



The Effect of Delayed Language Acquisition on Criminal Behavior of Deaf Individuals Involved in the Criminal Justice System

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Mini Review

Volume 2 Issue 1

Received Date: April 19, 2024

Published Date: May 15, 2024

DOI: [10.23880/oajcij-16000113](https://doi.org/10.23880/oajcij-16000113)

Abstract

Research indicates that approximately 90% of pre-lingual deaf children are born to hearing parents. Further, according to the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), about 3.6% of the U.S. population, or about 11 million individuals, consider themselves deaf or have serious difficulty hearing. For many of those children born to hearing parents, they are not learning or acquiring language from their parents as their parents do not know or use sign language. Often times, these parents have been advised (mistakenly) to not learn and use sign language with their children because of the belief that signing prevents speech and mainstream inclusion. This lack of language skills can have a deleterious effect on deaf children and lead to “an impoverished or distorted relationship between parent and child. This can lead to challenging behavior in adulthood. This paper will explore the nexus between language deprivation/delayed language development and the subsequent risk factors associated with criminal behavior.

Keywords: Language Acquisition; Language Deprivation/Delayed Language; Criminal Behavior

Abbreviations: DLD: Delayed Language Development.

Introduction

Literature Review

Developmental delay, due to delayed language acquisition, can cause a disruption in their cognitive processes, poor executive functioning, attention deficits and poor mental health [1-3]. Each of these disruptions have been linked to criminal behavior [4]. Executive functioning consists of the interplay between goal directed behavior and [s]elf regulation, including [resisting temptation, thinking before acting and mentally playing with ideas [4].

For a child growing up, the delay of language affects their internal mental lives. Merging language and cognition is so

very important to the development of executive functioning and concept formation. Even “[s]elf talk”, which is an internal dialogue is a tool for regulating behavior. Without a solid language, Paijmans [5] reports that its absence or delay “[i]s likely to interfere with the understanding of threat of punishment and the development of self-control via the ... concepts of shame, guilt and embarrassment.”

While many members of the deaf community share a language and a culture, their cultural identity and psychosocial needs are not always the same. Diversity of language skills, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, race, and level of overall disability are as common for deaf people as they are for hearing people [6].

Munoz-Baell and Ruiz [7] state that, among those individuals who are congenitally deaf or became deaf in



early childhood, the resulting language deprivation has an immediate effect on the child's ability to acquire social knowledge as well as assimilating such knowledge with understanding social norms [7].

Until recently, 2022, there has been a dearth of research into a hypothesized link between delayed language development (DLD) and criminal behavior, not deafness. This research will use deafness as a mitigating variable in this delay. A research report by Hobson [8] studied the relationship between the description of language disorder and the perceptions of mock jurors' perceptions and judgement. The researchers findings found that information about a persons' DLD did not influence mock jurors' likelihood of finding them guilty but did affect others; perceptions of credibility and blameworthiness. Although this is not the focus of this proposed study, I include this article because it does examine a link between DLD and criminal behavior. Brownlie [9] found that DLD did have an effect on delinquency and arrests in later adolescents. Hobson, et al. [8] stated that language problems and subsequent involvement in the criminal justice system may be directly linked and share common risk factors.

Language impairment is often associated with hearing impairment or deafness but it is not the quite the same thing. Many deaf individuals have not had DLD. There are many other factors associated with DLD than deafness, including autism and/or other physiological risk factors.

Criminogenic Risk Factors

It is widely recognized that deaf people are a misunderstood linguistic minority with unique communication needs. They are more likely than hearing people to experience mental health issues and have high levels of physical and learning disabilities. Conversely, due to attitudinal and language barriers, it is much more difficult for signing deaf people to gain access to services and information about how to obtain services. Studies have shown that deaf and hard-of-hearing adolescents tend to have a more difficult time in terms of mental health than their hearing peers [10-12]. Munoz-Baell and Ruiz [7] stated that, among those individuals who are congenitally deaf or became deaf in early childhood, the resulting language deprivation has an immediate effect on the child's ability to acquire social knowledge.

Social knowledge is naturally tied to language and social meaning. A consistent lack of access to language by which to frame and define the actions of others may contribute to acting out, underdeveloped social and coping skills, a lack of emotional awareness, and the failure to develop morally in the same way as hearing children found in Twersky Glasner [6].

Alienation and lack of intimacy are critical in the development of criminality in general, and for sexual offenders in particular [13,14]. Rokach highlighted the contribution of characterological, developmental, and familial backgrounds to the offender's feelings of alienation and social isolation. While these background experiences commonly impact criminal offenders, in this instance they can be logically extended to deaf criminal offenders.

Conclusion

I am proposing to do further research in this area. I don't have a hypothesis to test, I simply want to do ethnographic research with D/HH inmates, parolees or probationers.

The methodological model I am following was used by criminologist Lonnie Athens [15], in his interviews with violent criminals. "He allowed the inmates to interpret their own actions, experiences and social interactions, rather than try to interpret them himself and/or try to categorize and fit them into an existing framework of understanding Ben Keren [16], found online 04/15/2024), [15].

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