



SEXUAL DESIRE – A Challenge among Youth with Intellectual Disability

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THE AUTHOR HAS NO CONFLICT OF
INTEREST TO DISCLOSE

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Empirical studies:

Löfgren-Mårtenson, L. (2004). "May I?" About Sexuality and Love in the New Generation with intellectual disabilities. *Sexuality and Disability*, 22(3), 197–207.

Löfgren-Mårtenson, L. (2009). The Invisibility of Young Homosexual Women and Men with Intellectual Disabilities. *Sexuality and Disability*, 27(1), 21–26.

Löfgren-Mårtenson, L. (2012). "I want to do it right!" A Pilot Study of Swedish Sex Education and Young people with Intellectual Disability. *Sexuality and Disability*, 30(2), 209–225.

McCarthy, M. (2014). Women with intellectual disability: Their sexual lives in the 21st century. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 39(2), 124–131.





Dispositions

- What is an intellectual disability?
- Historical and societal context
- Sexual conduct and experiences
- A heterosexual and gender stereotype world
- Sex education for youth with ID
- A norm critical view
- Conclusions

What is an Intellectual Disability (ID)?

- A heterogeneous group , deficient abstraction, verbal and communicative ability
- In need of life-long support from staff and/or parents
- Limited understanding of sexual norms, codes and signals
- Lacking knowledge of sexuality, the body and relationships
- Many want to be like “every-one-else”





Historical and Societal Context

- Generalizations about the group as either asexual and non-gendered or hyper-sexual individuals.
- Institutionalization and a repressive societal attitudes, including forced sterilization, during the first half of the 20th century.
- During the 1970s living conditions changed through normalization and integration reforms.
- Today, many still to live sheltered based on a sense of responsibility and worry in their surroundings. e.g. of unwanted pregnancies, sexual assaults, exploitation.



On/Off Stage

- Lack of private spheres
- Is it possible to live a private life at a group home?
- On/off stage – sexuality in privacy and in public
- What do we really know about sexual conduct among people with ID?



Sexual Conduct and Experiences

- International research shows comprehensive experiences of sexual assault and exploitation among females with ID.
- Swedish youth with ID describe pleasurable sexual experiences.
- Experiences of masturbation, hugs, kisses, caresses and petting seem to be more common than intercourse.
- Current Swedish research points out experiences of prostitution in the target group.



A Heterosexual and Gender Stereotype World

- The normalization principle has a built-in stereotypical conception of gender.
- Society does not want persons with ID to further deviate from the norm.
- Swedish research show that young females take more initiatives to sexual activities than the males (who are afraid of assaulting the females).
- It seems to be unusual for persons with ID to come out as homo-, bi- or transsexual.



Sex Education for Youth with ID

- In Sweden (with compulsory sex education since 1955) sex education in special education is rare, and seldom perceived as relevant by the youth with ID .
- A heteronormative perspective diminishes other sexual experiences and/or orientations.
- Focus on sexually transmitted diseases and contraception are not considered important by the youth with ID based on their sexual experiences.
- Contradictory risk perceptions
- Limited or non-existing sex education leads to inaccurate sexual behavior and to low self-esteem.



A Norm Critical View

- A norm critical view opens up for a variety of sexual conduct, sexual orientation and sexual life styles.
- It can challenge gender stereotyped views and make a more nuanced way of meeting young women and men with ID possible.
- A voice can be given to a discourse that focuses on enjoyment based on the individual's prerequisites, instead of a problematizing discourse that focuses on heterosexual penetration .







Counteract the disempowerment

- Accessible information
- Time to make decision
- Support from significant others
- Being free from coercion



Conclusions

- Educate staff members and parents on sexuality among youth with ID.
- Offer young people with ID sex education on their premises.
- Apply a norm critical view and open up for sexual and gender varieties.
- Make sexual arousal and desire possible for youth with ID, as well as for others!



THANK YOU!

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