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An Exploration of Dating as an Occupation for Autistic Adults

Maryam Binaei, OTS, and Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L

BACKGROUND

Despite having the desire and motivation to date, adults on the autism spectrum experience challenges developing and maintaining romantic relationships (Mehzabin & Stokes, 2011; Shore, 2002)

The autistic community utilizes virtual platforms for engagement and community (Williams et al., 2021)

Autistic adults have increased diversity in gender expression and sexual orientation (Mogavero & Hsu, 2019; Warriar et al., 2020; Strang et al., 2014)

PROBLEM

The occupation of dating is a naturally occurring activity that falls within the scope of occupational therapy

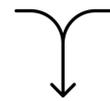
Occupational therapy can serve the autistic community as they grow and develop into adulthood, to support them to achieve their life goals and milestones.

PURPOSE

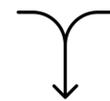
Autistic adults would benefit from occupation-based interventions that promote self-exploration and encourage the development of dating-related skills to achieve their personal dating goals.

METHODS

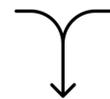
Literature Review



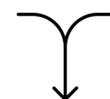
Analysis and review of available dating programs, online content, and resources for the autistic population with Occupational Science (OS), Form, Function and Meaning Framework



Designed qualitative data collection through survey, informal interview and focus groups, based on preference and needs of individual. However, IRB approval was not received in adequate timing



On-going interviews to collect observations and insight from an occupational therapist working with autistic adults



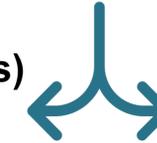
Used all previous methods framework of Person Environment Occupation(PEO) and Transtheoretical Model (TTM)/Stages of Change, to guide and develop a program manuscript

RESULTS

Up to Date: Dual Approach Program Manuscript

Client centered session with OT(s)

1:1, Group
Community, private setting, client requests



Autistic Adult Self- Paced

Private, consultation-based
Personal environment

Website:



Program Explorations

Dating Characteristics Wheel

Online Safety and Comfortability

Preferences vs. Deal Breakers

Stress and Sensory Management

Occupation Based Outing

Gender and Sexuality

Prospective Partner Explorations

Motivations to Date

Dating Vision Board

Post Program Maintenance

IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

The autistic adult population experiences barriers related to the occupation of dating and would benefit from further research, opportunities for insight and collaborative client-centered exploration of their needs and goals. Understanding the challenges experiences on all ends of the spectrum is important to consider and address as well.

Occupational therapists and academic researchers are interested in addressing these occupational needs and would benefit from attending to this unique occupation for this population. By providing this intervention, as a profession, considerations of occupational choices and occupational possibilities are expanded and addressed for the autistic adult population.

References:



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