

East Tennessee State University

Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University

Undergraduate Honors Theses

Student Works

5-2022

Assessing perceptions of disability knowledge of campus police at inclusive universities

Hannah Shultz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/honors>



Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education and Teaching Commons](#), [Disability Studies Commons](#), and the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Shultz, Hannah, "Assessing perceptions of disability knowledge of campus police at inclusive universities" (2022). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 714. <https://dc.etsu.edu/honors/714>

This Honors Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Works at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact digilib@etsu.edu.

Hannah Shultz

Assessing perceptions of disability knowledge of campus police at inclusive universities

East Tennessee State University

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perception of knowledge of campus police on intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), including autism, in inclusive college programs. A survey was sent to both campus police and representatives of 50 inclusive higher education programs across the United States. These questions involved perceptions of campus police knowledge, training, and the safety of students with I/DD.

Assessing perceptions of disability knowledge of campus police at inclusive universities

Individuals with disabilities can encounter danger and misunderstanding in the hands of the police whether or not they are a victim or a perpetrator. Like other aspects of society, there is still a large lack of knowledge and understanding of individuals with disabilities; however, when this lack of knowledge and understanding is from the police it can have even more damaging consequences. There is a large lack of research regarding police and individuals with disabilities specifically on college campuses. As inclusive college programs for individuals with disabilities become more prevalent, it is important that research is conducted into the safety and well-being of these individuals while in college.

Previous research found both police officers and students lack teaching or training on how to interact with each other. Multiple studies have shown the lack of training and knowledge police have on disabilities and the best way to support those individuals. Young et al. (2013) found police were arresting a high percentage of people with disabilities but were severely lacking in knowledge, resources, and supports to best work with and help these individuals. When looking specifically at learning disabilities, Gendle and Woodham (2005) found the same results- a severe lack of knowledge. Diamond and Hogue (2021) used a survey to show the lack of training for both police knowledge of how to interact with individuals with disabilities and the lack of teaching for individuals with disabilities on how to interact with police. They found that a two-pronged approach of teaching both parties (police and individuals with disabilities knowledge and strategies to work with each other) is the best way to ensure safety and understanding of individuals with disabilities when faces with police (Diamond et al, 2021). Another study by Hughes et al. (2011) showed a similar need for both parties to be trained but also how important it is for advocates, individuals with disabilities, and other groups of people

with knowledge of disabilities to help with the training of police so that they can ensure the training is adequate and accurate to their needs. Gulati et al. (2020) found similar results from their survey. In a survey of 95 people who were either law enforcement, healthcare workers, or people with intellectual disabilities, researchers identified the theme “barriers to communication” as the primary concern on both the front of law enforcement and people with disabilities when the two have interactions with each other. Both parties lacked knowledge and experience on how to interact with each other. This study also found law enforcement officers lack awareness and skills for communicating and interacting with individuals with disabilities.

Gulati et al. (2020) found through a review of 16 studies and 670 abstracts that there is a need for training for police officers, challenges in identifying people with intellectual disabilities, a large need to improve safeguards, and challenges in supporting and communicating with individuals with intellectual disabilities in the investigation process. Lastly, a study out of Lancaster, England showed police are more hesitant to respond to reports of individuals with disabilities. Caregivers are even more hesitant to report individuals with disabilities for crimes. Authors concluded these hesitations could likely be due to a lack of police training (McBrien et al, 2006).

These studies were limited due to a lack of specific connection to college campuses and their police interactions and perceptions with students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As inclusive college programs grow, knowing the knowledge of campus police is essential to providing safety to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze campus police knowledge and understanding of disabilities at universities with inclusive higher education programs.

Research Questions This study sought to answer three questions.

1. Do campus police at inclusive universities have adequate knowledge about intellectual and developmental disabilities including autism (I/DD)?
2. Have campus police at inclusive universities received adequate training on I/DD?
3. Is there a discrepancy between the perception of campus police knowledge between campus police representatives and inclusive higher education representatives?

Methods

A nine-item survey adapted from Gulati et al (2020) was used in this study. The survey was disseminated via email to representatives from inclusive college organizations and university police force. The email requested the recipient to distribute to qualified candidates at their university. After the initial email, follow-up emails were sent one week and two weeks after the first invitation. There was no incentive provided for completing the study. The survey was conducted online survey using Qualtrics. It was designed to measure the knowledge of campus police on I/DD and view any discrepancies between how campus police view their knowledge and how representatives of inclusive college programs view the knowledge of campus police on I/DD. Questions included a mix of multiple choice and Likert scale questions.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample of participants responding to the survey. Representatives from 50 inclusive higher education programs and their respective universities' police were contacted via email to complete the study. A total of 21 responses were collected (see Table 1 for demographics). Respondents included 11 representatives of campus police and 10 representatives of inclusive higher education programs. Eleven participants were male while 10 participants were female. There was a split of participants who had been in their position for 5 or less years (11) or more than 5 years (10).

Table 1

Survey Demographics

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender	Male	9	45%
	Female	11	55%
	Not Identified	1	5%
Experience (Years)	1-2	7	35%
	3-5	2	10%
	6-10	4	20%
	10+	7	35%
Position	Chief of Campus Police	7	35%
	Campus Police	4	20%
	IHE Staff	9	45%

Results

A total of 21 responses were analyzed. Data was exported from Qualtrics to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to organize and analyze data collected. What follows is a descriptive summary of the 21 responses organized by research question.

Research question 1, Do campus police at inclusive universities have adequate knowledge about intellectual and developmental disabilities including autism (I/DD)?

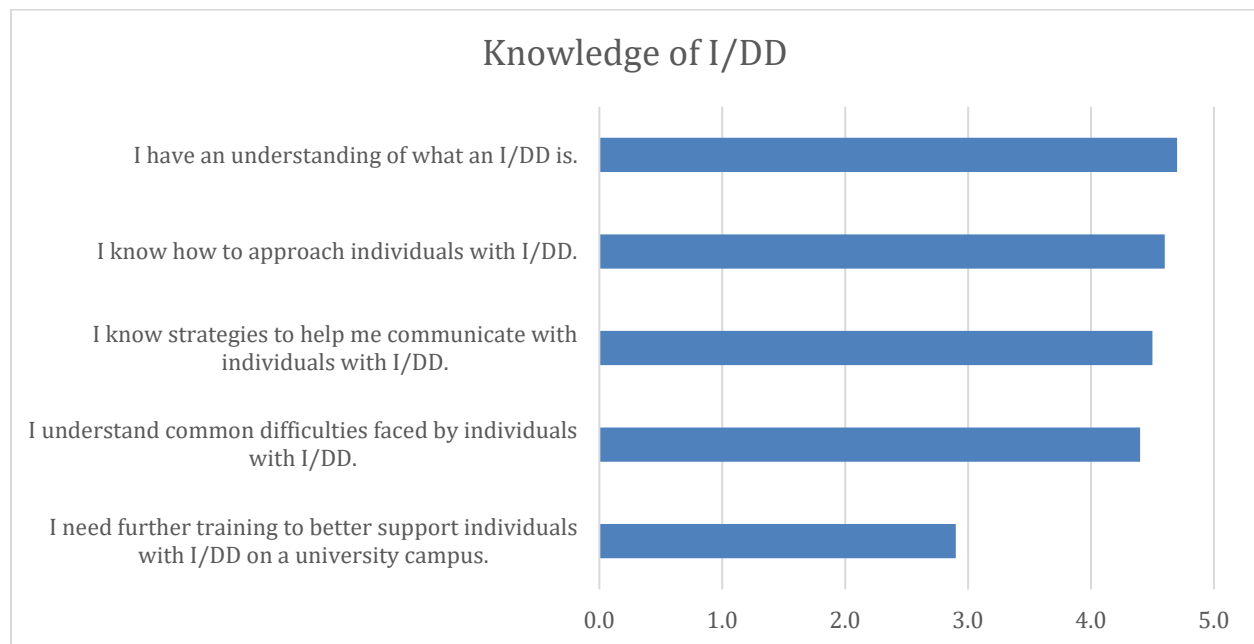
In response to the question “Do you think police on your campus are knowledgeable about intellectual/developmental disabilities?” 11 respondents indicated “definitely yes,” 5 indicated “probably yes,” 2 indicated “might or might not,” and 2 responded “probably not.” In response to the question, “Do you think students with intellectual/developmental disabilities are safe on your campus?” 19 participants responded with either definitely yes or probably yes while one participant responded with “might or might not.”

When asked to “Rate your knowledge and skills regarding individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities.” On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the lowest knowledge and 5 being the highest, 15 participants rated themselves as a 5, 1 rated themselves a 4, and 4 rated themselves as a 3. The majority of those surveyed consider themselves very knowledgeable

about disabilities. Based on results gathered, campus police perceive themselves as having adequate knowledge on I/DD. Representatives of inclusive college programs who responded to this survey provided similar responses. The large majority of participants indicated that campus police have adequate knowledge on I/DD.

Figure 1

Knowledge of I/DD

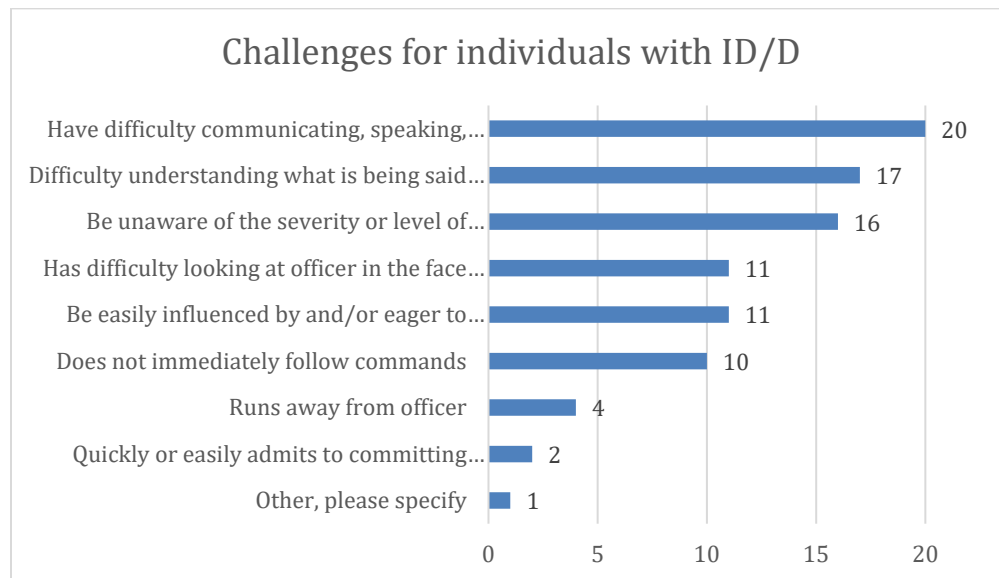


Respondents' perceptions of the main challenges regarding interactions with or support to individuals with I/DD on college campus varied. The majority of respondents felt communication was a significant challenge. Many respondents felt that individuals with I/DD have difficulty communicating (n=20), speaking, and/or expressing themselves, or experience difficulty understanding what is being said by officers or pretends to understand (n=17). In addition, many participants felt individuals with I/DD were unaware of the severity of a situation

(n=16). See Figure 2 for a summary of participant perceptions of the main challenges for students with I/DD when they encounter a law enforcement official in a campus setting.

Figure 2

Challenges for Individuals with ID/D



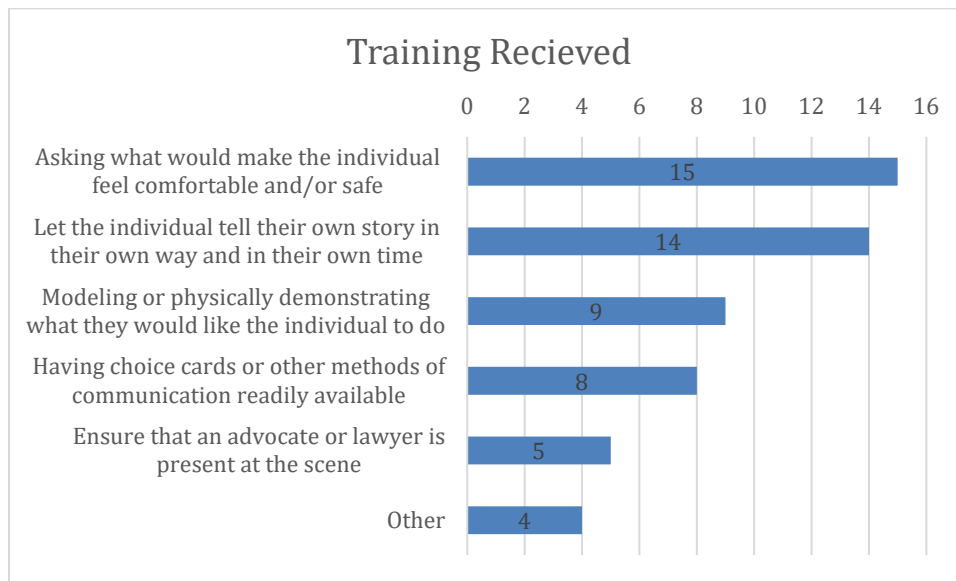
Research question 2: Have campus police at inclusive universities received adequate training on I/DD?

Based on results gathered, campus police surveyed perceive themselves as having adequate training on I/DD. Representatives of inclusive college campuses who responded carried similar opinions. Only one respondent indicated campus police may not have received adequate training on disabilities. Participants in the study indicated that they had training with the following strategies: asking what would make the individual feel comfortable and/or safe (n=15), let the individual tell their own story in their own way and in their own time (n=14), modeling or physically demonstrating what they would like the individual to do (n=9), and having choice

cards or other methods of communication readily available (n= 8). See figure 3 for a summary of responses.

Figure 3

Training Received



Research question 3: Is there a discrepancy between the perception of campus police knowledge between campus police representatives and inclusive higher education representatives?

There was not adequate data collected to come to any conclusion about research question three as the survey did not have enough participants to be able to identify any possible discrepancies.

Discussion

Data gathered from the online survey found that of the campus police surveyed, many of them had adequate knowledge on safety of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as adequate training. Inclusive higher education program representatives also

showed similar responses when asked about campus police knowledge. There were not enough participants to be able to find any discrepancies in the data between campus police and inclusive higher education program representatives nor are the results generalizable to the larger population.

Limitations. The primary limitation of this study was the lack of respondents to the survey. Despite being sent to both campus police and inclusive organizations at 50 universities, only 21 responses were collected. This left little to no opportunity to reach conclusions as there was no sufficient evidence to support any claims.

Many inclusive college programs have been founded within the last few years which could have led to some limitations with this study. With programs being new, there may not have been enough time for knowledge to be properly assessed and views to be adequately formed. There likely could not have been enough cases where this knowledge was put to the test or been opportunities for knowledge to be assessed in other ways. This could lead to some skewed data and/or could be a reason for the lack of data in this study. Newness of programs can play a direct impact on the knowledge of those participating.

Future Research. There are many opportunities for future research surrounding the topic of this study. With a larger survey sample size, this study could have yielded very beneficial results to both inclusive college organizations and campus police forces. It also could be of benefit to do this study again in the future after knowledge has more time to be obtained and assessed for the many programs that are currently new. Despite the small sample size, there seems to be discrepancies between data collected in this study and findings from others. Future research could yield a larger sample size which could help to find if the discrepancy is true or if

campus police have more adequate training and/or knowledge on disabilities compared to other types of law enforcement.

Implications There were no implications able to be drawn from this research due to lack of respondents. The main implication drawn from this study is the need and opportunity for further research with a larger sample size.

References

- Diamond, L., & Hogue, L. (2021). Preparing Students with Disabilities and Police for Successful Interactions. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 57(1), 3-14.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451221994804>
- Gendle, K., & Woodhams, J. (2005). Suspects who have a learning disability: Police perceptions toward the client group and their knowledge about learning disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 9, 70–81. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629505050923>
- Gulati, G. et al. (2021). Challenges for people with intellectual disabilities in law enforcement interactions in Ireland; thematic analysis informed by 1537 person-years' experience. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 75, 101683–101683.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2021.101683>
- Gulati, G., et al. (2020). The experience of law enforcement officers interfacing with suspects who have an intellectual disability – A systematic review. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 72, 101614–101614. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2020.101614>
- McBrien, J & Murphy, G (2006). Police and careers' views on reporting alleged offences by people with intellectual disabilities. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 12(2), 127-144,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10683160512331316262>
- Hughes, R & Curry, M., et al. (2011) Responding to crime victims with disabilities: The perspective of law enforcement. *Journal of Policy Practice*, 10(3), 185-205,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15588742.2011.582812>
- Spivak, B., & Thomas, S. (2013). Police contact with people with an intellectual disability: The independent third person perspective. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 57, 635–646. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2788.2012.01571>

Viljoen, E., Bornman, J., Wiles, L., & Tönsing, K. (2017). Police officer disability sensitivity training: A systematic review. *Police Journal* (Chichester), *90*, 143–159.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0032258X16674021>

Young, S., Goodwin, E.J., Sedgwick, O. et al (2013). The effectiveness of police custody assessments in identifying suspects with intellectual disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *BMC Medicine*, *11*, 248. 11-248. [https://doi.org/10.1186/1741-](https://doi.org/10.1186/1741-7015)

7015