

Prosocial Decision-Making In Men With Learning Disabilities

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Summary

Background: Changes in policy provide a welcome relief from the fears with which society historically viewed people with learning disabilities. However, whilst moral abilities are thought of as key to social living, studies investigating moral abilities in people with learning disabilities are narrow in scope. Attempts to examine prosocial abilities in adults with learning disabilities are extremely scarce. **Method:** Prosocial abilities were systematically examined using a decision-making framework and taking a developmental approach. Adapting a task from the general children's literature, men with learning disabilities were first compared to their counterparts in the general population on their prosocial responding and prosocial reasoning. Studies were then undertaken to explore prosocial decision-making among the male learning disability population by comparing those who live in the community with a group of men detained in hospital under the *Mental Health Act 1983* with a history of offending behaviour. Finally, associations between prosocial abilities and basic psychological factors were explored among men with learning disabilities. **Results:** Men with learning disabilities showed poorer understanding of the prosocial situations and used less mature forms of prosocial reasoning than those in the general population. However, they were concerned about those in need of help, and following adaptations to the task to improve their understanding of the situations, there was no significant differences between the two groups in their prosocial responding. No significant differences were found between the 'Community' and 'Detained' groups of men with learning disabilities, and few significant associations were revealed between prosocial abilities and basic psychological processes. **Conclusions:** Suggestions are made about how prosocial functioning in adults with learning disabilities may be understood in the light of this work and how models of prosocial functioning may be improved. The potential implications for practice and policy are discussed as well as the future for this area of research.