

The effects of adverse life events on the mental health of autistic people with learning disabilities

Summary Slides

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During this session we will consider how trauma-related mental health conditions may present in autistic people with learning disabilities

We will consider conceptualisations of trauma and methods of assessment

This will include how trauma-related mental health conditions may be identified in order to facilitate case recognition and access to support

Finally, we will close the session with a consideration of how current evidence indicates future developments and research going forward

Definition of Terms

Experiencing adverse life events may have a negative impact on mental health and may cause trauma-related mental health conditions

The term trauma is used throughout the session and trauma is defined here as both the adverse life events experienced and the impact of the experiences

Research and Evidence Gaps

Some research has considered the prevalence of adverse life events and the effects of trauma in autistic people

Some research has considered the prevalence of adverse life events and the effects of trauma in people with learning disabilities

Most research to date has looked at these groups of people separately

Research and Evidence Gaps

As described earlier in this session most trauma research to date has focussed on autistic people and people with learning disabilities separately

There is limited research to date on the effects of adverse life events and trauma in autistic people with a learning disability

The central focus of this session is on research work considering the effects of trauma on autistic people with a learning disability

Further there is a particular focus on methods of assessment or methods of identifying people affected by trauma for example by using questionnaires

Trauma-related mental health conditions

Exposure to adverse and negative life events may for some people result in trauma-related mental health conditions

For example post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD)

Trauma Questionnaires

Trauma assessment measures (for example trauma questionnaires) can be used to identify symptoms of trauma

They can be used to help clinicians to identify people who may have trauma-related mental health conditions

Identifying people with trauma-related mental health conditions can facilitate their access to support and access to suitable treatment

There is a lack of appropriate trauma questionnaires and assessments for autistic people with learning disabilities
(Kildahl et al 2019; 2020)

This is important because trauma questionnaires and assessments can facilitate access to treatment and support to improve the well-being and quality of life of those autistic adults with learning disabilities who have trauma-related mental health conditions

The Lancaster and Northgate Trauma Scales

The Lancaster and Northgate Trauma Scales were developed to measure trauma symptoms in people with a learning disability (adults)

There are 2 versions each with a different perspective

There is a self-report version (with 29 questions): this asks how a person feels

There is also a clinician or practitioner version (with 43 questions): this asks how the person is doing (for example at work and how they are getting on with other people)

The aim of the current work around which this session is centred is to adapt the Lancaster and Northgate Trauma Scales for autistic people with a learning disability

This is important as between 20 and 33% of adults with a learning disability are autistic (Emerson & Baines 2010)

Trauma questionnaires

Trauma questionnaires can be useful for clinicians working in services to support autistic people with learning disabilities in a number of ways

They can be used during assessment & information gathering

They can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of clinical interventions

Trauma assessment measures may be used to measure if any changes have occurred as a result of treatment

A consideration of current developments and
research going forward

Next steps....

The next steps for this work are to adapt the Lancaster and Northgate Trauma Scales for autistic people with learning disabilities

Before this work starts the first stage is to identify how autistic people with learning disabilities would like to be involved in the research process as study advisors or co-researchers

Thank you for listening

Contact

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