Research Abstracts on ASD and Sexuality

MMPI-2 Personality Profiles of High-Functioning Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Sally Ozonoff, Nicanor Garcia, Elaine Clark, ...

Assessment, Vol 12(1), Mar, 2005. pp. 86-95.

Abstract

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-Second Edition was administered to 20 adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) who fell in the average to above average range of intelligence and 24 age-, intelligence-, and gender-matched college students. Large group differences, with the ASD group scoring higher, were found on the L validity scale, Clinical Scales 2 (D) and 0 (Si), Content scale Social Discomfort (SOD), Supplementary scale Repression (R), and Personality Psychopathology Five (PSY-5) scale INTR (Introversion). The proportion of ASD adults scoring in the clinical range on these scales was between 25% and 35%. High scores on these scales are consistent with the clinical picture of Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism in adulthood. Future directions and implications for identifying adults in need of a specialized autism assessment are discussed.

Developmental theory and developmental deficits: the treatment of sex offenders with Asperger's Syndrome.

Bolton, Winifred.

Sex, mind, and emotion: Innovation in Psychological Theory and Practice. Hiller, Janice, (Ed); Wood, Heather, (Ed); Bolton, Winfred, (Ed); pp. 41-61; London, England: Karnac Books; 2006.

Abstract:

In this chapter, I describe my observations and experiences in individual and group therapy with a small group of six young men that led me to theorize that the core deficit in Asperger's Syndrome is a failure in non-verbal communication, specifically the interpretation of facial expression, and that this deficit gives rise developmentally to the abnormalities in social interaction, cognition, speech, and use of language, which are the defining features of the syndrome. I argue that an appreciation of the central importance of non-verbal communication to the development of symbolic thinking, the capacity to reflect on the content of one's own mind, to 'read' others' minds and thereby to connect with them, capacities that are absent in Asperger's, significantly extends our understanding of normal social and emotional development. I also wish to suggest that our understanding of Asperger's syndrome has been strongly affected by the fact that both theory and diagnosis have developed on the basis of observations of children. This has led to a failure to account for some features, specifically poor emotion regulation, because in the normal individual the capacity to regulate emotion is acquired in the course of development. Its absence, therefore, may not be apparent until adulthood. I would argue that poor emotion regulation is a core feature of Asperger's syndrome, and is clearly apparent in the adult. I believe that this difficulty is also evidenced in poor management of sexual arousal, which, together with the currently recognized difficulties in social interaction, make problems of sexuality and sexual relationship inevitable. A truly developmental theory then is required to understand sex offending in adult men with Asperger's syndrome.

Addressing the sexuality and sex education of individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

Sullivan, A., Caterino, L.

Education & Treatment of Children, Vol 31(3), Aug, 2008. pp. 381-394.

Abstract:

This paper addresses the need for **sexuality** education for individuals with **autism** spectrum disorders. It provides a brief overview of **autism** and Asperger's Syndrome as well as a

summary of the existing literature regarding the **sexuality** of this population. The existing research suggests that there is a high frequency of sexual behaviors among individuals with these disorders. A number of these behaviors may become problematic for caregivers and service providers because they violate societal norms regarding appropriate interpersonal behavior and may jeopardize the inclusion of this group in educational and community settings. The existing sex education programs for individuals with ASD are reviewed, highlighting the major components of programs tailored to this population.

From pp. 381-382

> *"However, more recent literature indicates that most adolescents and adults with these disorders engage in sexual behaviors and many desire intimate relations with others (Haracopos & Pedersen, 1992; Kontstantareas & Lunsky, 1997; Ray, Marks & Bray-Garretson, 2004; Ruble & Dalrymple, 1993; Stokes & Kaur, 2005; Van Bourgondien, Reichle, & Palmer, 1997). Unfortunately, parents continue to report substantial concern regarding negative public perceptions of such behaviors and the subsequent treatment of their children (Realmuto & Ruble, 1999; Ruble & Dalrymple, 1993) and case studies have drawn attention to deviant sexual behaviors (e.g., public masturbation, fetishism, compulsive sexual behaviors, etc.) among this population (Ray et al., 2004; Realmuto & Ruble, 1999; Williams, Allard & Sears, 1996). Additionally, as the population of individuals with varying degrees of autism continues to grow, this will likely become even more of an issue in the near future."*

Autism spectrum disorder symptoms in juvenile suspects of sex offenses.
't Hart-Kerkhoffs, Lisette A., et. al.
The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, Vol 70(2), Feb, 2009. pp. 266-272.
Abstract:

Objective: To investigate autism spectrum disorder (ASD) symptoms in juvenile suspects of sex offenses. Method: A group of 175 juvenile suspected sex offenders (all males, mean ± SD age = 14.9 ± 1.4 years) was compared with a matched healthy control group (N = 500, mean ± SD age = 14.0 ± 1.4 years) and a group of children with DSM-IV-diagnosed ASD (N =114, mean ± SD age = 14.2 ± 1.9 years) with respect to autistic symptoms as measured by means of a standardized questionnaire, the Children's Social Behavior Questionnaire. Furthermore, specific subgroups of sexual offenders, i.e., child molesters, solo peer offenders, and group offenders, were compared with regard to levels of ASD symptoms. The study was conducted from May 2003 to December 2006. Results: Significantly higher levels of ASD symptoms were found in juvenile sex offenders than in healthy controls, while levels were lower than in the ASD group ($F = 148.259$, $p < .05$). Solo peer offenders and child molesters scored higher on several subscales as well as on core autistic symptoms than group offenders ($F = 5.127$, $p<.05$). Conclusions: Levels of ASD symptoms are higher in juvenile suspects of sex offenses as compared to the healthy population, which argues for considering specific diagnostic assessment in this population, especially in solo offenders and child molesters.

Sexual behavior in male adolescents and young adults with autism spectrum disorder and borderline/mild mental retardation.
Hellemans, H., Roeyers, H., Lepale, W., Dewaele, T., and Deboutte, D.
Sexuality and Disability, Vol 28(2), June, 2010. pp. 93-104.
Abstract:

Group home caregivers of 20 institutionalized, male adolescents and young adults with Autistic Disorder (AD) and Borderline/Mild Mental Retardation (MR) and of 19 institutionalized, male adolescents and young adults with Borderline/Mild MR, without AD were interviewed with the Interview Sexuality Autism-Revised (ISA-R). Overall the individuals with AD were not significantly less sexually active than the individuals with MR. Masturbation was common in both groups. Individuals with MR had significantly more experience with relationships. No difference was found in the presence of inappropriate behavior. No difference was found in sexual orientation. Some deviant sexual behaviors (stereotyped sexual interests; sensory fascinations with a sexual connotation; paraphilia) were present in the group with AD, but not in the group with MR. A difference seemed to exist in the nature of sexual problems in the individuals with AD and MR, problems in individuals with AD being more related to an obsessive quality of the sexual behavior.

Self-assessed sexuality in young adults with High-Functioning Autism

Prianka Mehzabin, Mark A. Stokes

Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, Vol 5, Issue 1, January-March 2011, pp. 614-621

Abstract

The literature has revealed that autistic persons of all ages show an interest in sexuality and relationships, but the poor social and communication skills found among those with autism hinders the experience of this. Unfortunately, most research to date in this domain has relied exclusively upon parental or caregiver reports. Thus there remains a need for research to be undertaken in this area based on direct reports from autistic individuals. We hypothesised that compared to Typically Developing (TD) persons, persons with High-Functioning Autism (HFA) would reveal lesser levels of sexual experience, lower levels of sexual and social behaviour, and less understanding of privacy on various subscales of the Sexualised Behaviour Scale. The results of this present study supported the hypothesis on all scales except Privacy and Sexualised Behaviour. Overall, compared to TD individuals, HFA individuals engaged in fewer social behaviours, had less sex education and fewer sexual experiences, had more pronounced concerns for the future, and showed similar levels of privacy knowledge and public sexualised behaviour. These findings suggest a need for specialised sex education programs for autistic populations; further, since social behaviour was significantly lower for autistic individuals and future concerns were higher, this suggests that sex education programs need to incorporate education about social rules to enhance social communication and understanding.

Sexual abuse and offending in autism spectrum disorders.

Sevlever, Melina, Roth, Matthew E., Gillis, Jennifer M.

Sexuality and Disability, Vol 31(2), June 2013. pp. 189-200.

Abstract:

Individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may be disproportionately at risk of experiencing sexual abuse and victimization. Moreover, limited research suggests some individuals with ASD may be more likely to engage in sexual offending behavior. The present review addresses both sexual abuse and offending within the ASD population. The literature review was conducted utilizing PsycINFO and the Education Resources Information Center. Characteristics of the ASD population and how they relate to both victimization and offending are assessed. Additionally, a brief review of sexual education for this population is presented. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2016 APA, all rights reserved)

Violence and sexual offending behavior in people with autism spectrum disorder who have undergone a psychiatric forensic examination.

Søndenaa, Erik. St., et al.

Psychological Reports, (August 2014). 115(1): 32-43.

Abstract:

The increased awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) over the last few decades as well as the potential association between ASD and off ending behaviors has spurred a need for increased research in this area. In order to explore any possible relationship between ASD and violent or sexual crime the present study examines all forensic examination reports over a 10-yr. period in Norway where the charged persons were diagnosed with ASD and charged with either a violent (N = 21) or a sexual (N = 12) offense. Differences between these two groups regarding previous contact with child welfare and confessions to the offense were found. There was also a tendency toward more severe mental health problems and less intellectual problems among the violent offenders than the sexual offenders.

Autism spectrum disorder and sexual offending: Responsivity in forensic interventions.

Higgs, Tamsin, Carter, Adam J.. \

Aggression and Violent Behavior, Vol 22, May 2015. pp. 112-119.

Abstract:

Research concerned with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and criminality has grown in recent years. While having ASD does not increase risk of sexual offending behavior, an association has been recognized between ASD and sexually abusive behaviors. Despite this association, inadequacies in much of the criminal justice system to respond to the needs of this client group have been raised. A proportion of those people within the criminal justice system convicted of sexual offenses will have ASD. Given that group based interventions require participants to carry out introspection, sharing personal information and interacting in a group, all activities that an individual with ASD will invariably find challenging, efforts need to be made to develop interventions to work responsively, safely, appropriately and effectively with this client group to reduce risk of sexual recidivism. This review sets out to consider research on ASD and sexual offending in order to make practical recommendations on working responsively to raise the possibility of therapeutic interventions being effective when engaging with this client group. The status of research on ASD both generally, as far as the scope of this review allows, and in relation to offending is discussed and practical guidance is offered.

Sexual Offending and Autism Spectrum Disorders

Allely, C. S., & Creaby-Attwood, A.

Journal of Intellectual Disabilities and Offending Behaviour

Publication date: 14 March 2016

Abstract

Purpose – Studies have found innate vulnerabilities which potentially may increase the risk of an individual with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) finding themselves involved with the criminal justice system as a result of being charged with a sexual offence. The purpose of the present review is to evaluate the literature which has explored sexual offending in individuals with ASD. Design/methodology/approach – A systematic PRISMA review (PRISMA, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) was conducted using internet-based bibliographic databases (PsycINFO, MEDLINE, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection and PsycARTICLES) in order to access

studies which investigated to any degree the association between ASD and sexual offending. Findings – Only a small number of case reports (N = 7) on sexual offending in individuals with ASD and a small number of prevalence studies (N = 7) were identified. Research Implications – Research is urgently required to identify the specific requirements and needs of sexual offenders with ASD in order to inform an appropriate treatment strategy for successful outcomes. Originality/value – Relatively few studies and reviews have investigated the area of ASD and sexual offending specifically.

Aspects of sexuality in adolescents and adults diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders in childhood.

Authors:
Fernandes, Lucrecia Cabral, et al.

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, Vol 46(9), Sep, 2016. pp. 3155-3165.

Abstract:

The literature concerning sexuality in autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) is limited regarding inappropriate sexual behaviours and paraphilias and its relation to age, verbal ability, symptom severity, intellectual ability, or adaptive functioning. A cohort of 184 adolescents and young adults (ages 15–39 years) with ASD diagnosed in childhood, including both low and high functioning individuals, was examined. The large majority were found to have a sexual interest and showed interest towards the opposite sex. Inappropriate sexual behaviours and paraphilias were reported for about a fourth of the individuals. No relationships were found between inappropriate sexual behaviours and any of the background variables listed above. However, associations were found between paraphilias and ASD symptom severity, intellectual ability, and adaptive functioning.

Autism, sexual offending, and the criminal justice system

Melanie Clark Mogavero

Journal of Intellectual Disabilities and Offending Behaviour (2016), Vol. 7 Iss 3 pp. 116 – 126

Abstract:

Purpose – There has been growing concern among stakeholders about individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and sex offending as research supports an indirect association. The purpose of this paper is threefold: first, bring more awareness of the sexuality and deviant/criminal sexual behavior among those with ASD to stakeholders in the criminal justice system (CJS); second, demonstrate that much of the deviant or sexual offending behavior exhibited among those with ASD is often a manifestation of their ASD symptoms and not malice; and third, demonstrate the necessity to address specific needs of individuals with ASD who enter the CJS due to criminal sexual behavior.
Design/methodology/approach – This paper provides an overview of the ASD symptomology, including the diagnostic changes, a review of the literature on ASD and sexuality, which includes deviant sexual behavior and sexual offending.
Findings – The author linked examples of deviant or sexual behavior in the research literature to the ASD symptomology and described how the symptomology explains such behavior.
Originality/value – Sexual offending among those with ASD has received little research outside the mental health field. This review is of particular importance to those in the CJS unfamiliar with ASD, as they should handle them differently with regard to formal interviewing, measures of competency, capacity, and sentencing.

A psycho-legal perspective on sexual offending in individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Creaby-Attwood, A., Allely, C. S.

International Journal of Law and Psychiatry, Vol 55, Nov-Dec, 2017. pp. 72-80.

Abstract:

It is important to consider whether there are innate vulnerabilities that increase the risk of an individual with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), predominantly those defendants with a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, being charged and convicted of a sexual offence. The significance of such can be readily seen in recent English case law, with judgments on appeal finding convictions unsafe where there have been a number of failings in the Judge's summing up. In this article, we will consider the gravity of Judges omitting to highlight a defendant's diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and the necessity of detailed explanations to jury members regarding the condition and its effect upon thoughts and behaviour. Consideration will be specifically given to the necessity to prove sexual motivation in such offences and the judicial direction required in relation to whether the appellant's actions had been sexually motivated. Recognition of the social impairments inherent in ASDs are vital to this work and we shall consider whether the difficulty with the capacity to develop appropriate, consenting sexual relationships as a result of impaired social cognition may be one of the factors which increases the risk of sexual offending in individuals with ASD (Higgs & Carter, 2015).

Assessing autism spectrum disorder in intellectually able adults with the personality assessment inventory: Normative data and a novel supplemental indicator.

Authors:

Harrison, Kimberly B., et al.

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, Mar 13, 2020.

Abstract:

Differential diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) among intellectually-able adults often presents a clinical challenge, particularly when individuals present in crisis without diagnostic history. The Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI) is a multiscale personality and psychopathology instrument utilized across clinical settings, but to date there are no published normative data for use of the PAI with adults with ASD. This study provides normative PAI data for adults diagnosed with ASD, with effect size comparisons to the PAI clinical standardization sample and an inpatient sample. Additionally, a discriminant function was developed and cross-validated for identification of ASD-like symptomatology in a clinical population, which demonstrates promise as a screening tool to aid in the identification of individuals in need of specialized ASD assessment.