**THE EFFECTS OF TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAMES ON SOCIAL COMPETENCE IN ADULTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**

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**Purpose/Objective**: Tabletop roleplaying games (TRPGs), such as Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), have seen a dramatic increase in popularity over the past 20 years. D&D is a narrative-based TRPG where players collaboratively complete challenges through roleplay and game mechanics. Adults with mid- to high-functioning autism spectrum disorder, including Aspergers and Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified have social competency difficulties. Several studies support the use of roleplaying to develop social competence skills. However, there is little known about the impact of D&D on social competence of adults with ASD/PDD-NOS. This study aims to explore the effects of playing D&D on the social competence skills of adults with mid- to high-functioning ASD.

**Methodology:** The study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Pre-/post- measures of social competence include: the ADOS, the Autism Quotient, the Empathy Quotient, the Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale, the Toronto Alexithymia Scale, the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale. Twelve participants with mid- to high- functioning ASD/PDD-NOS aged 18-30 will participate in 10 weekly sessions of D&D. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test will be used to compare pre-/and post-data. With the quantitative data of the ADOS, any individual diagnostic threshold changes will be noted, and aggregate pre-post analysis will be limited to exploratory non-parametric Mann-Whitney tests. A behavioural checklist developed for the purposes of this study will be used to track week-to-week changes in social competence and compared against the ADOS using a Spearman rank correlation. Qualitative data will be collected in the form of in-situ observation and post-experimental interview. Transcript text will be processed using thematic coding with NVIVO, independently by two researchers.

**Results:** Results pending. It is hypothesized that social competence will improve in pre- and post- measures completed after the game sessions compared to baseline data collected prior to the sessions.

**Conclusions/Discussion**: There currently exist few to none interventions designed to increase social competence in this population. Furthermore, clinicians working in the field of ASD may not consider TRPGs as a potential intervention. This means a potential therapy to increase social competence may be underutilized. If TRPGs are determined to be effective, it would substantiate the need to make TRPGs more accessible to clients in a format designed to meet their population’s specific needs. Lastly, this study could inform future research into the effects of role-playing on developing social competence.

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