



Relationships and Sexuality

*Social Care Practice and Relationships- Critical Reflections on
Relationship-based Practice*



National Institute
of Intellectual
Disability Studies

- **Sexuality and Relationships – enhancing the lives of people with Intellectual Disability**





Aim of Session

- To provide participants with the opportunity to hear the voices of people with Intellectual disabilities about the issues, challenges, and barriers they face here in Ireland in developing relationships. I will also outline the opportunities which they need those supporting them to grasp to provide them with meaningful support and facilitate them in their relationship and sexual development.



Learning outcomes

- Explore the attitudes and barriers which prevent relationship development
- Explore the missed opportunities service users with ID which disadvantage them from intimate relationship building
- Understand loneliness and the impact it has on service users physical and mental health
- Examining the role of the SCW's in supporting relationship building and sexual development
- Identify the skills gaps in practice among SCW's and how they can enhance their professional practice in this area
- Review of organisations policy and how they both support and create barriers to relationship development with a view to enhance service delivery
- Exploration of the law and human rights in relation to supporting people in their relationship building and sexual development



TILDA Study Findings

- Consistent loneliness was found in 26% of the people with Intellectual Disabilities, nearly double that reported in the wider population (Victor, 2014). Loneliness is a vulnerability factor for mental health problems. 46.5% of people with Intellectual Disabilities have Mental Health Difficulties. TILDA Study 2021. Practitioners need to get better at helping people with Intellectual Disabilities have meaningful relationships to prevent loneliness and to enhance the quality of their lives.



How we conducted our research?

- Outline qualitative research conducted with 40 service users in Ireland finding out their experiences of how they live their lives and what relationships they have with people other than paid carers and family members. Their stories are powerful, insightful, extremely sad and may challenge participants' perceptions of the support they provide.
- Outcome: 5 case studies will be presented detailing
 1. how they live their lives
 2. how they feel about the way they live their life
 3. why they don't have intimate friendships
 4. what they want from their lives
 5. Implications for policy and practice



Research findings

- Findings indicated that service users mostly lived impoverished lifestyles, whether in services or at home with parents.
- Only one of the 40 service users was in a relationship.
- The other 39 lived their lives under close supervision, had a fear of relationships and or there was a lack of opportunity to meet potential partners or form friendships.
- Consequently, they were unlikely to develop relationships any time soon. The barriers they faced were physical, psychological, legal and organisational.
- In addition, there was a lack of education for themselves, their families and the staff who supported them. Many expressed concerns about loneliness.



Case Study



Martha McGinn

087 799 9739 info@marthamcgin.com www.marthamcgin.com



Shay is 17 and lives with both his parents. He is a young vibrant man full of curiosity and a desire to make sense of what is going on around him. He has two friends whom he only waves at when he gets off the bus returning home from his day center. Shay is very confused about relationships, he thinks that just by being in the company of a girl she can become pregnant, and then she will either have to have an abortion or he will have to raise the baby himself. The idea of this kind of relationships scares him and he says it is too much hassle. When we discussed the law in relation to the age of marriage Shay said the law is not the law; 'MY MOTHER' she is the law and they make the decision about when you get married'. Shay is learning about sex from the TV and also from his peers. There may be another influence, but he did not say, but it seems someone may be taking advantage of his curiosity, gullibility and innocence, to put him off having a relationship.



Martha McGinn

087 799 9739 info@marthamcginns.com www.marthamcginns.com

- How would you help Shay – Think about
 - Relationships
 - Sexual Knowledge
 - Advise????





Martha McGinn

087 799 9739 info@marthamcgin.com www.marthamcgin.com



Case Study



Martha McGinn

087 799 9739 info@marthamcgin.com www.marthamcgin.com



Miguel is a twin and they are very close. Miguel 's brother does not have an intellectual disability. Miguel has an intellectual disability and uncontrolled epilepsy with tonic seizures. He wears a protective helmet and his medication makes him sluggish and slow responding and reacting. He attends a day service and sees his ex-girlfriend and her new boyfriend every day, as they both attend to service also. Miguel is broken-hearted. He says he has no-one to talk to take him seriously. He would like to move on, and meet someone new, but does not know how?. He spends a lot of time with his twin, during the weekend days, but his brother has told him he should not go to nightclubs with him, as the lights may affect or trigger his epilepsy. Miguel cannot go out without supervision and goes out for a drink with his mother and her friend on a Saturday night to the local pub. He told his mother he would like to meet someone else, but she says he should not, as she is fed up with him being miserable. She said she could not go through all the moping again. She also said that if he got a new girlfriend he would only have to but her drink and dance with her. Miguel also thought that safe sex meant having an abortion as he had seem this on Eastenders and wants to know how he would go about finding himself a new girlfriend.



Martha McGinn

087 799 9739 info@marthamcgin.com www.marthamcgin.com

How could you help Miguel

- Day to day scenarios
- Education
- Advice
- ?????



Barriers to relationship and sexual development

Service user issues	Parental Issues
Organisational Issues	Staff Issues



Service User - Findings

- Some of the real issues preventing service users from having sex, and which staff feel the policy does not guide them in are:
- Where can they find someone to have a relationship with?
- How do they get to see them in private?
- One women of 64 years old told us that '**Relationships are not for the likes of us, anyway we would not be let**'
- A very insightful young man in his twenties told us, when we discussed the age of consent for marriage '**The law is not the law, parents are the law**'
- For one woman, staff are the law, '**we were given orders by the staff, not to go into each other's rooms**'.



Service User Findings

- Some don't have relationships because they are scared and they learnt that from TV or from people who have an invested interest in ensuring they do not develop relationships, comments such as, '***going out with someone will make her pregnant and I will have be made to rear the child***'



Staff findings

- Most groups of staff and parents agreed having read service users true stories that they had significant gaps in their responses to service users
- Some staff felt that the Importance of professional distance needs to be addressed in the policy.
- Others felt the vulnerability of staff working in isolation with service needs needed to be identified with some advice around creating safe space.



Purpose for developing programmes

- Our research also highlighted the many barriers to group sex education, such as the lack of expertise, resources, supervision, inadequate support from policy and organisations and incompatible groupings. We believe that the way to overcome these barriers is to prepare staff to provide education as and when needed, on a 1:1 or in small groups, under supervision.



Purpose for developing programmes

- Frontline staff are aware of some of the struggles people with Intellectual Disabilities experience concerning their relationships and sexual development. Most staff would like to be able to support them but don't know how or where to start, and they often feel frustrated that there are few sex education groups.



Rationale for programme

- Given the complexity of this topic, we have divided the programme into six modules, each exploring different aspects. Each module contains thought-provoking case scenarios, discussion points and provocative questions. The programme is designed to make course participants and organisations think about and challenge how they provide support. In addition, it will help them reflect and work to remove the barriers that service users face in their relationship development and sexual expression.



Programme Developers

National Institute of Intellectual Disability Studies, along with Dr Michelle McCarthy, University of Kent Tizard Center, developed this series of programmes.



Martha McGinn

087 799 9739 info@marthamcgin.com www.marthamcgin.com

