Psychotherapy patients in mental health care: Attachment styles, interpersonal problems and therapy experiences

av

Mona Wilhelmsson Göstas

Akademisk avhandling

Avhandling för medicine doktorsexamen i medicinsk vetenskap, som kommer att försvaras offentligt fredagen den 09 maj 2014 kl. 09.00, Campus universitetssjukhuset, Örebro, HSC2

Opponent: Professor Rolf Holmqvist Institutionen för beteendevetenskap och lärande, Linköpings universitet

Örebro universitet Institutionen för hälsovetenskap och medicin 701 82 ÖREBRO
Abstract


Attachment styles are relevant to psychotherapy since they highlight the way a person handles interpersonal and emotional stress. This thesis aimed to examine how psychotherapy patients in the public mental health care system report attachment styles related to interpersonal problems and diagnosis before and after psychotherapy and to examine problems and changes and psychotherapy contract and process from patients’ experiences of cognitive behavioural oriented therapy (CBT) and psychodynamic oriented psychotherapy (PDT).

The studies are based on data from patients admitted to psychotherapy within the public psychiatric services in Örebro County Council. Studies I and IV were quantitative and used self-reports to examine attachment styles and interpersonal problems before and after psychotherapy. Studies II and III were qualitative interview studies examining patients' experiences of problems, changes and psychotherapy process. The patients were diagnosed with mood disorders, anxiety disorders, adjustment disorders and personality disorders and reported insecure avoidant and anxious attachment styles that correlated positively with interpersonal problems when they started therapy. Psychotherapy with CBT or PDT enabled them to turn attachment styles into more secure ones and decrease interpersonal problems. Patients aged between 26 and 39, patients who attended 11-25 sessions and patients diagnosed with a personality disorder reported greater changes in secure-related attachment than others. Patients described their problems as emotions that could not be regulated, as cognitive disabilities and as problematic behaviours that implied a self-centredness. During the course of psychotherapy, the patients gained abilities to handle their problems. The perceived self-centeredness changed which increased their participation in their life-context.

Similarities across the therapy orientations showed that the creation of a new context was essential to pay full attention to the patient’s problems, and that the working method and cooperation with the psychotherapist made up a whole. To make the therapy effective, it is important to build up confidence in cooperation and secure base functions like offering predictability and shaping interventions according to the needs of the patient and their ability to use them.

Keywords: Attachment styles, interpersonal problems, psychotherapy, psychiatric patients, qualitative analysis

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