

Vulnerable people at risk of becoming victim or perpetrator in online crime

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People with learning (intellectual) disabilities have historically been marginalised from mainstream society, and have had limited choice and control over their lives. While movements to achieve greater equality have had success, the rapid advancement of modern technology risks creating a new form of digital exclusion. For people with learning disabilities there may be a delicate balance between becoming a victim or perpetrator of crime while online. There are potential challenges that health professionals have to overcome when promoting safe and inclusive internet access.

People with a [learning disability](#) walk a thin line between becoming a victim or perpetrator of online crime, according to authors writing in the journal Learning Disability Practice.

Social networking offers many benefits for people in this vulnerable group, such as social acceptance and new opportunities for communication, but it can also leave them exposed to crime through lack of understanding.

'While developing internet safety groups for adults with learning disabilities, both authors of this article found that there can be a fine line between clients who are vulnerable online and those who offend online. This difference is mainly due to a lack of understanding about laws governing internet access,' the authors write.

The article includes case studies of one client who became a victim of

online crime and another who became a perpetrator.

Nurses working with people with learning disabilities must, therefore, be trained in internet safety and 'digital professionalism' to help protect their clients, the authors argue.

Learning disability nurses should also maintain professional boundaries between themselves and clients they may have befriended on [social networking sites](#) in a bid to monitor their online activities.

The [authors](#) state that: 'Internet access should be safe and inclusive, and supported through individual assessments, care planning, and the education and monitoring of service users.'

They say that if staff lack 'digital competence and confidence' multidisciplinary teamwork is valuable.

To this end, organisations need policies in place to train their staff on [internet safety](#) so that clients can benefit from online access.

'Meanwhile, further research into effective interventions and outcome measures is required to ensure that [internet access](#) by adults with learning disabilities becomes safe.'

More information: Batey G, Waine H (2015) "Safe internet access for service users." *Learning Disability Practice*. 18, 3, 16-20.

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