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Book review: 'Caught in the Web of the Criminal Justice System: Autism, Developmental Disabilities and Sex Offenses' edited by Lawrence Dubin and Emily Horowitz

Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 352 pages. £40

This text, *'Caught in the Web of the Criminal Justice System: Autism, Developmental Disabilities and Sex Offenses'* represents a crucial exploration into the subject of working with offenders convicted of child pornography or sexual abuse charges. It differentiates itself by considering the perspectives of sexual offenders with a diagnosis of autism and other developmental disabilities and offers a fresh perspective upon current sex offending legislation in the USA; by offering chapters written from the perspectives of individuals charged with a sexual offence and an accompanying diagnosis of autism; as well as a consideration of the personal and economic impact this type of conviction can have on family members.

The initial chapter by Lawrence Dubin, a lawyer and legal professor, offers a personal account of his son Nick (a pseudonym) who was arrested by the FBI for possession and distribution of child pornography. Dubin provides his perspectives as both a father and lawyer through the court system and their stories are revisited throughout the book in other chapters.

Mesibov and Sreckovic in the second chapter explore how neurological differences within individuals on the autism spectrum may impact upon their social and emotional understanding. The authors highlight that delays in emotional processing and more restricted social networking opportunities can mean that individuals with autism are more vulnerable to learning about their sexual identities through internet pornography, which can increase the chances of coming into contact with illegal pornographic material.

In Chapter Three, Mogill provides a case study of his legal representation of Nick Dubin. Mogill discusses the challenges he, Nick and his family faced in negotiating the legal system and seeking recognition of Dubin's autism as having crucial bearing upon his sentence. Surgrue in the fourth chapter, drawing upon his experience in psychiatry, examines the diagnostic framework for autism, with a specific focus upon how particular issues with social awareness and communication can lead individuals on the autism spectrum to become involved in illegal pornographic material.

In Chapter Five, Horowitz explores the development of the Sex Offenders Register in the United State in the last 20 years. Horowitz asserts that a moral panic regarding the identification of sexual offenders has led to the proliferation of Federal and Community notification laws governing the registration of sexual offender in the US that has expanded the definition of sex offenders; without paying appropriate attention to the actual risk posed by some of these individuals to members of the public.

Allenbaugh in Chapter Six suggests that a fear about internet child pornography has led to increasingly stringent judicial sentencing guidelines for individuals convicted of possession of indecent child images. A key proclamation in this chapter, is a myth that accessing child pornography online leads to an increased risk of future physical contact offences. Allenbaugh asserts that a

perception amongst some judges that non-contact sexual offences are a gateway activity, leading to contact sexual offences. This has led to a lengthening of all sentences and increased conviction rates for child pornography offences in the US.

The seventh chapter focuses upon the 'Butner Redux study' undertaken by Bourke and Hernandez who argue that individual's convicted of a child sexual offence remain a prominent threat to children upon their release from prison. Bourke and Hernandez (2009) identified within their therapeutic work with sex offenders that a significant number of individuals had perpetrated other sexual offences that they were not charged with. The chapter authors Wollert and Skelton suggest that the 'Butner Redux study' has had an undue influence on judicial sentencing guidelines for sexual offenders without accurately reflecting the real risk of recidivism within this demographic.

In Chapter Ten, Nick Dubin offers a first-hand account of his own experiences as a young adult with a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome and being a subject on the sex offenders register. In presenting the lived experiences of an individual with autism convicted of a sexual offence Dubin demonstrates the devastating consequences of registration had upon him and his family.

A limitation of this volume is that contributors are writing from an entirely American perspective and the books strength could be enhanced by the inclusion of a more internationalist perspective. However, the book has value for probation staff and other professionals working with clients on the autism spectrum, by considering that specific service users with autism convicted of a sexual offence may require alternative interventions and support programmes to those typically offered to service users without additional needs. In doing so the book highlights the diverse backgrounds of individuals identified as committing a sexual offence and supports the philosophy that treating everyone the same does not equate to true equality.

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Reference:

Bourke, M.L. and Hernandez, A.E. (2009) "The 'Butner Study' Redux: A report of the incidence of hands-on-victimization by child pornography offenders." *Journal of family violence* 24, 183-191.