A life put on hold – Inside and outside perspectives on illness, treatment, and recovery in adolescents with restrictive eating disorders

av

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract

The overall aim of this thesis was to study adolescents with restrictive eating disorders in relation to illness, treatment, and recovery from an inside and outside perspective. Studies I and II are based on data from a national quality register for eating-disorder treatment. Studies III and IV are based on interviews with adolescents previously treated in outpatient care for a restrictive eating disorder.

The results showed that 55% of the adolescents were in remission at the end of treatment, and 85% were within a healthy weight range. The average treatment duration was 15 months. Over the years 1999–2014, remission rates and weight recovery increased, whereas treatment duration decreased. Young patients who received mainly family-based treatment had the highest probability of achieving remission at one-year follow-up, but the patients themselves were most satisfied with individual therapy.

The interviews with the adolescents revealed that they often felt a strong ambivalence during the first treatment sessions, both regarding being defined as sick and the involvement of their parents. In retrospect they believed that family involvement was important, but that individual treatment sessions were crucial. The informants highlighted that trust in the therapist was the key to successful treatment. The adolescents’ narratives drew a picture of a life that was “put on hold” during the time of illness, as their involvement in social contexts outside the family was strongly influenced. It was in these contexts that their problems first became visible, and the quality of their interpersonal relationships played a great role in the recovery process.

The results suggest that treatment for adolescents with restrictive eating disorders should be better adapted to changed social structures and patients’ individual contexts – a relevant area for future research.

Keywords: Adolescents, Anorexia Nervosa, restrictive eating disorders, family involvement, treatment outcome, patient perspectives, qualitative research, social contexts, interpersonal relationships.

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