

MDFT – Multidimensional Family Therapy

Abstract

Delivery of the Intervention

Family

Aim of the Intervention

The aim of the intervention is to create a positive change in a situation, where an adolescent has multiple behavioral and substance abuse problems and the supportive measures of the child welfare open care have been found insufficient. MDFT strengthens the interaction between the adolescent and their supportive network, taking into account the multiple environments, in which the adolescent acts and their closest ones as a part of the work.

Description of the Intervention

MDFT is an intensive family intervention targeted for families with 12–19 year-old adolescents suffering from behavioral and substance abuse problems. The theoretical framework of the intervention is based on systemic and structural family therapy, ecological system theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner 1979), constructs of developmental psychology and cognitive behavioral therapy and its interventions to promote change.

MDFT-team meets the adolescent, parents, other closest ones and the supportive network of the adolescent together and separately 2–3 times a week according to each particular situation. The duration of the MDFT-intervention varies from 5 to 9 months. The intervention aims to strengthen the functionality of the network and increase the adolescent's and parents' motivation for change (Ehrling 2014). The intervention uses a structured model to ensure fidelity, but the model can be tailored based on individual needs. The meetings are video-recorded to be assessed by method trainers.

Availability of the Intervention in Finland

MDFT-instructor training is targeted for the social and health care professionals, who have working experience with children and adolescents. The training is targeted at work teams. Mental Health Finland (Mieli ry) jointly with the European MDFT-Academy organizes the trainings.

The European MDFT-Academy is responsible for the dissemination of the intervention and certification of the MDFT-instructors in Europe. Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT) has been developed in the USA in the 1980 ´s and Mental Health Finland has been responsible for

the development of the Finnish intervention. The development project of the MDFT by the Mental Health Finland has been completed but the intervention has not been implemented.

Research- and Evidence-based Efficacy of the Intervention

There are international randomized controlled trials and two meta-analyses on the MDFT (Filges et al. 2015; van der Pol 2017). Most RCT-studies indicate that MDFT yields better treatment results than other therapies that are used (Henderson et al. 2010; Liddle et al. 2009). The adolescents participating in the intervention reduced substance abuse more and faster than the control group (Henderson et al. 2010; Liddle et al. 2004; Liddle et al. 2008) and the change was found also in a 12-month follow up (Liddle et al. 2008; Liddle et al. 2009; Greenbaum et al. 2015).

Depression and anxiety problems, behavioral problems as well as criminality were reduced compared to the adolescents who received other treatments (Liddle et al. 2009). Meta-analyses have shown that compared to other treatments, the MDFT is more effective in reducing substance abuse, criminality and behavioral problems (van der Pol et al. 2017) as well as decreasing the severity of substance abuse (Filges et al. 2015). The effect sizes in those meta-analyses were small. No peer reviewed research on the intervention has been conducted in Finland. The intervention has strong research-based evidence of effectiveness and it is evaluated as a strong intervention.

Literature

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