Attachment patterns and Reflective Functioning in Traumatized Refugees – in a Randomised Clinical Treatment Trial

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Presentation of project in progress

- Background
- Purpose
- Sampling – Design
- Adult Attachment Interview
- Preliminary Results and considerations
Background

John Bowlby (1907-1990)

Physician, child psychiatrist, psychoanalyst
Background

Mary Salter Ainsworth (1913-1999)

Secure base
The Uganda field study (1954-56)
The Strange Situation Test
The Baltimore study (1963)
3 attachment styles: anxious-avoidant, secure, anxious-resistant
Background
Mary Main (1943-)

The disorganized/disoriented attachment style
The Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan & Main 1984)
The Adult Attachment Scoring and Classification Systems (Main & Hesse 2002)
Inner representations of close relationships throughout the life-span
Background

Peter Fonagy, Mary Target, Miriam & Howard Steele (1998)

The Reflective Functioning Scale on the Adult Attachment Interview

The attachment system is closely linked with inner representations and development of the reflective functioning of the self, i.e. the capacity to mentalize which includes a self-reflective and an interpersonal aspect.

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Definitions

Attachment (Bowlby)
• Attachment is an inborn behavioural system with the primary biological function is to ensure survival – through forming close affectional bonds to persons who can protect and comfort.

Attachment (Main)
• The total of early attachment relations are formed to **inner representations of self and others**. Attachment becomes a part of personality and affect the ways a person form close relations throughout the life span.

Mentalization (Fonagy et al.)
• Mentalization includes both a self-reflective and an interpersonal aspect. Ideally it provides the individual with a capacity to distinguish inner from outer reality, pretend from real modes, intra-personal processes from interpersonal communication.

• The Attachment system is closely linked with inner representations and development of the reflective functioning of the self, i.e. the capacity to mentalize.
Purpose. The aim of this psychotherapy research study is:

1. To describe attachment patterns and mentalizing capacities in refugees with PTSD before psychotherapeutic treatment.

2. To further investigate these variables and shed light on their significance for therapeutic alliance and treatment outcome or change in symptoms of PTSD and depression.
Presenting the Study: Design & Methods

**Sampling**

- Refugees from 18 yrs
- PTSD
- Arabic-speaking (N=67/50)
- Typically from Iraq or Lebanon (palestinians)
- Prior informed consent to participate in in-depth interview (AAI) with obligatory interpreter (M/F)

**Measures**

- Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan & Main 1984, Main & Hesse 2002)
- Reflective Functioning Scale (RF) (Fonagy et al. 1998)
- Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) (Collins 1996)
- Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) (Horvath & Greenberg 1989)
- Feeling Word Checklist-58 (FWC-58) (Røssberg et al. 2003)
- Harvard Trauma Questionaire (HTQ) (Mollica et al.1992)
- Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL-25) (Derogatis et al. 1974)
Adult Attachment Interview
(Carol George, Nancy Kaplan & Mary Main 1984)

- A semistructured quasi-qualitative clinical interview with 20 questions and follow-up probes

- Questions focus on childhood experiences (5-12 years) with primary attachment figures

- Questions about situations where attachment system was activated (eg. separation, rejection, loss, trauma)

- Metacognitive questions that relate to inner representation of self/other

- A shifting focus on *actual episodes* and the *meaning* the person has ascribed to his/her experience.

- *Understanding attachment patterns and mentalization informs intervention rather than defines it*
AII with traumatized refugees – an exploratory approach

- AII are audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, anonymized, read and coded by certified raters with high reliability (r=.75-.80 or more)

- Rigorous procedures at pre-interview and pre-coding level: training of interviewer & interpreter, added transcription tasks, and translation-inspections.

- Cultural variations in AII-narratives with arabic-speaking refugees

- Participants reactions to the AII
Preliminary Considerations

- The Adult Attachment Interview should be used with careful caution in this population.

- The patient/client must be in psychological treatment. The interviewer/psychologist must be under supervision.

- The Loss and Trauma questions can be overwhelming. Follow the protocol, probe gently, prevent disintegration.
Preliminary Considerations

• Attachment trauma – beyond the wellknown war-related trauma

• Unresolved Traumatic losses

• Silencing strategies

• Psychological treatment presupposes a therapeutic relation and patients’ ability to relate to thoughts, feelings and actions
References


Thank you for listening…