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Exploring Digital Solutions: A Pilot Study on the Intersection of Autistic Traits and Mental Health

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Introduction: Digital interventions are increasingly popular in addressing various issues, including mental health problems, executive functions, and social cognitive skills in clinical and non-clinical populations. Previous studies have revealed that neurotypical individuals with elevated autistic traits may be more susceptible to other mental health conditions such as anxiety disorders, mood disorders, internet addiction, substance abuse, and suicidal risk. While there is no definitive explanation for this susceptibility, social and cognitive impairments may be contributing factors, including problems with executive functions and social cognitive skills.

Objectives: The main goal of this research is to develop an online social cognitive training program and conduct a pilot study to assess its feasibility within the current sample.

Methods: 36 participants (randomly assigned to 16 for the experimental group and 20 for the control group) were recruited for the pilot study and the experimental group completed 6 weeks of an online intervention program, while the control group was assigned to the waiting list. Autism Quotient, Depression Anxiety Stress -21, Patient Health Questionnaire -9, and Generalized Anxiety Questionnaire-7 were used to assess mental health symptoms. Executive functions were evaluated using the Wisconsin Card Sorting Task, N-back Task, and Go/No-Go task. At the same time, social cognition was assessed through the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, The Eyes test, and the Self-Assessment Manikin.

Results: 2 x 2 mixed repeated measure ANOVA was conducted. The main effect of time and group was significant for mental health symptoms and working memory ($p < 0.5$). However, the interaction of time and group was not significant ($p > .05$). Communication and attention switching (two components of autistic traits) have significant impacts on the scores ($p < 0.5$).

Conclusions: This pilot study demonstrated significant improvements in mental health scores, laying a solid foundation for further development and efficacy testing of the digital intervention program. This suggests that the intervention holds promise, particularly in targeting mental health improvements. Attention switching and communication contribute to the overall main effects highlighting the program's potential in addressing key aspects of mental health.

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Substance use and adolescents' activities in digital space

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Introduction: Representative surveys have shown a decline in alcohol and tobacco use among adolescents over the last years. The rapid spread of adolescents' activities in digital space may have contributed to these changes. However, there is still considerable scope for examining the relationship between activities in digital space and substance use behaviour of adolescents.

Objectives: The study aims to assess the association between adolescents' alcohol use, cigarette smoking and their activities in digital space. The respective associations are controlled for adolescents' subjective well-being as a putative confounder related to both substance use and digital activities.

Methods: Data from the 2022 Czech part of the *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* study were used. Only 15-year-old respondents were analysed ($N=4263$, 50.7% boys). To measure substance use, data on the frequency of alcohol use and cigarette smoking in the past 30 days were used. Digital activities were measured by data on typical daily free time spent on social media and computer gaming. To control for subjective well-being the WHO-5 scale was used. Pairwise associations between substance use, social media use, and computer gaming were examined using Spearman rank correlation coefficients (ρ). Ordinal logistic regression models were used to adjust the respective associations for gender and psychological well-being.

Results: Significant pairwise associations were found between time spent on social media and both frequency of alcohol use ($\rho = 0.181$, $P < 0.05$) and cigarette smoking ($\rho = 0.191$, $P < 0.05$). In contrast, computer gaming was not significantly correlated with either alcohol use or cigarette smoking ($\rho = -0.015$ and $\rho = -0.014$, respectively; $P > 0.30$). Poor subjective well-being was a significant risk factor for substance use and time spent on social media. Controlling for adolescents' well-being did not significantly attenuate the former relationship between the substance use and social media use.

Conclusions: The results suggest that among adolescents, different forms of digital activity have markedly different associations with substance use. While increased time spent on social media was significantly associated with higher frequency of substance use, no such association was found for computer gaming. Future research will focus on whether the relationship between specific digital activities and substance use can be explained by other factors related to mental health.

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ANALYSIS OF ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY HOSPITALIZATION IN INTEGRAL BEDS IN A CITY IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL

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