

**Hemmings, C.P., O'Hara, J., McCarthy, J., Holt, G., Eoster, F., Costello, H., Hammond, R., Xenitidis, K., & Bouras, N. (2009). Comparison of adults with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems admitted to specialist and generic inpatient units. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 37, 123-128.**

Though government policies in several countries stipulate that individuals with intellectual disabilities should access mainstream mental health services, it is arguable that such services may not adequately meet their complex needs. Therefore, specialized psychiatric services may be necessary as well. This study is the most recent to compare the profiles of patients with intellectual disabilities (ID) and mental health needs receiving care from specialist and mainstream psychiatric hospital units. The sociodemographic and clinical characteristics of patients admitted to generic ( $n=62$ ), specialized ( $n=35$ ) or a combination of both types of units ( $n=57$ ) in South London hospitals over 5 ½ years were compared.

### ***Key Findings***

- Only a small percentage of patients utilized the specialist unit exclusively (22.7%); most (77.3%) used either the generic units or a combination of both types
- Fourteen of the 57 patients using both services were transferred directly from generic to specialized units
- No differences were found among client groups with respect to gender, age, ethnicity, level of ID or forensic status. White males with mild ID constituted the majority of admissions to all units.
- Length of stay was longest for patients in specialist units
- Specialized patients were more likely to have lived with family prior to admission
- For all admissions, the most common diagnosis was schizophrenia spectrum disorder, and affective disorders were most common in the generic group.

Individuals with intellectual disabilities appear to utilize both mainstream and specialized services. The longer length of stay for patients in specialized units replicates the findings of other studies and suggests that this group presents with highly complex needs that require more time to resolve. In light of the number of patients transferred from generic to specialist units, specialized units may play an important role in complementing generic mental health services and providing training to mainstream staff.

It is important to increase our understanding of the characteristics of individuals with intellectual disabilities utilizing specialized and generic mental health services, in order to determine which kinds of clients benefit most from each type of service. Future research should examine predictors of admission to each type of unit, explore treatment outcomes, and incorporate the views of hospital staff and service users.