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Experience-based Learning in Psychotherapy

Effects of psychophysical exposures (ropes course) on psychotherapy patients within the framework of a multi-method inpatient treatment concept – results of a prospective controlled evaluation study.

Summary

Effects of psychophysical exposures (ropes course) on psychotherapy patients within the framework of a multi-method inpatient treatment concept – results of a prospective controlled evaluation study.

In a prospective controlled evaluation study on 247 patients, the effects, effect sizes and processes of change through experience-based exposure to a ropes course were studied from January 2004 to April 2005. The method was embedded in a multi-method inpatient psychophysical treatment concept. Various subgroups were studied and compared (participants who used the ropes course in the initial phase of therapy, participants who used the ropes course in the middle phase of therapy and participants who were exposed in the later phase of therapy). There was also a control group of patients who did not participate in the exposure (TAU Group, Treatment As Usual). Instruments of evaluation were the routine quality control assessments conducted in our institution (Forschungsstelle für Psychotherapie an der Universität Heidelberg, FOST) as well as special instruments of higher sensitivity for measuring specific changes (locus of control, fear, depression, self-efficacy). In addition, a direct evaluation with open questions was carried out. The therapeutic procedure had a high degree of acceptance among the participants (important prerequisite for therapy success). Although for 64.7% of the patients/test persons the participation was „difficult“, 80.1% would choose this procedure again. Overall, patients who were included in the exposure procedure (ropes course) showed significantly larger effect sizes with regard to impairment, depression, state and trait anxieties, locus of control and self-efficacy. At the end of treatment, the rope-climbers all showed large effect sizes (> 0,8 according to Cohen, 1988), whereas the effects of the non-participants were not above medium effect size (< 0,8 according to Cohen, 1988). The results are plausible and coherent with the current observations being made in brain research.

The experience-based psychophysical exposure to the ropes course is a clearly constructed situation in a defined, controlled space. This makes it accessible to direct therapeutic intervention and process accompaniment. On the whole, due to its high degree of effectiveness and efficiency, this approach is suited for psychosomatic treatment concepts and psychotherapeutic interventions. Furthermore, it does justice to modern concepts of learning and is especially suited for personality development and coaching processes.