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Svenja Taubner, Stephanie Müller, Silja Kotte



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Mentalizing Vocational Training increases mentalization interest in professionals and young people with the need for learning support: results of a pilot study

Svenja Taubner^a, Stephanie Müller^a, Silja Kotte^b

^aUniversity Klagenfurt, Austria

^bUniversity Kassel, Germany

Abstract

The present pilot study focuses on the evaluation of the prevention program “Mentalizing Vocational Training” (MVT). The program aimed to increase the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation by improving the interaction among professionals and between professionals and trainees. Professionals of Vocational Training Centres in Germany are facing an increasing number of adolescents diagnosed with learning disability, showing a severe lack of motivation to participate actively in the training. Within the framework of MVT, problems in daily routines were assumed to be related to mentalizing failure. The prevention program consisted of four modules: psychoeducational training and teambuilding for all professionals, mentalization-based supervision for two selected teams of professionals, two mentalizing training groups for selected trainees and a reflection group among the research team to tailor the intervention to the needs of the Training Centre on an ongoing basis. To assess outcome, we conducted a pre-post-study on mentalization interest, attachment styles and self-efficacy of both trainees and professionals. Additionally, we assessed trainees’ mentalization, personality organization, adverse childhood experiences and intelligence. Results showed that trainees had significantly less interest in mentalization and more attachment anxiety and avoidance than professionals. In addition to general cognitive deficits, trainees’ mentalization was impaired together with low personality organization and a high prevalence of adverse childhood experiences at a level comparable to clinical samples. After one year of MVT-program implementation, the comparison of pre- and post-survey data revealed a significant increase in the trainees’ and professionals’ mentalization interest as well as in trainees’ self-efficacy. Professionals reported goal attainment in eight of nine goals of the program and gave positive overall feedback to the program. We interpret the data as a successful implementation of the MVT program and a promising way of promoting mentalization in multi-professional teams with clients that are difficult to reach.

Keywords: mentalization – Vocational Training Centre – learning disability – attachment style – cognitive impairment

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