

Forskning

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First Experimental Study of Transference Work in Teenagers (FEST-IT). Who dropped out from psychotherapy?

This is a new publication from the Norwegian psychotherapy study on depressed adolescents: the First Experimental Study of Transference Work in Teenagers (FEST-IT). The focus of the publication was to explore reasons for drop-out from psychotherapy.

The sample included 69 adolescents aged 16–18 years with major depressive disorder who received short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy (STPP) as part of the FEST-IT trial. Of these, 21 (30 %) were identified as dropouts and were compared to those who completed the therapy. Several measures were analyzed: pre-treatment patient characteristics, symptomatology, functioning, and working alliance.

Furthermore, The Adolescent Psychotherapy Q-set (APQ; Calderón et al., 2017) was analyzed. APQ is a 100-item Q-sort measure describing the patient (e.g., “Young person feels sad or depressed”) and the therapist (e.g., “Therapist attends to young person’s current emotional states”) activity and the interaction between them (e.g., “Young

person resists therapist’s attempts to explore thoughts, reactions, or motivations related to problems”).

APQ ratings from an early session for 16 of the drop out cases were included, to find out more about the patient-therapist interaction structure. The results revealed three distinct interaction structures: (1) A process of mutual trust and collaboration; (2) Characterised by patient resistance and emotional detachment; and (3) Mismatch and incongruence between therapist and adolescent. These interaction structures explained 54.3% of the total variance

Among the adolescents receiving STPP with transference work (TW) There were fewer drop-outs (60% versus 48%), but this difference was

not statistically significant in this small sample. It was surprising that the effect of talking about the ongoing relationship does not seem to help those who showed somewhat lower alliance. However, there is a debate about whether adolescents profit from transference work in psychodynamic therapy or not (Della Rosa and Midgley, 2017), with some suggesting that too much discussion of the adolescent-therapist relationship may run counter to the adolescent's developmental need for a sense of autonomy.

The article discusses several possible explanations for drop-out in detail, for example: When the therapy process was in its beginning at session three, there were differences in therapist-rated motivation and willingness to engage in therapy, which was found to be significantly lower in those who dropped out, confirming previous research findings among adult populations. Furthermore: Confirming previous findings, patients in this study who dropped out of therapy were not found to differ with regard to most pre-treatment patient characteristics. However, the ones that completed might have experienced somewhat more relational difficulties as measured with personality disorder criteria. Interestingly, amongst the 21 adolescents who dropped out, level of confidence in and expectancy for the treatment's helpfulness (as rated by adolescents before starting treatment) was equally high among both groups. Others have found expectations of treatment to be lower in those who drop out, albeit among adult populations.

Not all adolescents may leave early because they are dissatisfied; they may also leave because they feel sufficiently helped. The interaction structures identified in the present study clearly showed one configuration of mutual trust, collaboration, and enjoyment in the psychodynamic work. Others may leave because the dynamic and interaction structure between therapist and patient was not optimal from the beginning.

The authors' conclude that understanding what happens early on in treatment between the therapist and the young person, is crucial to mitigate premature dropout of those who have not felt helped and left dissatisfied and disappointed. The therapist needs to pay attention to these processes from the first session onward to avoid unsatisfactory dropout.

References

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