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Social Cognition and Interaction Training for First Episode Psychosis: A Feasibility Study

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Introduction

Cognitive deficits are prominent and stable features of schizophrenia. Social cognition is one focused area for intervention as massive studies revealed its connection to functional outcomes. Social Cognition and Interaction Training (SCIT) is a manualized, group based intervention aiming to improve social cognition and social functioning. There were many evidences on its effectiveness for chronic schizophrenia but only one paper on its potential benefit for people with first-episode psychosis (FEP). As evidence supported the importance of early intervention to maximize treatment effect, SCIT is incorporated into our early psychosis service at Occupational Therapy Department to improve their social cognitive ability and functioning for successful community living.

Objectives

To evaluate the feasibility of SCIT group for FEP service users

Methodology

FEP service users with needs for enhancing social cognition were recruited to join a 20-session SCIT group, which was run twice a week, two sessions per time. The primary outcomes were measured with Chinese Social Cognition and Screening Questionnaire (C-SCSQ), Facial Expression Identification Test (FEIT) and MATRICS Consensus Cognitive Battery (MCCB) and the secondary outcome using Social and Occupational Functioning Assessment Scale (SOFAS) will be done at baseline and immediately after the intervention. A questionnaire to collect service user's perceptions of usefulness of SCIT, chart of attendance reflecting their acceptance were collected, and individual feedbacks were videotaped at last session of the group.

Result

A total of 20 FEP service users participated. Two SCIT groups were completed and the third group will be completed in March 2016. A preliminary analysis on 12 participants demonstrated positive results on outcomes with significant improvement

in two neuro-cognitive components in MATRICS: (1) processing speed ($p=0.004$) and (2) reasoning ($p=0.013$). Also, numerical improvement was found in social cognition (including emotion processing, theory of mind and attributional style), and social functioning. The qualitative questionnaire demonstrated excellent satisfaction (score 8.8/10) and great acceptance towards SCIT group with very high attendance (80% to 100%). Participants appreciated the learning process to enhance their social cognitive ability, its usefulness and applicability with skill consolidation and generalization to everyday life situation. Results show positive feedback in both quantitative and qualitative ways. It suggests that SCIT is welcomed and potentially helpful for early psychosis population to improve social cognition and functioning. Larger scale RCT study is warranted to affirm the effectiveness of SCIT for FEP service users.