

Beyond Survival: Defining and Measuring Thriving in Autistic Women



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Background

Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder defined by core features such as impairments in communication and reciprocal social interactions (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The prevalence of ASD in the UK is approximately 700,000, with women constituting about one-third of this figure (O’Nions et al., 2017). Unique behaviours of autistic women, such as camouflaging and internalisation of problems, can complicate identifying support requirements (Hull et al., 2017; Sedgwick et al., 2019). Compared to neurotypical individuals, this population experiences poorer quality of life and higher rates of mental illness (Lai et al., 2019).

Despite growing awareness of the challenges faced by autistic women, there remains a critical gap in exploring the extent to which they are thriving or experiencing positive outcomes. Human thriving—defined as *the simultaneous experience of personal development and success* (Brown et al., 2017)—remains underexplored in this population.

Developing a tailored thriving scale may support a strengths-based approach for health professionals to better address the unique needs of autistic women.

Research Aim

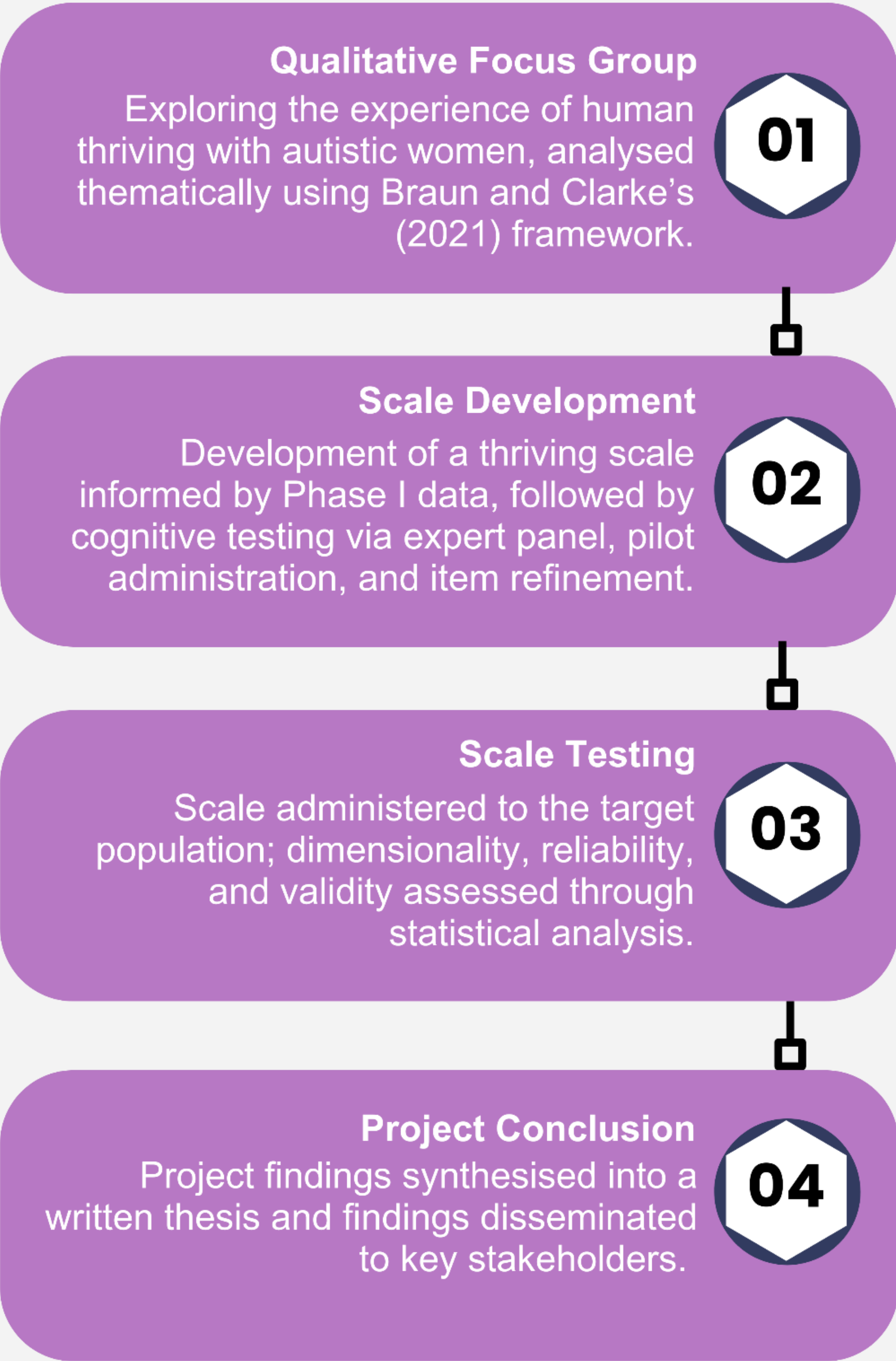
- 1) To explore the experience of human thriving in autistic women.
- 2) To develop a psychometrically validated thriving scale tailored to their experiences.

Proposed Methods

Research Design: Pragmatic sequential mixed methods
Research Methods: Focus groups (qualitative) & scale questionnaire administration (quantitative)
Study Setting: United Kingdom (UK)
Sampling: Purposive and snowball

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Female at birth	Male at birth
≥ 16 years of age	<16 years of age
Formal ASD diagnosis	No formal ASD diagnosis
No intellectual disability	Intellectual disability
Fluent in English	Not fluent in English
Access to internet connected device	No access to internet connected device
UK resident	Non-UK resident

Proposed Research Phases



Relevance to Practice

This proposal reflects current priorities in autism research and UK health policy (e.g., Lord et al., 2022), including:

- Enhancing professional understanding of the autistic female phenotype
- Embedding co-production into autism research
- Adopting strengths-based, neuro-affirming approaches
- Improving post-diagnostic support pathways

From an academic perspective, this work will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on autism in women and expand the literature on human thriving.

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