A NEW TRAINING TO IMPROVE EMOTIONAL REGULATION SKILLS FOR PROFESSIONAL CARERS WORKING WITH OLDER PEOPLE WITH ID

Case Vignette

For the last four years Mr. W. has worked as a front-line carer in an assisted living community for older people with an intellectual disability (ID). Mr. W. was always very proud of the fact that individual care was not an empty promise, but taken very serious at his place of work. People's wishes were taken into account and the daily routines were handled as individually as possible. This created more work for Mr. W. and his team, but they were happy to go the extra mile.

Lately he was confronted with several difficult situations at work: Mrs. M., a resident in the assisted living facility displayed difficult behavior during the past few weeks. She was aggressive and violent towards other residents and Mr. W. The team and residents were also confronted with the sudden and unexpected death of Mr. F., another resident. Lastly a team-internal problem arose as one staff member had to often swap shifts at the last minute due to a family member in need of care.

As much as Mr. W. tries to meet everybody's needs, he has started to notice that it is getting too much for him to handle. He has realized that his contact with the residents is not as personal as it used to be and he has a feeling of reluctance when he has to go to work.

Why is training on emotional regulation relevant for professional carers working with older people with ID ?

Studies on stress and strains in professional carers revealed that 25 % respectively 32.5 % of front-line staff working with people with ID were confronted with intense levels of stress. Furthermore, specific challenges suggest that professional carers working with aging people with ID are confronted with a high amount of possible stressors.

Stress levels of professional carers in general are influenced by challenging behavior. However, the likelihood of challenging behavior increases in older persons with ID, as there is a higher risk of dementia and other age associated diseases. Furthermore, the additional time needed to care for aging people with ID due to their lowering level of daily competence also directly influences the perceived stress level of carers.

Additionally, higher age of the persons with ID increases the probability of emotional challenging life events, such as social changes like retirement and the loss of relatives (especially parents) or dear front-line staff.

Consequently, a variety of different stress factors can contribute to stress in professional carers working with older people with ID. On the one hand, these factors include the characteristics of service users, as mentioned before. On the other hand, within-staff factors, like younger age of the professional carer, a lack of knowledge about challenging behavior or a deficit in strategies dealing with stress can also increase the perceived level of stress.

It is thus not surprising that several studies show that the way in which work related emotions are handled by professional carers has great impact on how likely they perceive high levels of stress.

In accordance to these findings and to provide professional carers with a broad set of skills to increase their ability to regulate emotions, the University of Vienna developed a training module on emotional regulation skills in the context of the AGID project.

What are the objectives of the training ?

The module's aim is to give front-line staff caring for people with ID the possibility to better cope with stress and challenges in their everyday work life.

The content of the module aims to help during times of extreme stress and pressure by reducing negative effects caused by stress, maintaining a high quality of life and ensuring a socially responsible behavior towards people with ID and colleagues.

What is the content of the training ?

The training is subdivided into three main topics. The first chapter provides a detailed overview of emotional regulation and specific stress factors challenged with when working with aging people with ID. Based on case vignettes and exercises, professional carers will receive insights into the following topics :

- What is emotional regulation ?
- Stress factors in your work environment.

- Stress factors when caring for aging people with ID.

- Specific aspects when caring for people with ID.

The second chapter addresses consequences of stress and pressure as well as preventive coping strategies. Specifically the following issues are covered :

- Stress and burn out.

- Aggression and violence.

- Benefitting from resources in the care environment.

- Co-workers.

- Problem solving behavior.

- Relaxation techniques.

The third chapter provides an overview of specific strategies designed to help with challenging situations when caring for aging people with ID. In several exercise courses participants acquire skills and competences in :

- Central life events of aging people with ID.

- Communication skills - how to deliver bad news to people with ID.

- Death and grief when caring for people with ID.

The module is concluded by a summary of the most important issues. Also, a self-test at the end gives professional carers the possibility of testing their knowledge they have acquired in the course of this module.

Which competencies can be acquired ?

Professional careers should have acquired the following competencies after completing the module :

- Ability to reflect and systematically explore stress factors in one's own work environment.

- Recognition of one's own risk of a burn out.

- The ability to recognize and handle organizational or personal violence and aggression.

- The ability to systematically recognize and benefit from resources available in the work environment.

- Measures to ensure a social and productive exchange in a professional environment.

- Knowledge of goal oriented problem solving strategies.

- The ability to exercise relaxation techniques.

- Reflecting on one's own understanding of aging and death.

- Communication skills when delivering bad news.

- Knowledge of important steps in case of the death of an aging persons with ID.

More information/Contact

If you are interested in the module or need further information, please contact the project team at the University of Vienna (andreas.kocman@univie.ac.at).

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