be victims of neglect than children without disabilities...
    - Children with disabilities were 3.79 times more likely to be physically abused than children without disabilities...
    - Children with disabilities were 3.14 times more likely to be sexually abused than children without disabilities...
- P. 1266
  - Results (cont.)
    - *Maltreatment and Disability Diagnosis*
      - “Overall...
        - Children with disabilities were 3.88 times more likely to be emotionally abused than children without disabilities...
        - Children with behavior disorders and mental disabilities were the most likely to be emotionally abused...”
      - “Deaf and hard-of-hearing children have twice the risk for neglect and emotional abuse and almost four times the risk for physical abuse than nondisabled peers. They are not at increased risk to be sexually abused.”
      - “Children with speech and language impairments have essentially five times the risk for neglect and physical abuse, almost three times the risk for sexual abuse, and almost seven times the risk for emotional maltreatment.”
      - “Mentally retarded children have four times the risk for enduring all four types of maltreatment in comparison to nondisabled children.”
      - “Children and youth with behavior disorders are seven times more likely to experience neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse and 5.5 times as likely to be sexually abused than children without disabilities.”
      - “Children with learning disabilities are essentially twice as to endure all four types of maltreatment.”

- “Children with health related disabilities are three times as likely to be neglected, physically, and emotionally abused and twice as likely to be sexually abused.”
- “Autistic children are at slightly increased risk to be neglected.”
- “Children with orthopedic disabilities are twice as likely to be emotionally maltreated, sexually abused, and neglected than children without disabilities.”
- P. 1267
  - Results (cont.)
    - *School Performance and Attendance*
      - “There was a clear pattern of an increasing number of missed school days by children who had experienced multiple forms of maltreatment. In general, however, neglect alone, or in combination with other forms of maltreatment, had a greater impact on school attendance than the other forms of maltreatment.”
      - “Significantly higher academic achievement in both reading...and math...was achieved by children without disabilities who were not victims of maltreatment. The lowest academic achievement scores were among maltreated children.”
- P. 1268
  - DISCUSSION
    - “The findings of the present research provide unequivocal evidence that there is a strong association between childhood disabilities and child maltreatment. The 31% maltreatment rate among children with disabilities, in contrast to the 9% rate for nondisabled children, provides further support for the notion that children with disabilities are at increased risk for having been maltreated.”
- P. 1270
  - DISCUSSION (cont.)
    - “Consistent with our earlier work (Sullivan & Knutson, 1998), children with disabilities tend to be maltreated at younger ages. In fact, preschool age disabled children experience significantly more neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse than disabled children in elementary, middle school, and high school age groups. This is in contrast to nondisabled children who tend to be maltreated during the elementary years (i.e., between the ages of 5 and 9).”
    - “Given the young age at which children with disabilities tend to be maltreated, early intervention and support services are critically needed for families with young children with disabilities. By concentrating prevention efforts on young children with disabilities, the period of maximum risk can be targeted.”

## Reference & Summary by H. Johnson

- “Child abuse and neglect are societal problems that cut across medical, educational, social service, and legal disciplines and data must be obtained from all of these domains.”
- P. 1270
  - DISCUSSION (cont.)
    - “...most maltreated children actually experience multiple forms of maltreatment; psychological or emotional abuse virtually never occurred in the absence of another form of maltreatment.”
    - “...child abuse and neglect was shown to have an adverse influence on academic achievement...this was the case for maltreated disabled and nondisabled youngsters with both groups earning significantly lower scores in reading and mathematics than nonmaltreated peers.”