Unfree Care: Listening to Experiences of Coercion During Anorexia Nervosa Treatment

Compulsory care for adolescents with anorexia nervosa (AN) is shaped by complex relational dynamics, particularly the tension between the need for trust in the therapeutic relationship and the coercive nature of certain treatment practices. Although compulsory treatment in AN, specifically compulsory refeeding, can be life-saving and thus appears beneficial in the short term, negative and potentially traumatizing effects have also been described. An open question is how compulsory treatment is at odds with the therapeutic relationship wherein trust plays a crucial role. Despite the ethical and clinical relevance of this issue, empirical evidence on compulsory care for AN is both limited and methodologically constrained, with existing research relying predominantly on quantitative approaches that often fail to capture the lived experience of those involved. Therefore, it is investigated in the current qualitative study how coercion has impacted the therapeutic relationship and how coercion and recovery are related in the perspective of youths, parents and clinicians. In-depth interviews with 6 participants have been conducted and thematically analyzed. Preliminary findings will be presented and discussed in light of ethical dilemmas.