

Sensory impairment and intellectual disability

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- Sensory impairment is much more common in people with intellectual disability compared with the general population. However, sensory impairment in this population remains largely underrated and under diagnosed.
- Sensory impairment is more common in people with more severe types of intellectual disability, older age-groups, ethnic minorities and certain genetic and non-genetic syndromes.
- Sensory impairment in people with intellectual disability can present as challenging behaviour and therefore a carer may think that a service user has been non-cooperative.
- Sensory impairment is one of the differential diagnoses of dementia, anxiety disorders, gradual loss of skills and depression in people with intellectual disability.
- The prevalence of autism and autistic symptoms is higher in people with a sensory impairment compared with those who do not have sensory impairment.
- Assessment is multi-disciplinary and starts with a thorough history and physical examination. Input from a speech and language therapist is invaluable. If preliminary investigation shows that a sensory impairment might be present, a referral to an audiology or ophthalmology clinic is necessary.
- Management should be intensive and multi-component, which takes into account other co-morbid psychopathology such as autism. It is essential that charity organisations are consulted for environmental adaptation and training of staff and carers.

Reflection questions

(1.10) Think about how your professional experiences compare with what you have learned regarding the prevalence, classification and degrees of visual and hearing impairment.

(2.8) Think about how your professional experiences compare with what you have learned regarding the factors influencing the prevalence of sensory impairment. Especially think about any cases of genetic syndromes you have had recently. Did they have any comorbid sensory impairment?

(3.5) Think about how your professional experiences compare with what you have learned regarding psychological development of people with Deafness, blindness and Deafblindness.

(4.19) Think about your professional experiences of making assessment and management plans for your patients who had a co-morbid sensory impairment. How have they compared with what you have learned regarding the assessment and management of sensory impairment in adults with intellectual disability?

Figures and tables

[Table 1: Different degrees of intellectual disability based on IQ score](#)

[Table 2: Degrees of hearing loss based on audiography](#)

[Table 3: Aetiology of congenital Deafness](#)

[Table 4: Assessment of visual impairment](#)

[Table 5: Assessment of hearing impairment](#)

[Table 6: examples of different management strategies for people with sensory impairment and autistic spectrum disorders](#)

[Table 7: charity organisations for people with sensory impairment](#)

[Figure 1: Audiogram of familiar sounds](#)

[Figure 2: Audiograms of different types of hearing loss](#)

[Figure 3/4: Waardenburg syndrome](#)

[Figure 5: Components of a hearing aid](#)

[Figure 6: Deafblind manual alphabet](#)

[Box 1. Examples of the impact of sensory impairment on psychological development](#)

[Box 2: points to remember when taking history in sensory impairment](#)

[Box 3: Distinct signs in some genetic syndromes](#)

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