Sex Offenders with Intellectual Disabilities

Individuals diagnosed with an intellectual disability (ID) who have sexually offended often present with a host of complex treatment needs. To help monitor, treat, and support sex offenders with ID, understanding their specific needs, limitations, and risk factors is essential. Assessments that utilize operant features of sex offending may be beneficial for this population. A combination of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), problem-solving, mindfulness, and treatment activities focused on relapse prevention are currently being used to treat this population. During treatment, sex offenders with ID typically work on victim empathy and cognitive distortions to decrease future risk of offending.

Fast Facts
- Sex offenders with ID experience stigmas and negativity from society
- Sex offenders with ID may also be victims of sexual abuse and exploitation
- Evidence suggests that this group of offenders sometimes have a history of child sexual abuse
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be effective for this population
- CBT is the most commonly used treatment method for sex offenders with ID
- Criminal justice and forensic professionals often lack the necessary training to identify individuals with ID
- Rates of recidivism should be interpreted cautiously as this population typically has stricter controls in prison, community settings, and with family and employers. This type of controlled environment can also aid in the detection of other problematic and criminal behavior
- Sex offenders with ID sometimes struggle to understand their offending behaviors from the victim’s perspective
- Sex offenders with ID sometimes struggle to recognize emotion in others
- For sex offenders with ID, there tend to be better outcomes when they are in treatment for at least 2 years

References