

## Does psychotherapists' interpersonal perceptual skills make a difference for their patients?

Irena Makower, Stephan Hau, Lennart Högman, Håkan Fischer

The demand for psychological therapies, especially CBT, in Sweden today is bigger than the supply. The aim of psychotherapy training is to increase therapist's competence which is expected to lead to improved outcomes for patients.

Therapist's Interpersonal perceptual skills (IPS) are also called "common factors" because they are important in all psychological therapies (Benett-Levy, Thwaites, 2007). An initial study was done on 24 CBT therapists who treated two patients each during the course of CBT therapist training. The hypothesis was that the ability to recognize emotional facial expressions improves psychotherapist's understanding of the patient's emotional signals in the therapy situation and thus leads to better treatment outcomes and more satisfied patients. In a first study Ekman's computerized program Micro Expression Training Tool (Mett, 2003) was used to evaluate ability to recognize facial expressions among therapists. Interestingly, ability for recognition of sadness among psychotherapists was correlated significantly and positively with experienced satisfaction with therapy among their patients (0.67,  $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, ability for fear recognition among psychotherapists was related to better outcome of anxiety treatment. As a next step psychology students beginning to treat patients will be investigated before and after intense IPS training in order to evaluate whether their IPS improve with training and in next step how therapist's IPS relates to patient's treatment outcome and satisfaction with therapy.