

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA16102

STSM title: Strengthening research competencies in the field of youth psychotherapy research with focus on mentalization.

The Host institution was Institute for Psychosocial Prevention in University of Heidelberg (Prof. Svenja Taubner).

STSM start and end date: 7/10/2018 – 3/11/2018

Grantee name: Lina Gervinskaite-Paulaitiene

PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

(max.200 words)

The overall aim of the STSM was to improve grantee's research competencies in the field of youth psychotherapy research with focus on mentalization.

This aim included several narrower aspects. First of all, as there are no research groups systematically working with youth psychotherapy research in Lithuania the opportunity to interact and learn from experienced researchers at the Institute was important for developing my research competencies in this field. Second, STSM also aimed to increase my knowledge in specialized applications of Mentalization based therapy (MBT), especially for Conduct disorder and their randomised control trials. This part of the aim was motivated by my special interest in MBT, clinical applications of research findings related to mentalization and my work in Lithuania in research studying adolescents with significant behavioral problems. Third, my dissertation was on mentalization in early adolescence and its links with abuse and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Therefore, the goal was also to work with Institute's researchers to improve the statistical analysis of the dissertation data and to increase the chances of preparing high quality research paper which could add up to scientific knowledge about the importance of mentalization in mental health problems of young adolescents and their prevention and intervention.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

(max.500 words)

My main activities during the STSM included joint work with Institute's researchers, attending meetings and supervisions, also individual work:

- Learning about research studies conducted in the Institute was carried out in two ways. First, through individual or small group discussions with researchers working with the studies and second, during the institute's meetings, where organizational as well as scientific parts of the studies were discussed (attended 3 institute's organizational meetings).

Applicant learned in depth about these studies: RCT on MBT for Conduct disorder (MBT-CD) in adolescence; RCT on a brief psychodynamic parent-child therapy for regulatory problems in infancy; a longitudinal controlled study of early prevention program “Nobody Slips Through the Net”; research on development of Patient Attachment Coding System; study of short-term intervention for health professionals for increasing their mentalization.

- Learning principles of planning and conducting randomized control trials with emphasis on studying mechanisms of change (mediators) was also accomplished in two ways. First, through discussing studies mentioned above and learning about details how to plan, organize the study, choose suitable assessment methods, also about problems common in RCT and possible solutions of them. Second, through in depth continuous discussion with dr. Jana Volkert of possible RCT study on mentalization based intervention program in Lithuania. The latter included joint discussions and also my individual work in studying the intervention manual and analysis of possibilities of this RCT in Lithuania.
- Continuous work with Lithuanian data of young adolescents’ mentalization, experience of abuse, and emotional and behavioural difficulties in collaboration with prof. Svenja Taubner, Paul Schröder-Pfeifer. First of all, I presented my research at the Institute’s team meeting. After that more thorough discussion about mentalization assessment methods (including the development process of my Situational Stories method) and statistical analysis of their psychometric properties followed. Further, new statistical analysis was applied to the data and ideas for two research papers continuously discussed with collaborators. Progress on the idea and statistical analysis for the first paper was presented during another Institute’s team meeting. I also worked on preparing manuscript plan and some parts of the manuscript based on results of Lithuanian data. This will be continued and finished after the STSM.
- Learning principles of coding and using Reflective Functioning Scale. It included analysis of coding manual, discussions of coding principles, analysis coding protocols, research materials, possibilities and difficulties of application and coding process, new possibilities of brief version applications and research with it. I also learned the principles of Patient Attachment Coding System, got introduced to extensive theoretical thinking behind the coding, to complicated and elaborated coding process, learned about PACS development process and research data on it and also new ideas for future development of PACS, application possibilities in research.
- Other main activities included attending two MBT-CD supervisions, attending session of doctoral students’ poster presentations (peer learning group) in Centre for Psychosocial Medicine, learning principles of conducting systematic reviews in the field of psychotherapy research through discussions and analysis of systematic reviews research papers, basic theoretical principles and guidelines for systematic reviews.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

- My competence and understanding about RCT’s has been highly improved. Discussions about the Institute’s RCTs and discussions of possible RCT in Lithuania in collaboration with Institute researchers helped me better understand how to develop idea for RCT project, raise proper research questions, prepare grant proposal, plan, conduct RCT according to high quality standards. I improved my knowledge about how to choose primary and secondary outcome measures, how to include suitable assessment measures for possible mechanisms of change (mediators).
- New extensive statistical analysis on Lithuanian data set was completed. The analysis yielded ideas for two research papers. Statistical analysis for one paper, manuscript plan has been completed during the STSM. The idea and agreement how to proceed with the second publication was also agreed during the STSM. The joint work with highly experienced researchers, feedback from Institute’s team greatly improved my statistical and methodological knowledge which already is and will be extremely helpful in increasing the quality of my research, choice of assessment methods, statistical analysis of gathered data, quality of my future publications.
- Improved understanding of mentalization assessment subtleties, difficulties and possibilities not only in adolescence but also in adulthood. Before STSM I had quite good understanding about available

mentalization assessment methods for adolescents, but the experience during STSM increased my knowledge during first-hand experience what is happening in the field and now am familiar with up-to-date questions and good practices. I also had a chance to discuss mentalization assessment method, Situational stories, with other researchers who are also working with development of vignette based measure for mentalization. This not only provided opportunity to share my experience, but also to get new insights for future developments of Situational Stories.

- Better understanding of MBT and main components of it, but also improved understanding of MBT-CD and its differences from MBT for adults with Borderline personality disorder and not specialized MBT for adolescents. I also learned about MBT adherence rating scale and experienced the rating process during supervisions which even more increased the understanding of MBT and also the importance of supervisions and therapist adherence rating during RCT. All this knowledge is highly valuable in my present work in our research team in Vilnius University, where we are preparing a theoretically and empirically based recommendations for practitioners working with adolescents with significant behavior problems.
- Improved understanding of coding principles of RFS and PACS and possible application opportunities in research studies, improved understanding of systemic review principles. This will be very valuable in planning and conducting future studies, increase possibilities of joining other researchers in systematic reviews.
- The above mentioned results already are and will be valuable not only for my research personally, but also will add to higher quality research studies in Lithuania through sharing my knowledge with my colleagues, my students. The obtained results will also increase my possibilities of international collaboration possibilities in future research activities and projects.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

- In collaboration with Prof. Svenja Taubner and Paul Schröder I am further working on preparation of joint research paper, which should result in submission of the paper to high quality research journal.
- The development of the idea for the second research paper and implementation of agreed first steps will be jointly implemented.
- Possible collaboration in joint research study on MBT based intervention program for parents have been discussed. Possibilities for future collaboration can proceed in at least two ways. First, as a joint research project with research grant funding. Second, small scale study implementation in Lithuania where expertise of Institute's researchers could guide the choice of main assessment measures in order to use same measures as are used in the Institute in order to have possibility to compare and also analyse the gathered intervention outcome data together.
- After meeting in person researchers in the Institute and having opportunity to learn about their studies and research standards it will be easier to look for opportunities for joint research projects and other collaboration opportunities and to seek methodological support from experienced researchers in order to ensure high quality research.