

Dealing with comorbidity in addiction care: A look behind the scenes

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ABSTRACT

Background: The high co-occurrence of mental and substance use disorders and the related negative effects on the course of illness and treatment are well known, just as the benefits of an integrative and parallel treatment. Nevertheless, in Germany little is known on how addiction treatment centres actually deal with comorbidity, with regard to diagnostic assessment, treatment planning and the provision of complementary treatment. Furthermore, we do not know if and in what way a comorbid disorder affects treatment course and outcome. The aim of this study is to investigate the management of comorbid disorders in addiction care and to determine associated procedures and approaches, thereby unravelling the mystery of dealing with comorbidity in addiction treatment.

Methods: An online survey for personnel in outpatient addiction rehabilitation will be conducted from February to March 2016, collecting quantitative and qualitative information on the prevalence of comorbid mental disorders, diagnostic features, supply structures (e.g. co-operations with other health care providers or services, referral after treatment) and procedures within addiction care.

Results: Qualitative and quantitative information will be explored with regard to 1) prevalence of comorbid disorders (comorbid substance use and mental disorders), 2) documentation and diagnostic assessment, 3) course of treatment, treatment characteristics and supply structures and 4) the subjective assessment of the supply situation for persons with comorbidity.

Discussion: This study will give broad insight into procedures and also difficulties involved in the treatment of patients with co-occurring disorders, which allows an assessment of the current supply status of patients with comorbidity in addiction care. Results can give hints how to improve the health care situation for persons with comorbidity and may contribute to derive practical recommendations also for other areas of substance abuse treatment.