

## **Challenging the discourse of 'Challenging behaviour'**

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'Challenging behaviour', as defined by Emerson in 1995, is generally used to describe particular actions of people with learning disabilities. The term was coined to describe actions that services find challenging to respond to. Used in practice, however, the term often individualises the behaviour, removing the context in which it occurs, and referring to challenging behaviour as something a person 'displays' (Wilcox et al, 2011).

Haydon-Laurelut (2015) highlights this individualisation by describing his conversation with 'Amy', after she used the word "appropriate" when discussing her actions:

Mark: "So (manager) wants you to be more appropriate?"

Amy: "Yes"

Mark: "Amy, what words come to mind when you think about appropriate?"

Amy: "Sensible" Mark: "What word comes to mind when you think about the word sensible"

Amy: "Normal"

NICE guidance (2015) acknowledges context in terms of environments, including:

'...those [environments] with limited opportunities for social interaction and meaningful occupation, lack of choice and sensory input or excessive noise. It also includes care environments that are crowded, unresponsive or unpredictable, those characterised by neglect and abuse, and those where physical health needs and pain go unrecognised or are not managed'

Context and relational aspects can therefore combine and accumulate, to bring about 'challenging behaviour'. The extent to which a person has resilience to such contexts is related to relationships and their associated resources, and thinking about challenging behaviour in this way opposes a culture that valorises independence and autonomy over connection and relationality.

In this presentation, we offer a sociological and gendered analysis of the use of the term 'challenging behaviour', asking why the term is used in particular with learning disabled people, and analysing the available knowledge base. We also present findings from a recent study where staff who work with men with learning disabilities who self-harm were interviewed about their experiences.