

*Forensic LD: Lecture Series*

# **FIRE SETTING: AN INTRODUCTION TO CLINICAL ASSESSMENT & INTERVENTIONS**

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**2015-16: Every day**

**Over 1000 fires attended by  
emergency services**

**20 casualties**

**just under 1 fatality**

**Life time prevalence of fire  
setting behaviour: 1%**



## Terms used

### 1. Fire setting

Behaviour that encompasses accidental or intentional setting of fires



## Terms used

### 2. Arson

- A criminal offence where the fire is set deliberately and with malicious intent.
- May be with direct intent of harming another or with reckless disregard as to whether others are harmed.



## Terms used

### 3. Pyromania

- A psychiatric disorder
- Multiple acts of (or attempts at) setting fires to property or other objects
- Persistent preoccupation with subjects related to fire and burning

Journal  
**Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability**  
Volume 40, 2015 - Issue 2

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ORIGINAL ARTICLES

**Arson or fire setting in offenders with intellectual disability: Clinical characteristics, forensic histories, and treatment outcomes**

Regi T. Alexander, Verity Chester, Fatima N. Green, Ignatius Gunaratna & Sudeep Hoare  
Pages 189-197 | Published online: 23 Jan 2015

Download citation | <https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2014.998182> | Check for updates

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Only half of those with a history of fire setting had an arson conviction



# Reported prevalence

**Community Learning Disability Teams: 1-3%**

**Referrals to forensic (LD) services: 4-10%**

**Forensic (LD) in-patients: 22-25%**

**Chester et al (2018), Wheeler et al (2009), Devapriam et al (2007), Hogue et al (2006), Enayati et al (2008), Taylor et al (2002), Lindsay et al (2010), Alexander et al (2002, 2006, 2010, 2011, 2015)**





# Characteristics and Risk Factors- Associations

**Younger age: current offence and first offence**

**Male**

**Single**

**Poor Education, Unemployment, Homelessness**





# **Characteristics, Risk Factors and Associations**

**Childhood maltreatment (offence recidivism and severity association)**

**Paternal alcoholism**

**Experience of physical abuse, sexual abuse (?)**

**Social isolation in adulthood**



# Characteristics and Risk Factors- Associations



Personality self reports: *'Inconsistent'*, *'Unbalanced'*, *'Emotionally unstable'*, *'loss of control'* and Personality Disorder diagnosis (different clusters), Family history link

Alcohol and Substance Misuse

Mental illnesses (range), Pyromania, Concepts of 'triple diagnosis' and 'pure arsonists'

Medical: Genetic syndromes?and Brain damage

Part 3 orders, Restriction orders

# *Multi Trajectory Theory of Adult Fire Setting (M-TTAF)* (Gannon et al 2012)

Background characteristics

Proximal factors  
(immediate vulnerabilities)

Key factors for  
repeated  
fire setting

5 key  
trajectories



# ***Multi Trajectory Theory of Adult Fire Setting (M-TTAF)*** (Gannon et al 2012)

1. Antisocial  
Cognition

2. Grievance

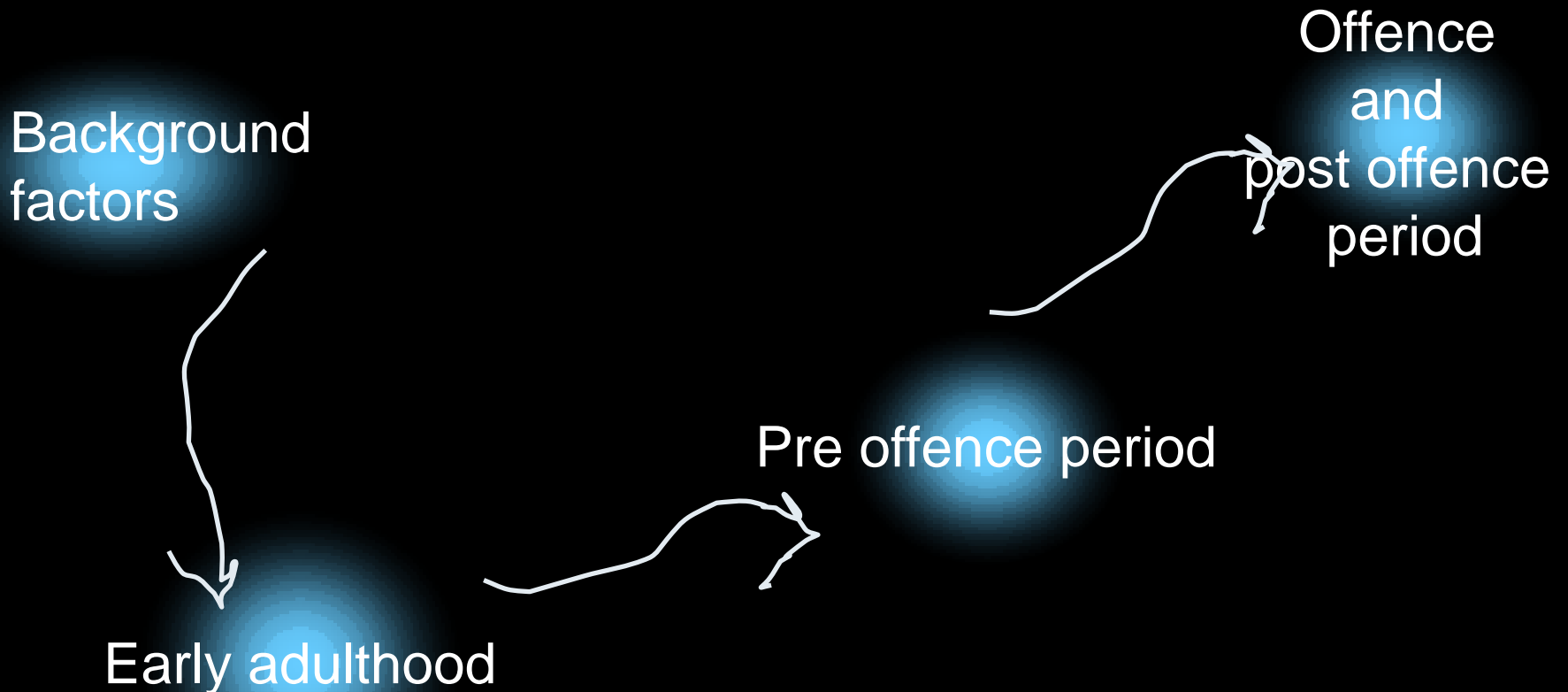
3. Fire  
Interest

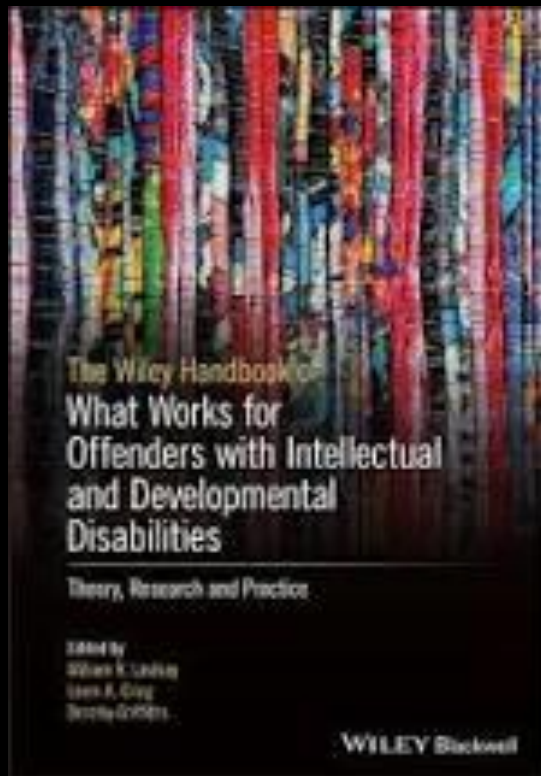
4. Emotionally  
expressive  
(need for  
recognition)

5. Multi faceted

# Fire Setting Offence Chain Model

(Tyler et al 2014)





## Assessing People with Intellectual Disabilities Who Have Engaged in Fire Setting

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### 10.1 Introduction

Fires represent a major societal issue, producing considerable devastation to both property and human life. There were 376 000 fire-related incidents attended by fire and rescue services in England between April 2015 to March 2016, with an associated 303 fatalities and 7661 casualties (Smallbridge 2017). Large-scale epidemiological surveys estimate a lifetime prevalence of fire-setting of around 1.0% (Vaughn et al. 2010). A variety of terms are used to refer to fire setting within the literature, often interchangeably. However, there are important distinctions between key terms, largely in regards to the individual's intent regarding the fire set, and legal factors, which are summarized in Box 10.1. The term 'fire-setting' is used throughout this chapter, and where other terms are used, this is to refer to terminology used by cited authors.

Fire setting behaviours amongst individuals with Intellectual Developmental Disorder (IDD) present numerous challenges for assessment and management by healthcare professionals, requiring coordinated multidisciplinary team input, and treatment programmes adapted for their level of intellectual functioning. IDD is defined as a disorder with onset during the developmental period (first 18 years of life), which includes deficits in both intellectual and adaptive functioning in conceptual, social, and practical domains (American Psychiatric Association 2013). The degree can be mild, moderate, severe, or profound, with over 90% of those with IDD falling within the mild range (Department of Health 2001).

### 10.2 Epidemiology

It is frequently suggested that fire setting is more prevalent amongst individuals with IDD, and that individuals with IDD are overrepresented in arson relative to other types of offences (Enayati et al. 2008). Prins et al. (1985) suggested that IDD in themselves

*The Wiley Handbook on What Works for Offenders with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: An Evidence-Based Approach to Theory, Assessment, and Treatment*, First Edition.  
Edited by William R. Lindsay, Leam A. Craig, and Dorothy Griffiths.

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