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Ansio-divers project: intervention to reduce social anxiety in people with autistic spectrum disorder and intellectual developmental disorder through the use of modified cognitive behavioral therapy in a virtual reality space

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Background: Immersive virtual reality (IVR) and modified cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT-M) show potential in the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Intellectual Development Disorder (IDD). This pilot study focused on the treatment of social anxiety.

Objective: Reduce social anxiety in people with ASD and TDI through the application of CBT-M in an IVR. Participants: 16 participants previously diagnosed with ASD, IDD, and social anxiety according to DSM-V criteria. Scales administered: Social Anxiety Inventory (SPIN), Self-esteem scale (Rosemberg), Clinical Impression Scale and Quality of Life Scale (GEN-CAT).

Method: The CBT-M + IVR intervention was carried out for six weeks, with a total of 12 sessions. It included 4 blocks: Psychoeducation, Social Skills Training, Behavioral/Cognitive Restructuring, Systematic Desensitization/Exposure, and three-month follow-up.

Results: A statistically significant decrease was observed in the SPIN scale ($t=13.07$, $p<.001$, $d=0.71$), an increase in the Rosenberg self-esteem scale ($t=-12.05$, $p<.001$, $d=-0.77$). In addition, a significant improvement was recorded in quality of life ($t=-9.61$, $p<.001$, $d=-0.81$). According to the results obtained, a clinically and statistically significant improvement is observed in the manifestations of social anxiety, greater self-perceived self-esteem and especially notable improvements in aspects such as emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, personal development, and self-determination.

Conclusions: The combination of CBT-M + IVR is a promising intervention, significantly improving the social anxiety, self-esteem, and quality of life of the participants. The improvement in aspects such as manifestations of anxiety and self-esteem positively influenced various areas of quality of life, generating a sense of well-being and general improvement as reported by the participants.

Biography

solid background in Clinical Psychology, with a specialization in Neuropsychology. Initially focused on Alzheimer's research, she has redirected her efforts toward Neurodevelopmental Disorders, particularly autism and intellectual disability. Her passion for these issues is evident in her unwavering commitment to early detection and intervention. She skillfully balances research efforts with clinical practice, comprehensively addressing the multifaceted nature of these disorders. She currently focuses her research on both the intervention and detection of autism, especially in women, a nascent field to date. Her determination and dedication mark her as a promising figure in the field of neuropsychology, where she has already begun to make significant contributions to the well-being of affected individuals and their families.

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