Designing a Virtual Reality Café to Support People with Eating Disorders

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Aims: People with eating disorders can find the experience of social eating difficult, and being able to eat socially can be an important part of recovery. In the context of mental health treatment, experiences of mastery within virtual reality (VR) can be transferred to real life, and previous qualitative research has identified that a VR café environment could be a useful treatment adjunct for people with eating disorders. The aim of this project was to develop a VR café intervention for people with eating disorders who find social eating challenging.

Methods: We used the Person-Based Approach to develop the VR café. In Study 1 we conducted qualitative interviews and focus groups with young people with personal experience of a range of different eating disorders (n=15), parents and carers (n=4), and clinicians from a variety of professional backgrounds (n=6), to inform the design of the intervention. In Study 2, the café was further developed through a series of development activities and think aloud interviews with people with experience of eating disorders (n=12).

Results: Study 1 participants described a range of challenges associated with cafés, which were incorporated into the initial build of the VR café by our industry partners,*Virtual Bodyworks (Kiin).* These included challenges related to social interactions with café staff, the busyness of café settings, and around choosing and ordering food and drink from café menus. Study 2 participants further shaped the intervention, contributing to the scripts for VR café staff; helping to develop food and drink menus; providing feedback on measures for assessing the effectiveness of the intervention; and advising on the ways clinicians could helpfully support people using the VR café, including through the provision of feedback on a written guidance document. During think-aloud interviews, Study 2 participants also identified areas for improvement to the content and experience of the VR café.

Conclusion: By placing the perspectives and ideas of people with eating disorders at the heart of the design of the VR café, we have developed a safe space for people with diverse eating disorders to practice relevant challenges related to social eating whilst being supported by a clinician. The intervention aims to reduce anxiety, increase confidence, and improve tolerance of uncertainty around social eating settings, and will be offered to young people accessing eating disorder treatment in two participating NHS trusts, as part of a mixed methods feasibility trial.

Abstracts were reviewed by the RCPsych Academic Faculty rather than by the standard *BJPsych Open* peer review process and should not be quoted as peer-reviewed by *BJPsych Open* in any subsequent publication.

Evaluating the Impact of a Social Games Club on International Students' Mental Well-Being and Social Integration: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Aims: This study aimed to evaluate the experiences and perspectives of international students participating in a games club, focusing on engagement, social interaction, and skill development across different cohorts and weeks.

Transitioning to university life presents significant challenges for international students, including social isolation, homesickness, and stress, which can affect mental well-being and academic performance. Structured social interventions offer potential benefits in supporting adaptation and promoting mental health.

Methods: I coordinated a four-week games club at the University of South Wales for international MSc Public Health students. Weekly sessions included a variety of interactive games designed to foster social connection and participation. Participant feedback was collected via anonymous questionnaires after each session. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, and qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns in engagement, enjoyment, and social integration.

Results: Across the October and February cohorts, participants consistently reported high levels of enjoyment, with over 95% affirming positive experiences each week. Social interaction and engagement with multiple games were highest in the initial sessions and decreased in later weeks, particularly in the February cohort. Thematic analysis identified key themes including enhanced social well-being, gratitude for the initiative, and suggestions for improving inclusivity and activity variety. Participants reported skill development in teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.

Conclusion: The games club effectively promoted social integration and mental well-being among international students. Observed variations in engagement highlight the importance of balancing novelty and familiarity, and designing interventions that sustain participation.These findings provide actionable insights for educators and public health practitioners developing targeted social interventions for diverse student populations. My role as facilitator and researcher enabled a nuanced understanding of participant experiences and informed recommendations for future iterations.

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