

An ecological perspective on offending by people with intellectual disabilities

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Background and rationale

Historically, the association between offending and intellectual impairment was believed to be self-evident (Terman, 1911). Today, the relationship between offending and below average intelligence remains robust, but mediated by a host of associated environmental and individual factors (Farrington, 2006). However, the relationship with intellectual disabilities (ID), which refers to intellectual functioning more than two standard deviations below the population mean coupled with significant impairments in adaptive functioning, is more complex, difficult to quantify, and has not been fully constructed (Holland, et al., 2002).

Supporting offenders with ID in the community, and improving health and care services to make this possible, is an integral part of stated UK government health and social care policy. However, the policy is proving challenging to implement. This project aims to address the issue by drawing on new criminological models and methodologies to provide a multi-levelled analysis of the environments of a community-based sample of offenders with ID.

The background to this project is outlined in more detail in the four boxes below.

1. Public health policy

- Reed, 1994, Mansell, 1993

The emphasis of policy in relation to the care of offenders with ID is:

- quality care
- attention to the needs of individuals
- care in the community rather than institutional settings
- no greater security than is justified by the degree of risk presented
- rehabilitation to improve future chances of independent life
- as near as possible to own homes or families

- Department of Health, Valuing People, 2001

Promoting and ensuring rights, inclusion, choice, independence

However...

- National Development Team, 2007

Progress has been slow, and many offenders with ID are still resident in out-of-area placements. Ad-hoc services are being established in different regions of the UK, but little is known about the relative success of these provisions.

2. Current research on offenders with ID

- Holland, et al., 2002, McBrien, 2003, Lindsay & Taylor, 2005

Within the field of intellectual disability research, there has been a welcome proliferation of interest and research in the area of offenders and offending. The focus has been particularly on:

- vulnerability during contact with the criminal justice system
- prevalence (and difficulties in measurement)
- psychopathology
- crime typologies
- psychological treatments

However...

Traditionally much of this work has focused on secure hospital samples, and while there is increasing interest in community-based samples, the focus of work remains largely upon the individual, rather than environmental, characteristics of offenders with ID.

3. Ecological perspectives in ID

- Felce & Emerson, 2001

Within the field of ID research, methodologies have been developed to enable a detailed analysis of the environments of people with severe ID and challenging behaviour.

- Health & Social Care Information Centre, 2005

A national survey of the lives of adults with ID suggested widespread social and emotional deprivation amongst adults with ID

However...

However these methodologies have not been adapted or applied to ID offender populations.

4. Ecological perspectives in criminology

- Wikstrom, 2006, Sampson, 2006

In mainstream criminology there has been renewed interest in the development of integrated models and methodologies, assessing environments, and explanations of offending, at a range of levels.

However...

These new models and methodologies have not been systematically applied to the explanation of offending by populations with intellectual disabilities.

Aims and Objectives

Aims

- To examine the geographic, social and emotional environments of a community-based sample of offenders with ID
- To develop new models and perspectives on offending by people with ID
- To provide an evidence base, and inform research and service provision

Objectives

- Develop methodologies (geographic, criminological, psychological)
- Use these methods in a case controlled study to compare active offenders, desisted offenders, and non-offenders with ID living in community settings
- Examine prospectively the effect on offending of historical, distal and proximal environmental variables

Design

- Case controlled study, comparing offenders, desisted offenders and non-offenders with ID living in community settings

Active offenders Active offenders are those who have been cautioned, charged or convicted in 2008, and referred to community health or social care services (x40 cases)

Desisted offenders Desisted offenders are those individuals with ID, who are known to health and social care services, and were cautioned, charged or convicted in the past, but are not known to be offending in 2008 (x40 cases)

Non-offenders Non-offenders are those with ID, known to health and social care services, who are not known to have ever been cautioned, charged or convicted (x40 cases)

- Cases matched for age, gender, ethnic background, IQ, region of residence
- Systematic assessment of historical, distal and proximal environments + qualitative interviews
- 6 months post environmental assessment, measurement of any cautions, charges, convictions and anti-social behaviour

Environmental measures



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