

Objectives/Aim of the project:

- 1) To evaluate the current situation, structures and contents of the training for psychotherapists in the participating (and other) European countries systematically and with reference to the requirement of psychotherapeutic competencies. The project also intends to reflect the professionalization of psychotherapy in the countries from an interdisciplinary point of view.
- 2) To develop standardized measures for psychotherapeutic competence in the training context and to formulate core competencies for psychotherapists that could be the basis for regulations of psychotherapeutic training in the EU.
- 3) To initiate studies within the countries focusing on training related issues such as the selection of candidates, their selection of specific trainings, skill development, as well as prospective investigations of training outcome.
- 4) To develop a concept and standards for an empirically supported training of these competencies provided for institutions and sites throughout Europe.

Project background:

Mental disorders continue to be a *serious and expensive health issue* in the world and also in the European Union, affecting people of all ages, cultures and socio-economic status. More than 27% of adult Europeans are estimated to experience at least one form of mental ill health during every year. Mental ill health costs the EU an estimated 3%-4% of the gross domestic product, mainly through lost productivity. Among treatment methods like psychotropic drugs or sociotherapy, psychotherapy is a standard method to treat psychological disorders. The effectiveness of psychotherapy has been demonstrated by many empirical studies. However, the *training of psychotherapists plays an important role* for the success of a therapy. As a result of the large „Consumer Reports Study“, patients with mental health disorders rated their therapy as more successful when they were treated by a therapist with a qualitatively higher training (psychologists versus family counselors). Other studies found that the success of a psychological treatment correlates with the duration of the training of a psychotherapist. On the other hand, some psychotherapy trainings do not durably improve the effectiveness of psychotherapists or do even have unintended deleterious consequences. Psychotherapy research shows that the person of the psychotherapist itself and especially the psychotherapeutic competence (e.g. ability to form a strong therapeutic alliance) has increasingly become the focus of research rather than therapeutic techniques. This paradigm shift, e.g. has been caused by the finding that psychotherapists clearly systematically differ with respect to their effectiveness. *These research outcomes should systematically be implemented into the training of psychotherapists.* A crucial step towards that goal will be the consistent definition of psychotherapeutic competencies. Until now, there are several differing definitions, which makes the measurement of these competences even more problematic.

Up to date, there is a *striking heterogeneity in the European countries* as far as the contents of the psychotherapy training, training standards, legal regulations as well as the minimum requirements for a person admitted to the training are concerned.

There is no comprehensive empirical foundation of psychotherapy training in Europe, nor do general models of a competency-based training exist. The training mainly consists of historically developed and sometimes sparsely empirically founded components and methods.

Considering the increased mobility of European citizens and the immense responsibility of a psychotherapist in his/her work with mentally ill people, it is absolutely necessary to provide trainees in Europe with the best and empirically supported training methods and contents possible.

Expected results and lead users of these results:

- A clearer picture of the commonalities and differences of different training systems for psychotherapists/counsellors in European countries
- Questionnaires and measures for the evaluation of psychotherapeutic competencies
- A consensus on core competencies for the training of psychotherapists and training standards.
- A empirical review of implications of psychotherapy research for the training.
- Suggestions for training curricula and their distribution among training institutions and political entities.
- Implementation of the consented curricula in training institutions in Europe.
- Collaborative strategies and networks for future research on psychotherapy training.
- *Lead users* will be the training institutes all over Europe, future trainees, the scientific community and future patients as well as representatives of European health politics.

Methods/Work phases:

- 1) Systematic literature reviews
- 2) Development of core questionnaires/measures for the assessment of the research questions
- 3) Data collection: paper-pencil and electronic surveys (to gather cross-sectional and longitudinal data), surveys using the Delphi-Method (a two-step combination of open questions and quantitative data); recipients: training institutes, leading psychotherapists/mental health practitioners, trainees, trainers, psychotherapy/mental health organisations
- 4) Evaluation of and with Patient Cases, Diary Methods, Computer-assisted feedback training, external evaluation of trainee patient therapy videos, Interviews with experts
- 5) Data analysis: quantitative data analysis methods (frequencies, correlation, analysis of variance, regression models) and qualitative data analysis methods (content analysis)
- 6) Regular research meetings and conferences to inform the project partners and leading psychotherapists about the results of the surveys, to discuss and integrate research results and to reach a consensus about core competencies

Potential Network Partners:

- Université R. Descartes Paris, Research Center on Mental Health, Psychotropics & Society, France
- University of Salzburg, Department of Psychology, Austria
- Masaryk University Brno, Department of Psychology, Czech Republic
- University of Bern, Institute of Psychology, Switzerland
- University of Nottingham, Institute of Work, Health and Organisations, United Kingdom
- Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, Department of Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy, Romania
- Vilnius University, Department of Psychiatry, Lithuania
- Jagiellonian University Krakow, Department of Psychotherapy, Poland
- Radboud University Nijmegen, Academic Center for Social Sciences, Netherlands

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→ An institute for psychosocial and psychotherapy research, teaching and patient care.

Planned duration of the project: 4 Years

Potential Funding Scheme: Marie Curie Initial Training Network