Associations between mental health problems and challenging behavior in adults with intellectual disabilities: A test of the behavioral equivalents hypothesis

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Title

Associations between mental health problems and challenging behavior in adults with intellectual disabilities: A test of the behavioral equivalents hypothesis.

Abstract

Introduction

Current research findings in the field of intellectual disabilities (ID) regarding the relationship between mental health problems and challenging behavior are inconclusive and/or contradictory. The aim of this study was to further investigate the putative association between these two, highly prevalent phenomena, in people with ID and specifically to explore the hypothesis that challenging behaviors may be behavioral equivalents of mental health problems.

Methods

A sample of 160 adults accessing secondary care ID health services were assessed using five validated measures. These included ratings of severity of disability, mental health problems, Autism behaviors, physical health problems, and four different aspects of challenging behavior. In conjunction with demographic information, four multiple regression analyses were undertaken to examine the interaction between mental health problems (moderated by severity of disability) and ratings of overall challenging behavior, aggression, self-injurious behavior, and stereotypy. In each case; age, gender, Autism, and physical health problems were included as covariates.
Results

There was a statistically significant association between mental health problems and ratings of overall challenging behavior, as well as the moderating effect of severity of disability. Importantly, the positive association between mental health problems and challenging behavior was only significant at more severe levels of disability.

Conclusions

These findings support the 'behavioral equivalents' hypothesis for mental health problems and challenging behaviors. However, further longitudinal research is required before this hypothesis can be considered unequivocally supported.

Keywords

Mental health, challenging behavior, intellectual disabilities, behavioral equivalents, adults, psychopathology, ASD
Background

The prevalence of both challenging behaviors and mental health problems is high in people with intellectual disabilities (ID; Cooper, Smiley, Morrison, Williamson, & Allan, 2007; Hemmings, Deb, Chaplin, Hardy, & Mukherjee, 2013). These problems often co-exist (Pruijssers, van Meijel, Maaskant, Nijssen, & van Achterberg, 2014) and adversely affect the quality of life of individuals (Totsika, Felce, Kerr, & Hastings, 2010), families, and carers (Tsiouris, Kim, Brown, & Cohen, 2011). Despite the significance of the putative association between mental health problems and challenging behavior, our understanding of the relationship between them remains incomplete (Melville, Johnson, Smiley, Simpson, Purves, et al., 2016). As a result, a number of hypotheses regarding their relationship have been suggested. Emerson (2001), for example, proposes that challenging behaviors may be: behavioral equivalents (i.e. atypical presentations) of mental health problems; secondary features of mental health problems; or conversely, that mental health problems may serve to maintain pre-existing challenging behaviors.

Potential explanations for this uncertainty include: fundamental differences in diagnostic constructs for people with ID (Bertelli, Rossi, Scuticchio, & Bianco, 2015; Melville, Johnson, Smiley, Simpson, Purves, et al., 2016); inconsistent definitions of challenging behavior (Hemmings et al., 2013); overlap between the two problems (Holden & Gitlesen, 2009), and practical difficulties in utilising a categorical diagnostic system in both clinical practice and research (Thakker, Bamidele, Ali, & Hassiotis, 2012). Against this challenging backdrop, the research can, at best, be interpreted in different ways (Bernstein, Visconti, Csorba, Radvanyi, & Rojahn, 2015).
and, at worst, as contradictory (Hemmings, Deb, Chaplin, Hardy, & Mukherjee, 2013; McCarthy et al., 2010).

In 2000, Moss's United Kingdom (UK) cross-sectional study of individuals with ID established that the severity of challenging behavior increased with the number of mental health problems, but that challenging behavior could not be used to make psychiatric diagnoses. Later, Tsiouris, Mann, Patti, and Sturmey (2003) divided adults with a wide range of severities of ID into those with and those without depression. They deduced that the two groups differed significantly in terms of depressive symptoms, but not challenging behavior and hence concluded that mental health and challenging behavior were independent constructs. This finding was challenged by Crocker, Mercier, Allaire, and Roy (2007) who found that low levels of challenging behavior were strongly associated low levels of mental health problems and vice versa. Similarly, Hurley (2008) found that, whilst challenging behavior did not distinguish between different psychiatric diagnoses, it was a key feature of depression in people with ID. Soon after, Felce, Kerr, and Hastings's (2009) study also challenged that of Tsiouris et al. (2003), finding a significant relationship between mental health problems and challenging behavior which was more pronounced at lower levels of adaptive behavior. More fundamentally, Holden and Gitlesen (2009) found significant overlap between carers' identification of challenging behavior and psychiatric symptoms. Effectively questioning the reliability of reporting, they drew no definitive conclusions, instead outlining a number of potential hypotheses similar to those that had been previously described by Emerson (2001). Next, McCarthy et al., (2010), found that individuals with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and ID were significantly more likely to exhibit challenging behavior than those with ID alone. They also concluded that a diagnosis of severe ID was
associated with challenging behavior. In contrast to some earlier studies, McCarthy et al., (2010) found mental health problems were not associated with challenging behavior, concluding they were relatively independent constructs. Also in 2010, Sturmey, Laud, Cooper, Matson, and Fodstad concluded that challenging behaviors should not be viewed as depressive equivalents. However, using a similar methodology, Hayes, McGuire, O’Neill, Oliver, and Morrison (2011) established that low mood was associated with higher frequency and severity of challenging behavior, tentatively concluding that challenging behavior may be indicative of low mood in some institutionalized individuals with ID. Despite considering a range of mental health problems, Sappok et al. (2014) found no association with challenging behavior, instead identifying the strongest predictors to be the presence of ASD, younger age and lower levels of emotional development. Finally, Melville, Johnson, Smiley, Simpson, Purves, et al. (2016) deduced that challenging behavior could not be considered symptomatic of depression as the two issues fell into separate factors derived from the Psychiatric Present State-Learning Disabilities Examination Scale.

Over the last two decades therefore, either by considering individual aspects of challenging behavior, or challenging behavior as a single entity, mental health problems and challenging behavior have been shown to be: both independent and overlapping constructs; that challenging behaviors may be, atypical presentations (behavioral equivalents) and secondary symptoms of mental health problems; and that mental health problems exacerbate or cause challenging behavior. In this way, proponents of each of Emerson’s (2001) seminal hypotheses regarding the association between challenging behavior and mental health problems can all cite at least some supporting evidence (Thakker et al., 2012).
In addition to the fundamental conceptual challenges described earlier, and these contradictory findings, research has also been hampered by methodological limitations. These include small sample sizes (Melville, Johnson, Smiley, Simpson, Purves, et al., 2016), cross-sectional designs (Totsika et al., 2010) and tautological issues (e.g. eliciting the presentation of mental health problems in people with ID by analysing the behaviors of a group of individuals selected on the basis of a diagnosed mental health condition [Hayes et al., 2011]). Latterly, considerable doubt has also been cast on the statistical approaches employed, including failure to control for potential confounding variables, the use of tests and procedures unsuited to categorical data, and a failure to validate (confirm) exploratory factor analyses (Melville, Johnson, Smiley, Simpson, McConnachie, et al., 2016; Melville, Johnson, Smiley, Simpson, Purves, et al., 2016). Addressing confounding variables is important since several of these, including age, gender, degree of ID, ASD, physical health problems, and stressful life events (according to Hemmings et al., 2013) also have their own supporting evidence for associations with challenging behavior. Finally, it is important to note that most of these studies explore associations rather than directly testing the behavioral equivalents hypotheses.

In light of these uncertainties, it may only be legitimate to claim that the relationship between challenging behavior and mental health problems in people with ID is complex, multi-faceted, and potentially bi-directional (Hemmings et al., 2013; Pruijssers et al., 2014; Sappok et al., 2014; Thakker et al., 2012). Our intention was therefore to take account of the methodological concerns raised whilst adding to the inconclusive evidence base surrounding the associations between challenging behavior and mental health problems in people with ID. Consequently, after controlling for other variables identified from the literature, we sought to test the
hypothesis that challenging behaviors were behavioral equivalents of mental health problems. To do this, we aimed to establish whether there was a statistically significant association between mental health problems and four different aspects of challenging behavior by replicating part of the approach taken by Felce, Kerr and Hastings (2009) as this also considered whether the challenging behavior - mental health relationship was moderated by level of ID.

Method

Participants

One hundred and sixty adults accessing secondary care specialist ID health services in the UK were rated using a range of validated measures. Eighty eight (55.0%) of these individuals were male and their mean age was 38.6 years (range 18-71 years). Treatment setting information was available for 126 cases, of which 32 (25.4%) were currently admitted to specialist ID acute inpatient services. The ethnicity of 154 individuals was recorded, 145 (94.2%) of whom were White British. Accommodation status was available for 89 (72.4%) of the 123 individuals residing in community (rather than inpatient settings). Of these, 16 (18.0%) were living independently in mainstream housing whilst 24 (27.0%) were living with family or friends. A further 46 (51.7%) were living in some form of supported accommodation (i.e. placements with varying levels of paid staff input). By virtue of their acceptance into ID services, clinicians deemed all individuals to have ID however, a formal primary or secondary ID diagnosis had also been recorded for 119 (74.4%) individuals. Of these, 50 (42.0%) were for mild ID, 52 (43.7%) moderate, 15 (12.6%) severe and 2 (1.7%) profound. These individuals had been referred into ID health services in the UK were rated using a range of validated measures. Eighty eight (55.0%) of these individuals were male and their mean age was 38.6 years (range 18-71 years). Treatment setting information was available for 126 cases, of which 32 (25.4%) were currently admitted to specialist ID acute inpatient services. The ethnicity of 154 individuals was recorded, 145 (94.2%) of whom were White British. Accommodation status was available for 89 (72.4%) of the 123 individuals residing in community (rather than inpatient settings). Of these, 16 (18.0%) were living independently in mainstream housing whilst 24 (27.0%) were living with family or friends. A further 46 (51.7%) were living in some form of supported accommodation (i.e. placements with varying levels of paid staff input). By virtue of their acceptance into ID services, clinicians deemed all individuals to have ID however, a formal primary or secondary ID diagnosis had also been recorded for 119 (74.4%) individuals. Of these, 50 (42.0%) were for mild ID, 52 (43.7%) moderate, 15 (12.6%) severe and 2 (1.7%) profound. These individuals had been referred into ID health
services for a variety of primary reasons. Of the 696 cases where this information was available, the most frequent referral reasons were: challenging behavior \((n=180)\); mental health problems \((n=110)\); general vulnerability \((n=67)\); ASD \((n=62)\); mobility and posture \((n=55)\); epilepsy \((n=34)\); social emotional functioning issues \((n=30)\); communication problems \((n=26)\); offending behavior \((n=24)\), and support in accessing mainstream primary care services \((n=23)\).

**Measures**

In addition to the collection of routine demographic and other relevant clinical information (see above), individuals were rated with five assessment tools, each focusing on a domain (emboldened below) that had been identified as clinically important by a large, multidisciplinary group of specialist ID professionals. Initially, a list of candidate measures was identified via a brief literature review before selection criteria were applied to provide a final choice. Given that (with the exception of the clinician-rated mental health measure described below) informants would not receive training, the primary criteria were brevity and simplicity; however, psychometric quality and cost were also considered. The final selection was:

- The Mental Health and Wellbeing (MHW) subscale of the Learning Disability Needs Assessment Tool (LDNAT; Painter, Trevithick, Hastings, Ingham, & Roy, 2016) which was used as a clinician-rated measure of the overall severity of mental health problems. The LDNAT is a brief (23 item) holistic needs assessment developed from the Health of the Nation Outcomes Scales (HoNOS; Wing, Curtis, & Beevor, 1996). The tool was validated using data from 1,692 adults with a broad range of presenting problems and levels of ID and
demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80) and excellent test-retest reliability (ICC =0.91). The Mental Health and Wellbeing subscale was derived through principal component analysis and consists of 6 of these 0-4 scales including hallucinations/delusions, depressed mood, relationships, and strong unreasonable beliefs, which are summed to give a total score out of 24. For this sample, the internal consistency of the MHW subscale was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha 0.72).

- The Waisman Activities of Daily Living Scale (WADL; Maenner et al., 2013) which was employed as an assessment of general ability/severity of disability. Raters record whether different activities of daily living can be performed independently (scoring 2), with help (scoring 1), or not at all (scoring 0). The tool includes 17 activities which range from basic skills (e.g. using a cup) to more advanced tasks (e.g. budgeting) and was originally validated on people with a broad range of ID diagnoses. For our sample, the WADL's internal consistency was excellent (Cronbach's alpha = 0.94).

- The Behavior Problems Inventory for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities-Short Form (BPI-S; Mascitelli et al., 2015; Rojahn et al., 2012a, 2012b) was used to rate challenging behaviors. This shortened (30-item) version was developed from the original 52-item version. It captures a range of self-injurious behaviors (e.g. head-hitting), aggressive or destructive behaviors (e.g. verbal aggression) and stereotyped behaviors (e.g. rocking or repetitive body movements). The frequency rating for each scale was used to provide an overall challenging behavior total score and three subscale scores (aggression, self-injurious behavior and stereotypy). For our sample of 160 cases, internal consistency for the total BPI-S was good (Cronbach's alpha = .89), whilst for the aggression, self-
injurious behavior, and stereotypy subscales Cronbach's alphas were: .83, .50, and .76 respectively.

- The Social Communication Questionnaire (SCQ; Rutter, Bailey, & Lord, 2003) rated the severity of ASD symptoms. The SCQ has been validated with all age groups (Brooks & Benson 2013) and has 40 ‘yes/no’ questions covering the primary features of ASD. For example: 'Does he/she have interests that pre-occupy him/her and might seem odd to other people (e.g. traffic lights, drainpipes or timetables)?' As the SCQ responses are dichotomous, analysis of internal consistency was undertaken using the Kuder-Richardson formula (Grove & Cipher, 2017). For our sample internal consistency was good (Kuder-Richardson alpha = 0.85).

- In the absence of a suitable physical health questionnaire, we created a bespoke tool, based on the POMONA study (Haverman et al., 2011) which was a large European study of the health status of people with ID. This comprised 12 yes/no questions (e.g. 'Is the person blind/visually impaired?'), three scaled questions (e.g. 'How good is the person’s health in general?: Very good/ good/ fair/ bad/ very bad/ don’t know'), as well as recordings of height and weight. The first 15 questions were summed to provide an indication of the overall level of physical health and disability. This tool has not yet been fully validated; however, a brief investigation of its internal consistency yielded acceptable results in the larger (n=1692) study (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73) and similar results for this sample (Cronbach's alpha = 0.72).
Procedure

The data analysed in this study were drawn from a larger dataset collected as part of a broader UK project (see Painter et al., 2016). Briefly however, participating National Health Service (NHS) ID healthcare providers sourced the required demographic and clinical data from their routinely recorded patient information systems before submission via a standardized, encrypted dataset to the research team for collation and central analysis.

Between July 2014 and August 2015, three NHS trusts involved in the wider study were also able to consider the nature of the individuals with ID in receipt of their services in more detail. Following delivery of standardized training package in the use of the LDNAT, for each referral to their service, these NHS providers' health professionals rated the individual with ID as part of their routine assessment process. In contrast, these clinicians were then asked by the authors to identify a different person who knew the individual with ID well enough to independently complete the four other measures described above. Typically these informants were General Practitioners, family members or carers. They were subsequently telephoned by the research team and asked to complete the battery of assessment tools. Those that agreed were sent the four questionnaires for completion within two weeks. Once returned to the research team, these ratings were added to the electronic clinical data that had been submitted by the three services for analysis. This naturalistic study of routinely collected clinical data received governance approval for the purposes of NHS service evaluation.
Statistical analysis

All data for the 160 individuals' case records were entered into SPSS version 24. Correlation coefficients were calculated to identify any associations between the variables identified in the literature and participants' mental health and well-being. Data were also checked for multi-collinearity, a lack of autocorrelation and other regression assumptions before a number of moderated multiple linear regression analyses were performed using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS software and method. PROCESS allows independent and dependent variables to be entered as well as multiple co-variates. Importantly, it also allows variables to be entered as moderators so that their interaction with the independent variable can be understood, as well as their direct effect on the dependent variable. In addition to ease of use, after centering the variables, another advantage of the PROCESS macro is its use of bootstrapping (multiple resampling) to estimate confidence intervals for the effect of the moderator at a number of values (Hayes, Montoya, & Rockwood, 2017).

Based on findings from Felce et al. (2009), we examined whether the association between mental health problems and challenging behavior may have been affected (moderated) by severity of ID. This enabled a direct test of the behavioral equivalents hypothesis. The relationship between the LDNAT's MHW subscale scores (modelled as the independent variable) and the total BPI-S score (as the dependent variable) was explored using the total WADL scores as the moderator, whilst also controlling for age, gender, total SCQ score, and total physical health score. To estimate the moderating effect of the WADL the PROCESS bootstrapping functionality was set at 5000 resamples. This provided estimates at the mean as well as 1SD above and below it. The conceptual model for this regression is depicted in Figure 1.
This analysis was subsequently repeated with the total BPI-S score being replaced for each subscale total in turn (i.e., separate models for self-injury, aggression, and stereotypy).

**Results**

From the preliminary exploration of the data, correlational analyses (Table 1) revealed that, of the covariates, only age was significantly associated with the Mental Health and Wellbeing subscale of the LDNAT ($r = -0.31$, $p<0.01$). However, all putative predictor variables were retained in the multiple regression analyses due to their presence and reported clinical significance in the existing research literature. The standard assumptions for linear regressions were met with, for example, multi-collinearity tolerances ranging from 0.53-1.00, variance inflation factors (VIFs) all below 1.90 (c.f. Grove & Cipher, 2017, p335), residuals relatively normally distributed, and Durbin-Watson test results ranging from 1.83-2.44 which confirmed the independence of these residuals (c.f. Field, 2009, p220).

The results of the analysis of total BPI-S scores can be seen in table 2. Here 25.6% of variation in overall challenging behavior was explained by the regression model ($F [7,139] = 6.850; p<0.001$). The MHW subscale (measuring severity of mental health problems) and the total SCQ co-variate (measuring severity of ASD) were significantly positively associated with the total BPI-S score indicating that those with more mental health problems or ASD symptoms were more likely to also
exhibit challenging behavior. The WADL (measuring level of impairment) was
negatively correlated with this overall measure of challenging behavior; however, it is
important to note that higher WADL scores indicate less impairment and thus
individuals with more severe impairment were also more likely to exhibit challenging
behavior. Finally, the interaction term between the MHW subscale and the WADL
was a significant predictor of the BPI-S total score. Further analysis using Hayes’s
(2013) PROCESS software established that the conditional effect of the MHW
subscale on total BPI-S was significant at lower, i.e. 1SD below the mean (b=1.2066,
95% CI [.295, 2.110]) but not at mean (b=.439, 95% CI [-.274, 1.150]) or higher, i.e.
1SD above the mean (b=-.329, 95% CI [-1.396, .73]) WADL scores. Thus, the
association between mental health and challenging behavior was strongest at more
severe levels of ID.

Insert table 2 here

The results of the analysis of BPI-S aggressive/destructive behavior scores
can be seen in table 3. Here 15.3% of variation in aggressive behaviors was
explained by the regression model (F [7,139] = 3.590; p<0.001). In this case, only
the MHW subscale (measuring severity of mental health problems) had a statistically
significant positive association with the BPI-S aggression subscale score. This
suggests that individuals with more severe mental health problems also exhibit
higher levels of aggression.

Insert table 3 here

The results of the analysis of BPI-S self-injurious behavior scores can be seen
in table 4. Here 23.9% of the variation in self-injurious behaviors was explained by
the regression model (F [7,137] = 6.155; p<0.001). Again the MHW subscale
(measuring severity of mental health problems) was significantly positively
associated with the aspect of challenging behavior measured. In contrast, the
interaction between the MHW subscale and the WADL (but not the main effect of the
WADL itself) was negatively correlated with self-injurious behavior. As with the first
analysis, the PROCESS macro for SPSS was used to establish that the conditional
effect of the MHW subscale on the BPI-S self-injurious behavior subscale was only
significant at lower, i.e. 1SD below the mean ($b = .297, 95\% CI [.090, .500]$) but not at
mean ($b = .051, 95\% CI [-.111, .210]$) or higher, i.e. 1SD above the mean ($b = -.196,$
95\% CI [-.438, .040]) WADL scores. Thus the association between mental health
and challenging behavior was strongest at more severe levels of ID.

Insert table 4 here

The results of the final analysis (of BPI-S stereotypy scores) can be seen in
table 5. Here 19.3\% of the variation in stereotyped behaviors was explained by the
regression model ($F[7,138] = 4.703; p<0.001$). The WADL (measuring impairment)
had a significant negative association with this aspect of challenging behavior whilst
the total SCQ co-variable (measuring severity of ASD) was positively associated with
the BPI-S stereotypy subscale score. This indicates that individuals who were more
severely impaired were more likely to exhibit stereotyped behaviors, as were
individuals with more severe ASD.

Insert table 5 here
Discussion

From a brief review of the literature it is clear that research into the interaction between mental health problems and challenging behavior in people with ID has yielded contradictory findings and has often been limited to the identification of main effect associations only, and hence that the relationship remains poorly understood. Consequently, the broad aim of our study was, to investigate the relationship between mental health problems (as measured by the MHW subscale of the LDNAT) and challenging behavior (as measured by different elements of the BPI-S) when moderated by severity of disability (measure by the WADL), meaning that, unlike most previous studies, our analysis approach directly tested the behavioral equivalents hypothesis. In doing so, we also set out to control for age, gender, severity of ASD, and physical health problems. None of our moderated multiple regression models explained more than a quarter of the variation in the aspect of challenging behavior analysed, suggesting that other (unmeasured) variables were also having a significant impact. This is unsurprising, given the highly complex and multi-faceted nature of the functions and topography of challenging behavior and the range of correlates for challenging behavior in previous research (Bowring, Totsika, Hastings, Toogood, & Griffith, 2017; Hemmings et al., 2013; Pruijssers et al., 2014; Sappok et al., 2014).

Our main findings were that clinician-rated mental health problems had a significant positive association with the overall measure of challenging behavior, as well as the aggression and the self-injurious behavior (but not the stereotypy) subscales. In our sample, therefore, people who presented with more severe mental
health problems also exhibited more challenging behaviors. This supports previous
studies by Felce et al. (2009); Hayes et al. (2011); Hurley (2008) and Moss (2000)
but is in contrast to results from McCarthy et al. (2010); Melville, Johnson, Smiley,
Simpson, Purves, et al. (2016); Sappok et al. (2014); Sturmey et al. (2010) and
Tsiouris et al. (2003).

The interaction between mental health problems and level of impairment
(WADL scores) was significant in the analyses of overall challenging behavior and
self-injurious behavior. Further analyses showed that the association between
mental health problems and overall challenging behavior and self-injurious behavior
was only significant at lower levels of ability (i.e., in those with more severe ID).
These results support the 'behavioral equivalents hypothesis' also supported in
analyses by Felce et al. (2009); Hayes et al. (2011) and Hurley (2008) but refuted by
McCarthy et al. (2010); Melville, Johnson, Smiley, Simpson, Purves, et al. (2016);
Sappok et al. (2014); and Sturmey et al. (2010).

We also found the severity of ASD to be independently significantly positively
associated with overall challenging behavior and the stereotypy subscale suggesting
that people with more severe ASD exhibit more stereotyped behaviors and
challenging behavior overall. We also found that these two aspects of challenging
behavior were significantly independently associated with severity of disability.
These associations between ASD and severity of ID with challenging behavior have
also been found in other research (e.g., McCarthy et al., 2010; Sappok et al., 2014).
Finally, we found no statistically significant independent associations between any of
our four ratings of challenging behavior and either age, gender, or physical health
problems despite all having been found to have a relationship with challenging
behavior in other previous research (Hemmings et al., 2013).
Our study addressed a number of the methodological weaknesses (described earlier) raised by Hayes et al. (2011); Melville, Johnson, Smiley, Simpson, McConnachie, et al. (2016); Melville, Johnson, Smiley, Simpson, Purves, et al. (2016); and Totsika et al. (2010). However, despite these strengths, as with most naturalistic studies, our research has a number of limitations which it is important to recognize. For example, although (according to Green's [1991] rules of thumb) the sample size is sufficient for a multiple regression, it remains modest. It also included a higher proportion of more able participants. Additionally the study design (as for all others cited here) is cross-sectional, precluding cause and effect from being definitively concluded. The internal consistency of the BPI-S self-injurious behavior sub-scale was also low, and so the findings focused on self-injury do need to be treated with caution and replicated. Finally, there will inevitably also be variation in data quality arising from the cascade training model used for data collection.

Overall however, we believe our study adds to the existing evidence base regarding the 'behavioral equivalents' hypothesis by specifically incorporating the moderating effect of the severity of disability on mental health problems when analysing their interaction with three different aspects of challenging behavior (aggression, self-injurious behaviors and stereotypy) as well as an overall rating of challenging behavior. The findings also have clinical significance in that they clearly suggest that individuals with more severe ID who exhibit challenging behavior should be carefully screened to eliminate explanations related to treatable mental health problems before undertaking other, more complex/costly assessment and intervention. In addition, where behavioral intervention is undertaken to address challenging behavior, practitioners should monitor for ongoing or emerging mental health problems. Where ongoing and treatment resistant mental health problems are
detected, practitioners should also undertake structured assessment of the interaction between mental health and challenging behavior (e.g., where the presence of hallucinations/delusions may heighten distress and exacerbate displays of aggression directed towards others). This may help to develop a broader case formulation and shape specific interventions that target the exacerbation and maintenance of challenging behavior.

In terms of future research, larger-scale studies are now required which take account of the highlighted weaknesses in previous studies' designs and, in particular, adopt a longitudinal approach to resolve the current ambiguous and contradictory research findings.
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Figure 1: Conceptual diagram of Hayes (2013) moderated multiple regression model
as applied to the current research
Table 1: Correlations between the LDNAT’s Mental Health and Wellbeing subscale and each predictor used in regression analyses

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<th>Total Physical Health Score</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total WADL score</th>
<th>Total SCQ score</th>
<th>Total BPI-S score</th>
<th>Total BPIS-Stereotypy subscale score</th>
<th>Total BPIS-Aggression subscale score</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.512</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.908</td>
<td>0.713</td>
<td>0.211</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.378</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Table 2: Moderated multiple regression model for total BPI-S score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta [95% CIs]</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.142 [-.348, .064]</td>
<td>.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1.312 [-4.333, 6.956]</td>
<td>.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Physical Health score</td>
<td>-.341 [-1.722, 1.039]</td>
<td>.626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SCQ score</td>
<td>.661 [.204, 1.118]</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total WADL score</td>
<td>-.643 [-1.256, -.031]</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDNAT MH and Wellbeing subscale score</td>
<td>2.177 [.563, 3.791]</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (WADL X MHW subscale)</td>
<td>-.095 [-.181, -.010]</td>
<td>.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. $R^2 = .256, F(7, 139) = 6.850; p<0.001$
Table 3: Moderated multiple regression model for BPI-S Aggression subscale score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta [95% CI]</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.038 [-.109, .034]</td>
<td>.299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.755 [-1.204, 2.713]</td>
<td>.448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Physical Health score</td>
<td>.096 [-.383, .575]</td>
<td>.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SCQ score</td>
<td>.135 [-.023, .294]</td>
<td>.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total WADL score</td>
<td>-.101 [-.314, .112]</td>
<td>.349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDNAT MH and Wellbeing subscale score</td>
<td>.633 [.073, 1.193]</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (WADL X MHW subscale)</td>
<td>-.016 [-.046, .014]</td>
<td>.290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. $R^2 = .153$, $F(7, 139) = 3.590$; ($p=0.001$)
Table 4: Moderated multiple regression model for BPI-S self-injurious behavior subscale score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta [95% CIs]</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.029 [-.076, .018]</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.212 [-1.073, 1.498]</td>
<td>.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Physical Health score</td>
<td>.045 [-.266, .357]</td>
<td>.775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SCQ score</td>
<td>.077 [-.027, .180]</td>
<td>.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total WADL score</td>
<td>-.067 [-.205, .072]</td>
<td>.344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDNAT MH and Wellbeing subscale score</td>
<td>.605 [.241, .969]</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (WADL X MHW subscale)</td>
<td>-.031 [-.050, -.011]</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. $R^2 = .239, F(7, 137) = 6.155; (p<0.001)$
Table 5: Moderated multiple regression model for BPI-S stereotypy subscale score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta [95% CIs]</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.081 [-.226, .065]</td>
<td>.275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.295 [-3.660, 4.250]</td>
<td>.883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Physical Health score</td>
<td>-.480 [-1.445, .486]</td>
<td>.328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SCQ score</td>
<td>.445 [.125, .765]</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total WADL score</td>
<td>-.460 [-.891, -.030]</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDNAT MH and Wellbeing subscale score</td>
<td>.943 [-.186, 2.072]</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (WADL X MHW subscale)</td>
<td>-.050 [-.110, .010]</td>
<td>.100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. $R^2 = .193, F(7, 138) = 4.703; (p<0.001)$