

Schema Therapy as Treatment for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Comorbid Personality Disorder: A Multiple Baseline Case Series Study Testing Cognitive-Behavioral and Experiential Interventions

Authors : Richard Vuijk, Arnoud Arntz

Abstract : Rationale: To our knowledge treatment of personality disorder comorbidity in adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is understudied and is still in its infancy: We do not know if treatment of personality disorders may be applicable to adults with ASD. In particular, it is unknown whether patients with ASD benefit from experiential techniques that are part of schema therapy developed for the treatment of personality disorders. Objective: The aim of the study is to investigate the efficacy of a schema mode focused treatment with adult clients with ASD and comorbid personality pathology (i.e. at least one personality disorder). Specifically, we investigate if they can benefit from both cognitive-behavioral, and experiential interventions. Study design: A multiple baseline case series study. Study population: Adult individuals (age > 21 years) with ASD and at least one personality disorder. Participants will be recruited from Sarr expertise center for autism in Rotterdam. The study requires 12 participants. Intervention: The treatment protocol consists of 35 weekly offered sessions, followed by 10 monthly booster sessions. A multiple baseline design will be used with baseline varying from 5 to 10 weeks, with weekly supportive sessions. After baseline, a 5-week exploration phase follows with weekly sessions during which current and past functioning, psychological symptoms, schema modes are explored, and information about the treatment will be given. Then 15 weekly sessions with cognitive-behavioral interventions and 15 weekly sessions with experiential interventions will be given. Finally, there will be a 10-month follow-up phase with monthly booster sessions. Participants are randomly assigned to baseline length, and respond weekly during treatment and monthly at follow-up on Belief Strength of negative core beliefs (by VAS), and fill out SMI, SCL-90 and SRS-A 7 times during screening procedure (i.e. before baseline), after baseline, after exploration, after cognitive and behavioral interventions, after experiential interventions, and after 5- and 10- month follow-up. The SCID-II will be administered during screening procedure (i.e. before baseline), at 5- and at 10-month follow-up. Main study parameters: The primary study parameter is negative core beliefs. Secondary study parameters include schema modes, personality disorder manifestations, psychological symptoms, and social interaction and communication. Discussion: To the best of author's knowledge so far no study has been published on the application of schema mode focused interventions in adult patients with ASD and comorbid PD(s). This study offers the first systematic test of application of schema therapy for adults with ASD. The results of this study will provide initial evidence for the effectiveness of schema therapy in treating adults with both ASD and PD(s). The study intends to provide valuable information for future development and implementation of therapeutic interventions for adults with both ASD and PD(s).

Keywords : adults, autism spectrum disorder, personality disorder, schema therapy

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