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The relationship between moral development, distorted cognitions and social problem solving amongst men with intellectual disabilities who have a history of criminal offending.

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Aims: The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between moral development, social problem solving ability and distorted cognitions. A secondary aim was to examine the psychometric properties of a revised measure of distorted cognitions called the “How I Think Questionnaire – Intellectual Disabilities” (HIT-IDs).

Method: Forty-six men with intellectual disabilities with a history of criminal offending and 51 men with intellectual disabilities without any known history of criminal offending were recruited and invited to complete measures of moral reasoning, social problem solving ability and distorted cognitions. Comparisons were made between the two groups.

Results: While both groups of men had developmentally “immature” moral reasoning, the group of offenders were reasoning at a significantly more “mature” developmental level than non-offenders. Offenders endorsed a significantly greater impulsive style of social problem solving, and had significantly higher levels of cognitive distortions. The test re-test reliability of the HIT-IDs was good.

Conclusion: The relationships between these constructs has relevance for our understanding of social information processing amongst men with intellectual disabilities.