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The Impact of Open Ended Psychotherapy with Adults Formerly in Foster Care

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The Impact of Open Ended Psychotherapy with Adults Formerly in Foster Care
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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

• Young adults who emancipate from foster care demonstrate emotional instability as a result of their experienced maltreatment, the trauma of subsequent removal from their homes, and the instability and uncertainty of the foster care experience.
• Former foster youth demonstrate high rates of mental health problems, typically do not receive appropriate mental health interventions, and are often homeless, unemployed, unexpectedly pregnant, and incarcerated.
• Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of psychotherapy with adults in the general population; however, little is known about effective treatments for young adults formerly in foster care.
• The current study explored the impact of open-ended, relationship based treatment provided to adults who were previously in foster care. Treatment was delivered by licensed clinicians through a national non-profit organization that provides pro-bono mental health treatment to current and former foster youth with one therapist “for as long as it takes”.

METHOD

Clinician Participants (n = 7)
• 100% female
• Mean age = 21.11 years (SD = 2.52 years)
• 71.4% White; 14.3% Asian/Pacific Islander; 14.3%
Multiple Ethnicities
• M= 14.21 years clinical experience (SD= 9.21 years)

Patient Demographics (n = 7)
• Mean age = 21.11 years (SD = 2.52 years)
• 100% female

Parameters of Treatment
• Average Duration: 1.19 years (SD = 1.15 years)
• Frequency: 42.9% once per week, 57.1% once every other week.

Therapist Approaches to Treatment

Results

Changes in Treatment Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Start of Treatment</th>
<th>End of Treatment</th>
<th>Mean Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>-1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

• Former foster youth who began treatment as adults experienced significant reduction in depression and anxiety over the course of a one year treatment.
• Non-significant trends suggest a decrease in sleep problems, substance use/abuse, and improvement in patients’ relationships with peers, each of which often presents obstacles for former foster youth trying to function in society while attempting to cope with past traumas.
• Emotional development improved overall, which suggests that these young adults may be more able to cope with their past, and have improved mental health capacity in the future.
• Limitations of the current study include small sample size, potential bias of therapist informants, and lack of a comparison group. Future research should include interviews with adult patients in order to allow comparison between therapist and patient reports.

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