

Online screening of people in the Criminal Justice System for Learning Difficulties and Disabilities- what are the benefits?

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The prevalence of people with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD) in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) has been highlighted over the last decade. Various publications including *Unlocking Potential-A review of education in prison*¹ and *The Bradley Report*² discussed the difficulties of knowing the exact numbers of people with LDD in custody, with even less information regarding those on community sentences. The 'Coates Review' and the 'White Paper' cited that 1 in 3 people who are in contact with CJS have an LDD. These documents gave a greater emphasis on action not only for identification of offenders who have LDD, but also for those working with offenders having the skills to support at all stages within the CJS.

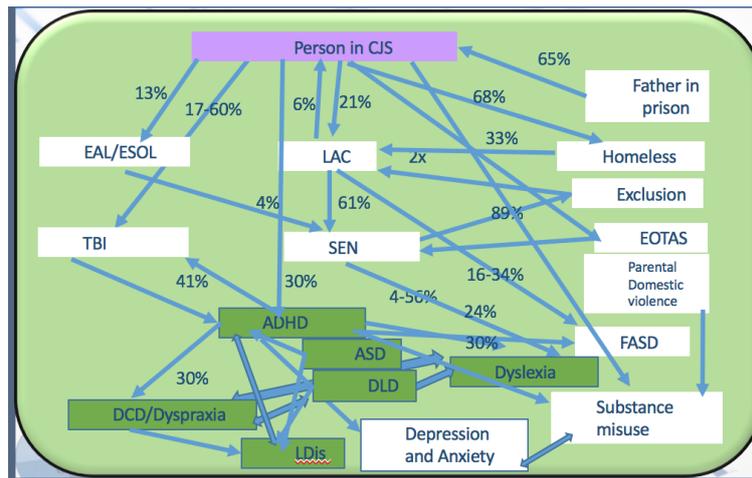
So why do people in the CJS get missed, mislabelled or misdiagnosed?

Some people may enter the CJS with a diagnosis for one LDD, but the reality is that LDD's overlap, therefore challenges in other areas are missed. There are also many who have been missed as their pathway can be a 'messy' one, therefore not having their needs recognised or supported:

- **Been a Looked After Child or Young Person (LACYF).** They may have moved from school to school making a referral and follow-up harder to do despite evidence of high levels of learning difficulties;
- **Excluded from school.** There is a high level of undiagnosed LDD in this group, but there remains no mandatory screening for LDD at present;
- **Left school early or not attended school regularly** and not been in a 'system' at all;
- **Not recognised as needing to be diagnosed**, e.g. come from social settings where their parents had similar patterns of difficulties but were never diagnosed. As a result, the parents don't see that the challenges in their child as anything to be concerned about;
- **Come from another country** where LDD is less well recognised;
- **Homeless** and not have a G.P to make a referral;
- **Other reasons for symptoms not considered.** There is increasing interest in the association between Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and ADHD. It can be difficult (especially if the question isn't asked) to know whether attention problems are due to ADHD or to a head injury or potentially a combination of the two.

¹ Coates, S (2016)

² The Rt Hon Lord Bradley. (2009). Lord Bradley's Review of People with Mental Health Problems or Learning Disabilities in the Criminal Justice System. London: Department of Health.



The negative impact of ignoring LDDs

The negative impact of having an LDD may mean that inside the prison gates, people may not understand instructions given which could lead to frustration and negative/violent behaviours. Through the gate, that some offenders may not be able to use public transport to get to meetings or community payback. They may miss appointments due to not being able to plan. They may react badly to a new situation or they may not fully understand what they must do to adhere to their community order. If those working within the CJS knew that the person had these barriers, practical adjustments and strategies could be put in place to support the offender achieving their outcomes.

The need for whole person-centred screening and guidance for those working with offenders:

The systems in place may preclude appropriate screening or assessments being made:

- **Paper-based systems** may not be accessible for those who cannot read the questions, e.g. with low levels of literacy or for the 10% of people where English as a second language³ (but there may not be a means of assessing their needs in their home language resulting in limited or little information about their prior educational experiences).
- **Questions relating to the 'other' factors** may not be asked concurrently so conclusions may be biased by the data collected.
- **A lack of confidence and training by the non-specialist LDD staff** to have a conversation with the offender if identified as having an LDD. There can also be a lack of knowledge to know what to do and how to provide support for the offender or make reasonable, practical adjustments
- **A lack of tools** in place to assist may prevent the process of screening happening. Or the tools may take too much time or be too confusing to administer. Therefore, missing key information on the rehabilitation barriers the offender may have.
- **Lack of pathways for onward referral**- there may not be a system in place to know what to do if someone is identified with ADHD or Dyspraxia traits or how to make reasonable adjustments.

³ 13% Prison Population HMP data (2006)

The benefits of screening offenders- using technology to help

The reality is that even though around 1 in 3 offenders may have an LDD there is a need to understand all barriers and strengths to support their rehabilitation and move towards developing their skills and gaining meaningful employment.

This requires a whole person approach- therefore screening in all areas so as not to miss key information about the person that is needed to support Keyworker conversations, to prepare reports, to plan their intervention or understand why they are not adhering to, for example, Prison or Probation rules.

One tool that is currently used with offenders in custody and through the gate across the UK is the Do-IT Profiler which provides:

- a whole person approach to identifying the strengths and challenges for the offender through a modular based system completed online.
- Quick, consistent screening for LDD traits and provides assessment tools and resources relating to literacy, numeracy, wellbeing and training for work skills.
- The integration and analysis of the data through the management information platform which provides instant person-centred feedback for the individual, as well as guidance for staff and reports.



The use of such a system could benefit offenders by providing:

1. Those working with offenders training and guidance on how to recognise someone has a LDD and the means to make practical adjustments to help that person whilst in custody, through the gate and on community orders.
2. A system that is accessible for all, both staff⁴ and offenders, e.g. built in coloured overlays and voiced questions and answers, written material available in different formats, and easy read materials as options.

⁴ 1 in 8 of employees have an LDD, therefore accessibility for staff needs to be considered also.

3. Consistent, systematic and time efficient approaches using evidence- based tools that screen and capture information on the strengths and barriers of the offender, therefore providing more information to support the offender in achieving their outcomes.

For more information about Do-IT Profiler, please visit www.doitprofiler.com or contact info@doitprofiler.com