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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHEMA FOCUSED THERAPY; INDIRECT, EXPERIMENTAL MEASURES OF EMOTIONAL CHANGE IN FORENSIC PATIENTS

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According to recent literature, 50 to 90 percent of criminal offenders have personality disorders (PDs), with cluster B PDs being the most prevalent in forensic settings. The latter type of PD is associated with an increased risk of violence and recidivism. Among forensic patients with a cluster B diagnosis, psychopathic offenders are at particularly high risk for re-offending. Psychopaths are believed to be untreatable, but evidence for this view is weak.

The current study aims at determining the effectiveness of Schema Focused Therapy (SFT) versus 'treatment as usual' in male forensic patients (including psychopaths) with Antisocial, Borderline, Narcissistic, and Paranoid PDs, within a 3-year multi-center randomized clinical trial. SFT is an integrative form of psychotherapy combining cognitive, behavioral, psychodynamic object relations, and humanistic/existential approaches, and was developed as a treatment for PDs and other longstanding problems. SFT aims at changing early maladaptive schema modes, thereby producing changes on a structural, emotional level.

The goal of a second study that runs within the same project is to objectively determine the nature of the emotional deficiencies that are thought to be central to psychopathy. By administering forensic patients an extensive test battery that assesses various affective capacities (e.g., moral emotion, emotional expressive behavior, cognitive and emotional empathy), we aim at constructing an integrative picture of psychopaths' emotional functioning. Within the SFT effectiveness study, patients are tested twice (with a one year interval), to see whether these affective capacities are subject to change in the context of therapy.