

Learning Disability Specialist Library

Evidence Bulletin 011 – February 2008

The LDSL brings together and makes available best current evidence to support decision makers in supporting people with learning disabilities.

Key articles which add important new knowledge to the field are presented here with links to extended summaries on the LDSL site.

Get the **LDSL Evidence Bulletin**: <http://www.library.nhs.uk/learningdisabilities/>

- **Are mood stabilisers and/or anti-epileptic medications effective in the management of behaviour problems with adults with intellectual disability?**

Psychotropic medication continues to be used for the management of challenging behaviour in adults with learning disabilities, whether or not there has been a formal diagnosis of a mental health problem. This systematic review of the literature set out to look at what evidence exists for the use of mood stabilisers like lithium and anti epileptic medications, like topiramate or valproate.

As well as searching the electronic databases, the authors carried out a hand search of relevant literature, and used a strict set of inclusion criteria. Very few papers met the criteria. Only one randomized controlled trial (RCT) relating to lithium use and two non-randomised controlled trials, one on lithium and the other on carbamazepine, were revealed.

The authors suggest the review shows support for the use of mood stabilizers and antiepileptic medication for the management of behaviour problems in adults with ID. Three studies found evidence for the use of lithium for the management of behaviour problems, particularly aggression, although in one study, lithium had no effect on non-physical aggression or Self Injurious Behaviour.

A number of patients also stopped using lithium during the study because of adverse effects (including renal failure in two cases). Topiramate, an anti-epileptic medication appeared effective in the treatment of behaviour problems, although once again, five of 19 patients developed adverse effects.

However the authors also state that these findings should be interpreted with caution because of significant methodological difficulties in the studies, for example:

- retrospective studies - susceptible to biases or crossover design in RCTs (e.g. lack of clarity about washout period), all with small sample sizes.
- Lack of validated outcome measures, with effects assessed only in intermediate post-intervention period.
- Medications as add-on therapy, making it difficult to isolate confounding effects of concomitant medications.
- Medications treating underlying mental illness or epilepsy rather than primarily impacting on behaviour issue.

In addition, none of the studies appeared to indicate any work to identify the cause or function of the behaviour, or report any previous work with non medication based alternatives. Studies failed to analyse the cause of the behaviour problem before using medication, and failed to report any previous approaches with non-medication based interventions.

The effectiveness of mood stabilizers and antiepileptic medication for the management of behaviour problems in adults with intellectual disability: a systematic review, Deb S. et al, in Journal of Intellectual Disability Research 52 (2), 107–113.

LDSL Summary

<http://www.library.nhs.uk/learningdisabilities/viewResource.aspx?resID=280091&code=c0a60d8b2cdf58b3898a00c58ffaab6b>

-
- **What impact does being in supported employment have on psychological, emotional and social outcomes for people with learning disabilities?**

The right of people with learning disability to work is firmly established in UK policy. Valuing People reiterated the central place of work as a goal for policy makers, recognising work as an aspiration for many people with learning disability. This study set out to look at the impact of supported employment on quality of life and socio-economic well-being.

The authors systematically searched the literature for case controlled and longitudinal studies, where the outcomes measured included quality of life, impact on social life and impact on levels of autonomy.

The review suggests that people with learning disabilities in employment reported higher quality of life outcomes and higher levels of psychological well-being, in terms of locus of control, self-esteem and depression. There were significant methodological difficulties in the studies however, which means that the findings may simply be reflecting differences in the characteristics of participants, rather than

This document is produced by the Learning Disability Specialist Library. The National Library for Health is not responsible or liable for, directly or indirectly, ANY form of damage whatsoever resulting from the use/misuse of information contained in or implied by this document.

the impact of employment.

Whilst there were some limited gains found in relation to social networks for those in employment, there was little evidence of friendships extending outside the workplace.

The review also found positive change in the level of autonomy enjoyed by people with learning disabilities in competitive employment. Once again though, methodological difficulties for example lack of control groups mean that the results must be treated with some caution.

Overall the authors suggest that the review shows positive outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities entering employment in terms of Quality of Life, well-being and autonomy, although they point out that the studies paid little attention to the relationship to outcomes of such variables as the number of hours people worked, the level of pay they received and the nature of the work they did, all of which they suggest are needed to provide a more rounded and naturalistic view of the impact of supported employment on the lives of people with learning disabilities.

Feelings About Work: A Review of the Socio-emotional Impact of Supported Employment on People with Intellectual Disabilities; Jahoda A et al, in Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities 21 (1), 1–18.

LDSL Summary

<http://www.library.nhs.uk/learningdisabilities/viewResource.aspx?resID=280092&code=cf630a822a8ad87170ff51e9a149eb8f>

- **In a population of adults with learning disabilities in community settings, is having epilepsy associated with greater psychopathology or carer strain?**

Epilepsy occurs amongst people with learning disabilities more frequently than amongst the general population. This study aimed to look at the nature and impact of epilepsy on a population of patients of GP practices in Wales. The study identified 374 adult patients from 40 GP practices, 318 participated in the survey. Demographic data was collected, and information on place of residence, skills, challenging behaviour, social abilities and psychiatric status. In addition, an experienced nurse visited those identified with epilepsy to gather information on seizure type/severity, level of investigation, treatment and impact on carers.

The study found a prevalence rate of 18%, consistent with other studies. It found that participants with epilepsy had significantly lower adaptive behaviour, higher levels of challenging behaviour and a higher representation of the triad of social impairments than those without. 92% of those with epilepsy had had onset before the age of 18 years, with multiple seizure types frequent. Seizure control was poor with only 26% seizure free. The authors were concerned to find that the level of

This document is produced by the Learning Disability Specialist Library. The National Library for Health is not responsible or liable for, directly or indirectly, ANY form of damage whatsoever resulting from the use/misuse of information contained in or implied by this document.

investigations was low, particularly the use of neuro-imaging. Just over one in four participants had not seen a specialist. 42.1% were on one anti-epileptic drug, but another 40+% were on two or more. The most common were carbamazepine, sodium valproate and lamotrigine. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in psychopathology, carer malaise or caregiver strain between matched epilepsy and non-epilepsy groups.

The authors suggest that epilepsy is a significant, chronic morbidity among people with learning disability, with the severity of the disability related to earlier onset and more frequent seizures. Family caregivers show strain in the support relationship, but given the complex nature of the support needs of the individuals concerned, underlying disability-related factors appeared to be more important than the presence of epilepsy.

A general practice-based prevalence study of epilepsy among adults with intellectual disabilities and of its association with psychiatric disorder, behaviour disturbance and carer stress; Matthews T. et al, in Journal of Intellectual Disability Research 52 (2), 163-173.

LDSL Summary

<http://www.library.nhs.uk/learningdisabilities/viewResource.aspx?resID=280093&code=2e2547c99fad5640b78e88dc699fd951>

What else is new?

Mental illness in adults with autism spectrum disorders

Carpenter P, in Advances in Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Vol.1, 4 2007

This article reviews the evidence of mental ill health in people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The author suggests that anxiety and mood disorder are common as well as paranoia. He points out the difficulties in assessing illness in people with ASD. He suggests that schizophrenia appears not to be more common in people with ASD. He suggests that treatment usually requires environmental manipulation, and can include counselling, with medication often working primarily as a de-stressor.

You can receive the **LDSL Evidence Bulletin** by registering at <http://www.library.nhs.uk/learningdisabilities/>