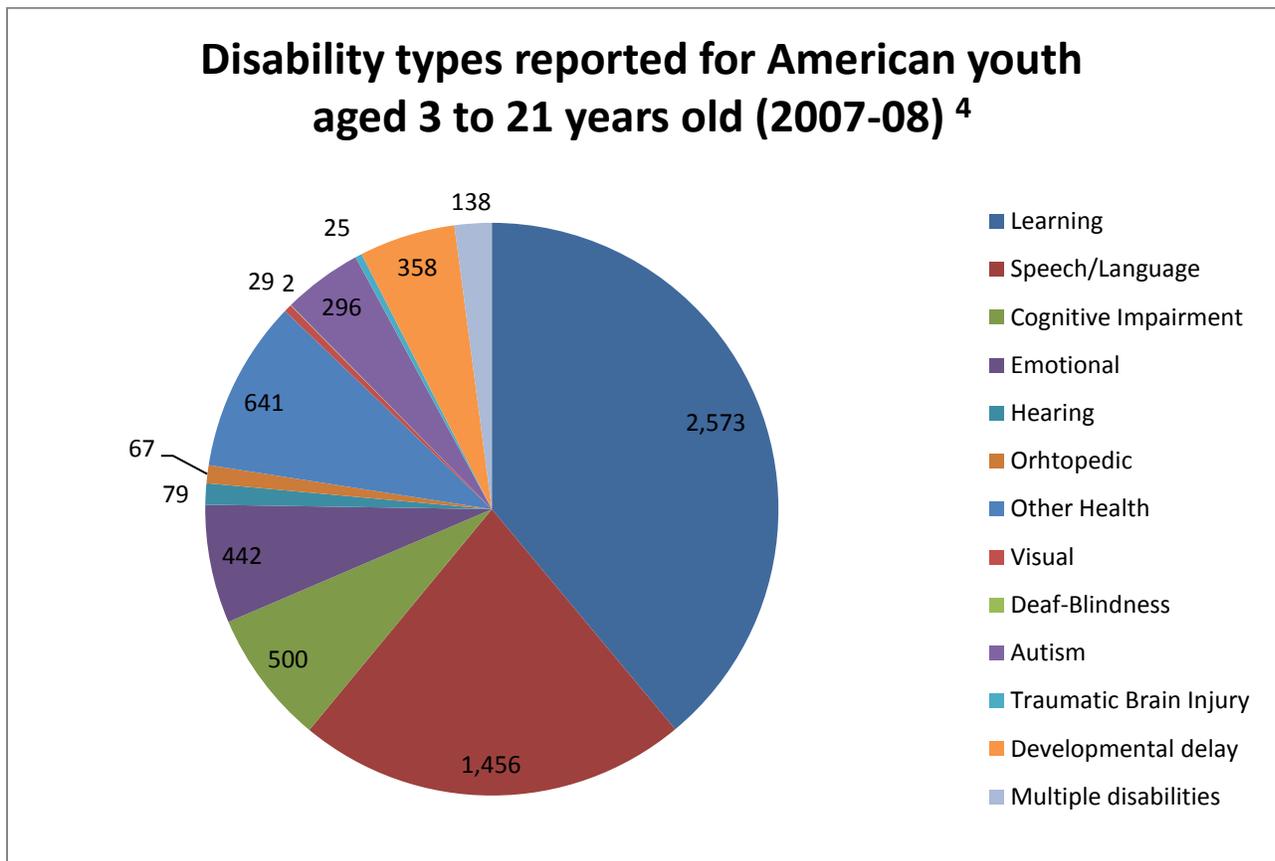


Children with physical and cognitive disabilities are at greater risk for substance abuse for three main reasons:

Reason One: Children with disabilities are generally subjected to more risk factors and pressures than their non-disabled peers. This includes risk factors such as exclusion, alienation, and health-related issues to name a few. Research has found that children with certain limitations (i.e., mobility, self-care, learning, communication) tend to have higher exposure rates to a number of risk factors including: barriers to medical care, poor parental health and exposure to second-hand smoke; additional research also shows that these students with disabilities (limitations) often live in less favorable environments that include issues with family structure, financial status, safety and parental education.¹

Research has shown that an increase in risk factors also increases the risk for substance abuse in many students, including students with disabilities.² In 2008, 19% of youth 5 to 17 years of age were identified as having one or more limitations (as reported by a parent or other household respondent). Of the estimated 74.5 million American school-age children in 2009, approximately 9.9 million (13.4 percent) received special education services.³



Reason Two: Most substance abuse prevention programs offer "one size fits all" curriculums aimed exclusively at non-disabled youths, or at youths from ethnic communities. These curriculums don't address or take into account the specific critical issues faced by students with disabilities that relate to additional risk factors, differing learning styles, functional limitations and disability culture.

Reason Three: Research has shown that youth with disabilities use alcohol and drugs to "level the playing field" with non-disabled peers. It is not unusual for youth with disabilities to choose illegal substances (tobacco, alcohol or drugs) and get "high" with non-disabled peers to feel more accepted.⁵ Several research studies have shown that some youth and adults with disabilities use ATOD at the same or higher rates as the general population, and these individuals are often at a higher risk for developing substance abuse problems.⁶

Research by our own SARDI staff at Wright State University, using data on over 24,000 students from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988-2000, demonstrated that: students with disabilities:⁷

- ~ Use more alcohol, tobacco and drugs
- ~ Are twice as likely to drop out of school

Those students with disabilities who use alcohol, tobacco and drugs are also more likely than their non-disabled peers to:

- ~ Have sex earlier
- ~ Get into more trouble with the law
- ~ Not attend college

REFERENCES:

¹ <http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org/?q=node/73>]

² <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Prevention/risk.html>

³ <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables.asp>

⁴ <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=64>

⁵ http://www.orcasinc.com/research_areas/research_projects.html?index=26

⁶ <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/eric/e627.html>

⁷ Hollar, David and Moore, Dennis (2004). Relationship of Substance Use by Students with Disabilities to Long-Term Educational, Employment, and Social Outcomes, *Substance Use and Misuse*, 39(6), 931-962.