ABSTRACT

Overcoming Challenges in the Assessment and Treatment of Problem Behavior in Adults with Autism

by

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Problematic behaviors, such as self-injurious behavior or aggression, demonstrated by adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), create many significant life complications, some life-threatening. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is established as an evidence-based approach to treat problem behavior for children with ASD and shows promise as an effective treatment for adults, yet little research has been conducted within the adult population. Assessment and treatment of problem behavior with adults is often challenging due to funding limitations, increased severity and complexity of problem behavior, and underqualified staff. The purpose of the present study was to overcome these challenges by (1) identifying a functional assessment method that is effective, efficient, and socially valid, (2) evaluating the efficacy of treatment involving reinforcer parameter manipulation in functional communication training without extinction (extinction not often being feasible with adults due to increased severity of problem behavior), and (3) evaluating a novel efficient approach to effectively train staff to ensure correct treatment implementation. Results of the current study demonstrated an effective and efficient assessment and treatment option for adults with ASD and the need for ABA services through adulthood. The successful treatment of problem behavior for these adults with ASD has broad impacts such as improvement in quality of life, safety, health, and community opportunities.