Wired for Trouble? Special Issues and Considerations When Assessing & Treating Child Pornography Offenders with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Thomas Brewer, Psy.D.
Kevin McGovern, Ph.D.

There has been a significant increase in the number of individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who have accessed Internet child pornography, and this subgroup seems to be overrepresented in the population of men convicted for child pornography offenses. These special needs, non-contact, pornography offenders present the clinician with a number of complicated assessment and treatment challenges. The primary purpose of this presentation is to address the unique psychological characteristics of this population, while reviewing specialized assessment and treatment strategies useful in more efficacious interventions. Many ASD individuals appear to gravitate to compulsive internet pornography use and subsequent aberrant pornography use. The etiology of this involves a confluence of social isolation and dissatisfying interpersonal relationships, delayed social maturation, and irrational cognitive beliefs and related distortions. In many situations, these individuals do not appear to recognize the seriousness of their offenses due to their limited social awareness and irrational views of their environment. Often, when presenting for treatment, these men appear to be deceptive, simply because of their deficits in communication skills and lack of understanding and perspective-taking. Traditional treatment directed on sexual deviancy and the erosion of denial/personal responsibility may be misdirected and not particularly helpful with these individuals. More relevant treatment targets for these men often include assistance becoming comfortable with sexual development, increased social adaptation, and understanding laws and societal norms. The specialized assessment and treatment techniques utilized with the ASD population of child pornography offenders will be discussed and then illustrated through clinical case presentations.

Goals of the Workshop:
1. Participants will learn the specific cognitive and behavioral manifestations of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ADS) and understand how these contribute to the etiology of child pornography viewing in this population.
2. Participants will be able to understand and identify evaluation techniques for psychological and risk assessments used for this unique population of offender.
3. Participants will be able to integrate intervention techniques that are consistent with the needs and developmental levels of these clients.