
Risks and Benefits of Internet Use by People with Neurodevelopmental Disorders

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Abstract

Electronic social media facilitate the development of relationships, which could lead to greater social inclusion for people with neurodevelopmental disorders [i.e. intellectual disability (ID) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD)]. While there is a dearth of research on Internet use by people with ID or ASD, families, educators and support workers have voiced concerns about online safety.

Our study attempts to produce an overview of experiences with Internet from young adults with a diagnosis of ID or ASD. Sample: Preliminary results are available on eight subjects: five with ID (3 males, 2 females), and three with ASD (2 males, 3 females) with a mean age of 25 years. Methodology: A sociodemographic and Internet use questionnaire was administered with the help of the participants' support worker, followed by an in-depth interview with one of the researchers.

All participants used Internet for consuming content (e.g. watching videos, listening to music, checking sports results, pornography, shopping or browsing), or communicating (e.g. Facebook, e-mail, chatting, dating sites). Three males played games online, and only the participants with ASD (without ID) created content (e.g. on Facebook or a blog). All interviewees with an ID and 2 of 3 with ASD had distressing experiences such as: being insulted online, having false rumors spread, receiving threats or being targets of sexual solicitation. Users with ID have had to rely on a friend, parent or social worker to avoid or repair episodes of cybervictimization.

Access to Internet has opened a wide window of opportunity for people with ID to participate in a virtual community. Nevertheless, education and support are needed to ensure safe and positive Internet use by the population with an intellectual disability.

Session: Online social participation of young people with intellectual disabilities with Martin Molin and Carmit-Noa Shpigelman

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