

HOME LITERACY EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS AND MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the outcomes of frequent storybook reading experiences of children with visual impairments and multiple disabilities and to determine if these differ from children with visual impairments only. This study used a two-phase, mixed-method approach. First, an Internet-based parent questionnaire was distributed to a volunteer sample of parents of young children who are visually impaired who had recently participated in a program promoting daily storybook reading activities. A total of 41 parents from 23 different states completed the survey. Their children had an average age of 5.45 years ($SD = 2.92$) and almost equal numbers of boys ($n = 20$) and girls ($n = 21$). Parents were assigned to the Visual Impairments Only (VI) group ($n = 17$) or the Multiple Disabilities (MD) group ($n = 24$) based on their report of any disabilities their child had in addition to their visual impairment. Second, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted to explore specific details on the challenges, supports, and outcomes related to storybook reading experiences with nine volunteer parents of children with multiple disabilities.

A comparison of the two groups found that children with multiple disabilities had less access to braille materials in the home than children without additional disabilities. The majority of parents in both groups indicated they were comfortable with their child's use of braille, large print, and assistive devices. The parents of children with multiple disabilities reported that service providers had less involvement in their child's literacy development, revealing the need for training of professionals in providing strategies to engage children with multiple disabilities and visual impairments in early literacy activities. No significant differences were found between the children with visual impairments and the children who also had multiple disabilities in frequency of literacy activities, duration of literacy activities, or in the number of targeted behaviors exhibited while reading. The progress reported by parents of children with multiple disabilities shows the need for additional research to identify evidence-based practices in emergent literacy for children who have visual impairments and multiple disabilities.