



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2009

I3 Asperger's Syndrome in a Forensic Context

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After this presentation, attendees will understand the criteria and common symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome. They will also learn to recognize how some of the social and other difficulties common to this syndrome can contribute to activities that manifest as criminal acts. Attendees will learn how these actions can be evaluated in the context of Asperger's Syndrome, with an emphasis on understanding issues of fitness and criminal responsibility.

Asperger's Syndrome is an important diagnostic phenomenon which should be considered more frequently and is in need of much more vigorous research for the future. This presentation will impact the forensic community by contributing to the currently meager literature on the legal implications of Asperger's Syndrome on criminal cases; this information is important both for mental health personnel and all members of the court process.

Asperger's Syndrome is a debilitating neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by impairments in socialization and the presence of repetitive behaviors and focused interests. In particular, persons with Asperger's have difficulty forming and navigating social relationships, and are deficient in their ability to appreciate others' viewpoints. A person with Asperger's that is being tried for a criminal act presents special challenges for the court, as these particular deficits must be taken into account. This discussion will review the current understanding of Asperger's Syndrome and explore its history, diagnosis, treatment options, as well as offer recommendations regarding assessment and management of those with Asperger's Syndrome within the court, jail, and prison systems. Epidemiological information on rates of violence and rates of institutionalization will be discussed. In addition, the presentation will describe the interesting interface of this disorder of socialization and the legal system, with a focus on criminal responsibility and issues of fitness. Conclusions are drawn from specific examples, with a particular emphasis on determining when it is reasonable to consider criminal acts to have been committed in the context of the deficits of Asperger's Syndrome, and when there is no relationship.

Asperger's, PDD, Psychiatry