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Assessing psychological damage in people with intellectual disabilities after a traumatic event

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Statement of the Problem: The assessment of psychological damage resulting from traumatic events is a complex process and is difficult for forensic psychologists to establish the presence or absence of a criminal act attending to the alleged victim's psychological state. As a part of their intervention, experts must evaluate the psychological damage in order to argue the possibility that a crime has taken place and make an appropriate prospecting regarding the clinical evolution of the victims. Since there are no validated scales in Spain which evaluates traumatic symptomatology in people with intellectual disabilities (ID), The Victims Support Unity for People with ID (Madrid, Spain) is currently validating the Spanish version of what would complete a traumatic symptomatology battery assessment within this population and will afterwards analyze the type and frequency of the symptoms (anxiety, depression and PTSD) depending on the traumatic event.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: 120 people with ID (older 18) and their main carers have been interviewed through a traumatic symptomatology battery. The inter-rater and test retest reliabilities are being analyzed and the symptomatology frequency associated to each of the different traumatic events will be measured.

Findings: The main research hypothesis considered are, those scales under validation process which will adequately assess the symptomatology previously mentioned within Spanish population with ID. Additionally, we expect to find higher scores in PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder) when being victims of sexual abuse, intimidation or threats.

Conclusion & Significance: The Spanish validation of this traumatic symptomatology battery within the population with ID will be a valuable resource for forensic experts when exploring the victims' psychological damage and will make experts decision making easier.

Recent Publications:

1. Ackerman M J (2010) Essentials of Forensic Psychological Assessment. (2nd Ed.). John Wiley & Sons. Pages:352. ISBN:978-0-470-55168-4.
2. Emerson E and Baines S (2010) Health inequalities and people with learning disabilities in the UK: 2010. Improving Health and Lives: Learning Disabilities Observatory. Pages:1-20.
3. Hall J C, Jobson L and Langdon P E (2014) Measuring symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in people with intellectual disabilities: the development and psychometric properties of the impact of event scale-intellectual disabilities (IES-IDs). British Journal of Clinical Psychology. 53(3):315-332.
4. Hernández Núñez Polo et al. (2016) Integrative therapy focused on trauma for people with intellectual disability (TIT-ID): a therapeutic answer to abuse and intellectual disability experience in the individual and the family. Journal of Intellectual Disability - Diagnosis and Treatment. 4(1):29-40.
5. Reid A J (2016) Sex trafficking of girls with intellectual disabilities: an exploratory mixed methods study. Sexual Abuse. 30(2):107-131

Biography

Mercedes Hernández Nuñez-Polo work as psychologists and researchers at the Victims Support Unit for people with ID (A LA PAR Foundation) and is passionate for trauma therapy and its psychological impact on specially vulnerable populations. Mercedes additionally, accompanies and supports victims all along the judicial process guaranteeing the necessary adaptations.

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