AbSPORU
Alberta SPOR SUPPORT Unit



EMILY-MARIE ROBERTS

University of Alberta

Project Title:
An Exploration of Autistic Adults' Dental Insights through a Table-top Roleplaying Game (TTRPG)

ABOUT EMILY-MARIE

Emily-Marie Roberts (she/her) is a Registered Dental Hygienist with a clinical and teaching background in dental hygiene. She earned her Advanced Diploma in Dental Hygiene from Durham College and her Honours Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene from George Brown Polytechnic. Prior to pursuing graduate studies, she worked as a clinical dental hygienist and has since contributed to dental hygiene education as a clinical instructor and lecturer. She is currently a PhD student in the School of Dentistry at the University of Alberta.

Emily-Marie's research interests centre on Autism, oral health, accessibility, person-oriented research, and the use of tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) in research. Her connection to this work is also personal, as her younger brother is Autistic and has helped shape her interest in understanding and advocating with Autistic people. Her doctoral research explores Autistic adults' dental insights through the TTRPG Dungeons & Dragons. Through this work, she hopes to contribute to a better understanding of Autistic adults' perspectives and experiences within dental care

PROJECT SUMMARY

Autistic adults experience significant inequities and barriers in oral healthcare, including communication challenges, dental anxiety and experiences that can lead to treatment avoidance. Yet oral health research

remains largely focused on children, leaving the experiences and needs of Autistic adults underrepresented.

This innovative, participatory study explores Autistic adults' experiences with dental care using Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) as a qualitative research and data collection method. In partnership with Autistic person partners, the research team has co-designed a neurodiversity-affirming D&D campaign featuring "Dental Encounters" that model real-world oral healthcare situations.

Through collaborative gameplay and follow-up discussions, the study will explore Autistic adults' perspectives and experiences of dental care in their own words. The findings will help identify strategies to improve access, communication and dental experiences, while supporting the development of more inclusive and accessible oral healthcare environments. The project will also produce practical resources for Autistic adults and an open-access framework for using tabletop role-playing games in participatory health research.