A Qualitative Examination of the Perspectives of Adolescents with an Eating Disorder on their Parents’ Participation in Skills-based Training Workshops inspired by the New Maudsley Method

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Introduction

Eating disorders often affect the whole family and it is well known, that parents play a pivotal role in the recovery of their child and in re-establishing a balanced family climate. Skills-based training is one approach for parents to learn new strategies and to get knowledge about and reflect on adequate responses to the eating disorder symptoms. This approach shows promising results in research from both parents’ and adult patient perspective, however the adolescent patients’ perspective on their parents’ attendance in skills-based training is sparsely examined.

Aim

The aim of this study was to examine the perspective of adolescent outpatients with an eating disorder on their parents’ participation in skills-based training workshops.

Method

Two focus groups with adolescent outpatients were conducted. One prior to the workshops exploring the thoughts and feelings associated with their parents’ participation and one after the workshops, exploring their experiences associated with their parents attending the skills-based training workshops. Participants were selected consecutively as their parents attended the workshops. Eight patients participated in the first interview and six in the second interview (See Table 1 about collection of empirical data). The qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using inductive content analysis with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach.

Results

The preliminary results indicate that the adolescents prior to the workshops feared that it would provide the parents with general recipes towards the eating disorder symptoms not allowing individual approaches. At the same time they hoped that their parents would gain more confidence and persistency in handling the symptoms, leaving more space for common family activities. After the workshops the adolescents experienced changes in their parents’ approach and highlighted a reduction in family conflicts concerning the eating disorder. Furthermore they underlined that their parents had become more understanding, showed more confidence and persistency with improved family cooperation as a result.

Perspectives

The preliminary results suggest that the effects of the workshops are congruent with the aim of the skills based training workshops and thereby support the continued justification of skills based training in eating disorder treatment (See textbox 1 for clarification of the aim of the workshop course). The skills based training workshops can be considered as a relevant and meaningful adjunct for parents to conventional eating disorder treatment. This study contributes to preliminary evidence, that skills based training serves as an effective method to bring parents and adolescents on the same page in overcoming the challenges in everyday life with an eating disorder.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop 1-7</th>
<th>Follow-up Workshop 8</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Interview</td>
<td>2. Interview</td>
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The purpose of the eight workshops is:
- To increase parents’ understanding and knowledge about eating disorders and maintaining factors
- To provide reflection on their parental style and to what extend the eating disorder controls the family
- To reduce parental stress and powerlessness by way of enhanced skills and competencies
- To train communicative and motivational skills to be better able to navigate through conflicts

Timetable for collecting empirical data during the five months workshop course Workshop 1-7 is conducted biweekly and the 8. follow-up workshop 2 months subsequently