

## A Study on Sexuality Education for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities: Review of Research Studies

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### ABSTRACT

This Study aimed to analyse the different research studies available previously on sexuality education for adults with intellectual disabilities. Findings suggest that these sexuality education programmes enhance knowledge, decision-making, interpersonal skills and awareness of adults with intellectual disabilities. This review of available studies also helps in identifying the curriculum to make them aware on sexuality, risk of sexual abuse, sexual behaviour, expressing and controlling sexual needs in the correct way and place.

**Keywords:** *Sexuality, Intellectual disabilities, Education*

Sexuality is the way people express their sexual desires. People with intellectual disabilities have below normal intelligence. They have difficulty in comprehending simple things like other people who are having normal intelligence. They have less knowledge and awareness on sexual health and behaviour in common. Moreover, people with intellectual disabilities also have need and desire to have sexual relationships because of influence of hormones (Kelly et al., 2009; Konstantareas & Lanky 1997).

“Sexual health” is a state of complete physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires positive way to have sexuality and sexual relationships. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled (WHO, 2006). This means all the people irrespective of their intelligence levels including people with intellectual disabilities have a right to have healthy sexual life and sexual relationships. Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour in conceptual, social and practical daily living adaptive skills. Some adults with intellectual disabilities try to imitate few behaviours without understanding the limitations and consequences (Mihokovic, 2007; Siebelink et al., 2006). They do report to have experiences with friends like kissing, hugging, holding hands (Leutar & Mihokovic, 2007). Other sexual experiences are not allowed by parents as they repeatedly warn what are social taboos and are discouraged (Shandra & Chowdhury, 2012). Some women feel anxious and guilt after sex despite having regular sexual relationships (Fitzgerald & Withers, 2013), and think sex is only for procreation. Some research Studies revealed number of factors contributing to the problems regarding sexuality.

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Having limitations in intelligence and adaptive functioning negatively influence the sexual health of people with intellectual disabilities (Schlock et al.,2012). Having less comprehension and knowledge limits recognition of sexual abuse, identifying safe sexual practices and development of positive attitude towards sexuality (Khemka et al., 2005). Sometimes they experience loneliness, isolation and negative reactions towards sexuality (Stofflen et al.,2013). As sexuality is still a topic of taboo (Bernert &Ogletree,2013), no one speaks about this in front of family members especially with people who are intellectually disabled even though they are adults. Some do not feel comfortable and some people don't give importance to talk about sexuality or giving sex education. As there are more restrictions in the families regarding sexual expressions (Martenson, 2004) that has a great impact on the provision of sexuality education to people with intellectual disabilities to properly guide them regarding proper way of expressing sexual behaviour and healthy sexual relationships (Lafferty et al. 2012).

### **REVIEW LITERATURE**

Hingsburger et al. (2001) studied on the Effects of a Sexuality Education Program on the Knowledge and Attitudes of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities. This study evaluated the effectiveness of a sexuality education program for 42 adults with intellectual disabilities. The program consisted of 12 weekly sessions that covered topics such as body parts, personal safety, and relationships. The results showed significant improvements in the participants' knowledge and attitudes toward sexuality.

McCabe, Cummins, Byers, and Sharek (2010) found that adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) have similar sexual desires and needs as adults without ID, but they often face barriers in accessing sexuality education. The researchers emphasize the importance of providing comprehensive sexuality education to this population to promote healthy sexual behaviours and prevent abuse.

O'Callaghan et al. (2012) studied on Sexual Behavior and Sexuality Education for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities. This study explored the sexual behavior and experiences of 24 adults with intellectual disabilities and identified their sexuality education needs. The authors found that the participants had limited knowledge of sexual health and relationships and that they would benefit from a comprehensive sexuality education program that addresses their specific needs and concerns.

O'Hara, Lutz, and Kahn (2014) found that many adults with ID lack knowledge about sexual health and relationships. They suggest that sexuality education should be individualized, age-appropriate, and inclusive of various topics such as puberty, relationships, consent, and contraception.

Taleporos and McCabe (2014) explored the experiences of adults with ID regarding sexuality education. The participants reported positive experiences with sexuality education programs that were delivered in a respectful and inclusive manner. However, some participants also reported negative experiences such as feeling uncomfortable or not taken seriously.

Eastgate, G., and Van Driel, M.L (2015) had done a study titled "Sexuality Education for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities": A Review of Literature and Implications for Practice. The overall study of the literature provides insights into the effective approaches and challenges faced by educators. Sexuality education for adults with intellectual disabilities is an important topic that has gained increased attention in recent years.

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McConkey and Clifford (2016) studied on Sexuality Education for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities: A Systematic Review. This study reviewed 24 studies on sexuality education for adults with intellectual disabilities and identified key themes and best practices. The authors found that sexuality education should be tailored to the individual needs and abilities, involve parents and caregivers, and address a range of topics including puberty, relationships, and consent.

Stenhøj and Madsen (2017) studied on Sexual Knowledge and Attitudes among Adults with Intellectual Disabilities. This study surveyed 171 adults with intellectual disabilities about their sexual knowledge and attitudes. The results showed that the participants had limited knowledge of sexual health and relationships and that they were interested in receiving sexuality education.

Brown, O'Connell, Rondinelli, and Salsich (2018), studied whether social skills training can be an effective approach to sexuality education for adults with ID. The researchers found that participants who received social skills training showed improvements in knowledge about sexual health and relationships, as well as in their ability to communicate their feelings and boundaries.

Grayson et al. (2019) studied adults with ID reported that they wanted more information about relationships and sexual health. The participants also expressed a desire for more opportunities to practice their social skills in real-life situations.

Stenfert Kroese et al. (2020) highlighted the need for inclusive and accessible sexuality education for adults with ID. The authors recommend using a variety of teaching methods such as visual aids, role-playing, and group discussions to accommodate different learning styles. They also emphasize the importance of involving family members and support staff in the education process.

Willner, P and Jones, J (2020) had studied Sexuality Education for adults with intellectual disabilities." A systematic Review". This examined the effectiveness of sexuality education programmes for adults with intellectual disabilities. The authors found that these programmes can improve knowledge; attitudes and skills related to sexuality and can reduce the risk of sexual abuse.

Delphi, A (2020) Studied on Developing a Sexuality Education Program for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities. This study found that such a program should cover topics such as sexual anatomy, consent, and relationships, and should be adapted to the individual needs and abilities of the learners.

Overall, these studies and resources highlight the need for comprehensive sexuality education programs for adults with intellectual disabilities. Such programs should be adapted to the individual needs and abilities of the learners, and should cover a wide range of topics related to sexuality. Sexuality education for adults with intellectual disabilities is an essential aspect of their overall development and well-being. It helps them understand their bodies, emotions, and relationships, and enables them to make informed decisions about their sexual health. However, there are limited studies on this topic, and the ones that exist often focus on specific aspects of sexuality education or particular populations.

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These studies highlight the importance of sexuality education for adults with intellectual disabilities and the need for tailored and comprehensive programs that address their specific needs and concerns.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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