The Internet & People with Learning Disabilities

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Aims & Objectives

- To provide an overview of how people with learning disabilities use the internet.
- To highlight the risks of using the internet for people with learning disabilities.
- To explore the role of healthcare professionals in supporting vulnerable groups to use the internet.
Biography

- I qualified as a Registered Nurse for People with Learning Disabilities in January 2009 at Teesside University.

- Currently work as a Community Charge Nurse in a learning disability forensic community team.

- Previous background in information technology stimulated interest in this field.
Defining Learning Disability

A learning disability affects the way a person understands information and how they communicate. Around 1.5m people in the UK have one. This means they can have difficulty:

- understanding new or complex information
- learning new skills
- coping independently
Scene Setting

- The internet has become a major part of modern life and has heralded the start of the Digital Age.

- It has transformed the way we communicate,

- complete tasks such as banking and shopping

- Share knowledge and information
Exclusion....

- Historically, people with learning disabilities have been marginalised from society.

- However, the evolution of the internet risks creating a new type of marginalisation, that of ‘Digital Exclusion’.
Barriers to Access

- Research by Ofcom (2008) suggest that the level of an individual’s learning disability is not the main barrier to internet access. Barriers include:
  - low levels of literacy
  - lack of awareness of what can be done with the internet,
  - parents and carers associating the internet with potential dangers.
Question

Put your hand up if you own a smart phone?

Put your hand up if you own a tablet?
Risks to Health

● People with learning disabilities and other vulnerable groups can experience health risks associated with their internet use.

● Caplan (2003), highlighted the concept of problematic internet use.

● This can lead those with existing problematic psychosocial predispositions lead individuals to excessive and compulsive computer-mediated social interaction, that worsens their problems.
Problematic Internet Use

- One of main vulnerabilities for people with learning disabilities is their limitations in social functioning and this is likely to increase in an environment which can be unpredictable and the rules governing it can be often abstract and lack clarity (Batey & Comer, 2013).
Without Rules

● In 2007, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee published report on Personal Internet Safety which described the Internet as

‘a lawless wild west playground for criminals’
Delicate Balance

Perpetrator

Victim
Risks of using the Internet

- These include
- Paedophile contact,
- Stalking,
- Cyber bullying
- Race hate
- Trolling
- Fraud & Exploitation
- Sexual Abuse
- Stealing personal information
- Grooming
Really??

- Can people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable groups commit crimes on the internet?
Case Study 1

- John felt ‘betrayed’ by a member of staff called Colin.

- He set up a fake Facebook profile of Colin and attempted to befriend his real life friends.

- John then attempted to spread rumours about Colin in an attempt to get him sacked.

- John had a mild learning disability with a full scale IQ of 63.
Case Study 2

- Josh was playing on X-Box Live on Call of Duty.

- He experienced significant levels of cyber bullying.

- As a result he self-harmed.
Role of Healthcare Professionals

- Batey & Comer (2013) highlighted the need for interventions to support people with learning disabilities to educate on the risks of using the internet.

- Vulnerable groups need support from professionals who understand their needs to advocate on their behalf.

- As health professionals it is part of our remit to ensure that a persons online behaviour does not effect their health.
Solutions

- Identifying those at higher risk of problematic behaviour at an earlier stage.

- Increasing awareness of internet usage amongst professionals.

- Health professionals need to have an understanding of risk and vulnerability issues relating to their clients to inform care planning.
The Future

- The internet will continue to evolve and play an increasing role in our lives.

- For people with learning disabilities they will need support to adapt to new internet trends to reduce their vulnerability.

- As health professionals it is part of our remit to ensure that a person's online behaviour does not affect their health.
Any Questions?
Thank you.....

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