Introducing the Forensic-Needs-Model (FNM)

Quality of life and needs of female offenders in forensic psychiatry

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Introduction

In contrast to male offenders, the research of female offenders in forensic psychiatry is comparatively low – in this context, female offenders require treatment that takes into account women-specific characteristics (Klein, 2018; Melzer, 2001). Accommodation of offenders for an unspecified period of time is associated with restrictions in their daily life in which the issue of needs gains relevance, for example, examinations conducted by Ward and Stewart indicate that a satisfied lifestyle has a preventive effect on future delinquency (2003). This research project was carried out in Germany from 2016 to 2019 and aims to gain a first insight into the needs of female long-term mentally ill patients within the framework of qualitative basic research.

Method

Prior to data collection, a total of three criteria were defined for the selection of patients. Regarding a long-term accommodation, the first criterion is a minimum duration stay of 6,4 years. The second criterion is the affiliation to one of the three most common diagnoses of mentally ill women in forensic psychiatry in Germany, which are specific personality disorders, schizophrenia and intelligence impairments. The third criterion is voluntary participation. According to the criteria, nine guideline-based interviews were conducted in three German federal states in open, partially open and highly secured settings.

The duration of stay varied between 6,6 and 23,6 years. In order to comply with the diagnostic criteria, the sample contains four patients with personality disorders, three with schizophrenic disorders and two with intelligence impairments as main diagnoses.

Results

The key finding of this research, is the need to maintain the self-image of a "normal" woman living in regular life, outside of forensic psychiatry. Subordinate to this, seven further needs could be identified together with their dynamics. These are autonomy and identification, spatial and interpersonal variety, calm, company and intimacy. In addition, relevant frameworks of the clinical everyday life are identified which are closely related to the fulfilment of these needs. The offenders' needs become especially relevant in the framework of work and daily activity, contacts outside and inside of forensic psychiatry, their own room, leisure time and unsupervised leave and intimate partner relationships. Some additional limiting factors for the fulfillment of their needs are determined in the study, based on structural issues of the institution as well as individual employee approaches to the daily routine of the offenders. Part of the final result is presented below in the Forensic-Needs-Model of female perpetrators in forensic psychiatry. The model should be read in a downward direction, whilst sustaining the self image of a woman living a regular life is the main need and concern.