

Publication

Feasibility trial of virtual reality exposure therapy for selective mutism.

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Virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET) has been commonly utilised as an extension of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). However, most studies examined its effectiveness among adults, with no study focusing on children with selective mutism (SM). We aimed to examine its feasibility and acceptability among children with SM. Twenty children aged 6-12 with SM diagnosis were recruited and completed six therapist-guided VRET sessions. Parents and clinicians completed measures at pre-VRET, post-VRET, 1-month and 3-month follow-up visits. At post-VRET, parent and child participants completed the acceptability questionnaires. Findings suggested the feasibility of VRET as all participants completed the programme with no attrition. Parents and child participants also reported VRET to be an acceptable and effective treatment for SM. Significant improvement in overall functioning were found at post-treatment and follow-up measures, but there were no significant changes in parent-rated speech frequency and anxiety measures. These support the acceptability of VRET as an adjunct modality (and not substitute) of CBT in SM treatment. Future studies, with more robust experimental designs and larger sample sizes, can be conducted to confirm its efficacy. As technology becomes more sophisticated, tools such as virtual environments can be explored to enhance evidence-based care for children and their families.

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