

Introduction to the Special Issue

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This special issue of **Mental Health Aspects of Developmental Disabilities** concerns the diagnosis, assessment, and treatment of sexual deviance (paraphilias) and sexually offending behavior in people with developmental disabilities (DD). Clinical disorders related to sexual functioning can be severely debilitating, causing impairment to social relationships, emotional distress, and personal maladjustment. When these disorders include non consensual contact with others, physical coercion, and law violating acts, forensic concerns must be considered in the course of treatment. These problems pose significant challenges to the mental health system, habilitation settings, and society at-large.

The decision to publish a special issue on this topic was sparked by the growing interest of many practitioners and information that has appeared in the professional literature. For example, it is well established that children and adults who have DD are at risk for victimization in the form of physical and sexual maltreatment,^{1,3} a predisposing influence that may account for the emergence of sexually offending behavior.^{4,6} Furthermore, there is accumulating evidence that people with DD experience the full range of paraphilic disorders seen in the general population.² Although they are in the nascent stage, comprehensive treatment programs are being implemented with good clinical outcome for people with DD who demonstrate paraphilias and sexual offenses.⁵

Each of the articles in this special issue provides an overview of our present knowledge concerning diagnosis, assessment, and treatment. The articles are consistent in documenting that the majority of therapeutic intervention and clinical research on sexual deviance and sexually offending behavior has been conducted with individuals who do not have cognitive and intellectual challenges. The authors of each article summarize this information and comment on its relevance and applicability with people who have DD. The conclusions presented by the authors are based on their analysis of the extant literature combined with their extensive clinical experiences.

In addition to giving readers a "state of the art" summary of this complex topic, it is hoped that the contents of the special issue will improve the quality of service delivery, prompt professionals to undertake a new area of treatment, and stimulate seasoned clinicians to report their impressions, observations, and case histories. The articles also should guide psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and other mental health specialists in designing research projects that will contribute to our knowledge base. It is through controlled and empirical inquiry that meaningful advances will be realized concerning the epidemiology, assessment, treatment, and prevention of sexual disorders and offending behavior by people with DD.

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