

Research Matters

Back to School: Academic Functioning and Educational Needs among Youth with Acquired Brain Injury

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO DETERMINE THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE FOLLOW-UP CARE?

- Identifying these factors can lead to a better understanding of how to improve access to medical and rehabilitation care for children with acquired brain injury (ABI).

ABOUT THIS STUDY

Authors Vanderlind et al. (2022) summarize existing research on neuropsychological, psychiatric, and academic outcomes among youths following brain injuries that acquired pediatric attention. Based on their review, the authors suggest the need to improve support systems and communication as youths begin or re-enter school amongst medical, educational, and family systems.

KEY FINDINGS

- Children with brain injuries are at increased risk for long-term neurocognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral sequelae
 - Problems that attribute to this include ineffective communication between medical and education systems, brain injuries being under-reported, and the inability of teachers, parents, and clinicians to link academic challenges to brain injuries
- Cognitive domains most severely affected by pediatric brain injury include
 - Executive functioning
 - Processing speed
 - Attention
 - Verbal memory, fluency, and planning and problem solving
- Children with a history of brain injury are at elevated risk for psychiatric disorders
 - TBI enhances risk for personality change and disruptive behavior disorders
 - Increases in affective liability, aggression, and disinhibition
- Social challenges and physical changes are also prominent
 - Reduced social participation
 - Changes in functioning
 - Changes in peer relationships
- Academics are greatly affected
 - Children miss school due to hospitalization, rehabilitative care, and ongoing monitoring appointments

- Also experience lingering symptoms while in the classroom such as difficulties with attention, processing speed, executive functioning, and memory
- Major legislative advances help children receive free and appropriate education
 - IDEA – students with brain injury are provided individually tailored, specially designed instruction
 - Section 504 of 1973 Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities

STUDY IMPLICATIONS

- If educators are aware of barriers and facilitators that youth may face, they can more effectively establish a support system that helps youth re-enter schools and to improve neuropsychological, psychiatric, and academic outcomes following a brain injury.
- Educators must be aware of these difficulties:
 - communication between medical, educational, and family systems
 - challenges obtaining medical documentation of the injury
 - inappropriate classification categories for non-traumatic acquired brain injuries
 - accessing resources
- Educating everyone that interacts with youth with brain injuries is essential for best understanding and addressing their needs
 - Legislative advocacy is extremely important
 - Educational laws must be critically examined and revised to ensure that all children receive a free and appropriate education

REFERENCE

Vanderlind, W. M., Demers, L. A., Engelson, G., Fowler, R. C., & McCart, M. (2022). Back to school: Academic functioning and educational needs among youth with acquired brain injury. *Children, 9*(9), 1321. doi: 10.3390/children9091321