Mentalization-based Treatments with school-age children:

a systematic review

Nick Midgley
with Eva Sprecher and Michelle Sleed
Mentalizing and middle childhood

The publication of ‘Affect Regulation...’ in 2002

Part Two of the book: ‘Developemental perspectives’
More recent reviews

Psychology and Psychotherapy

Mentalization-based treatment and its evidence-base status: A systematic literature review

Javier Malda-Castillo, Claire Browne, Guillermo Perez-Algorta

First published: 09 August 2018 | https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12195 | Cited by: 1

Mentalizing Makes Parenting Work: A Review about Parental Reflective Functioning and Clinical Interventions to Improve It

Andrea Camoirano

Annotated Citation


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Where is middle childhood in the theory and clinical practice of MBT?
The aims and design of the current study

To explore what has happened to middle childhood in the clinical practice of mentalization-based treatment?

A systematic review of mentalization-based interventions where the primary target group was school-age children, aged 5-12, and/or their parents or carers

Work published in English

Intervention was MBT or primarily mentalization-informed approach
Search Strategy

PICO Model for Database Searches for Systematic Reviews of Health-Related Research (Schardt, Adams, Owens, Keitz & Fontelo, 2007)

Population
• children (aged 5-12 years old)
• families
• parents
• pre-teens
• pre-pubescent
• school aged
• young people

Intervention
• mentalization / MBT / reflective functioning / mind-mindedness
• therapy / intervention / treatment

Comparison
• N/A

Outcomes
• wellbeing
• mental health
• psychological
• behavioural
• relational?
• etc.
Findings of Search

CINAHL
n = 290

EMBASE
n = 104

PsychINFO
n = 1491

Scopus
n = 509

Web of Science
n = 838

Without duplicates
n = 2825

After title filter
n = 1691

After abstract filter
n = 171

After full text review
n = 52

Added by hand search
n = 13
Key findings

Given the range of studies found, a thematic synthesis was carried out to examine papers through examining:

1. **Target groups** – what kind of children did the intervention aim to help?

2. **Intervention format** – what format did the intervention take?

3. **Outcomes** – was any empirical data presented, and if so, what level of evidence was found for interventions?
Key findings 1: Target groups

Variation in specificity of age group, with very few studies identified target group by formal diagnosis.

Children mostly identified by:

- **current presentation** (e.g. emotional/behavioural difficulties)
- **experience** (e.g. maltreatment/neglect, bullying)
- **Family or system factors** (e.g. living in foster care, living in extreme poverty, affected by high parental conflict)
Key findings 2: Intervention format

Wide variation in intervention format:

**Individual** child therapy

**Family-based** interventions
Key findings 2: Intervention format

Wide variation in intervention format:

**Individual** child therapy

**Family-based** interventions

**Mz-based** parent trainings

**Whole system** interventions
Key findings 3: Outcomes

Around one third of the papers (n =18) reported original outcome or evaluation data

Only one was a rigorous cluster-RCT (Peaceful Schools; Fonagy et al., 2009); 3 feasibility/pilot RCTs; most were simple pre-post evaluations with no random allocation.

Average sample size for pre-post evaluations was N = 34 children/carers/families

Clear lack of systematic measurement of child mentalizing capacity
Key findings 3: Outcomes

• Consistent **positive effects** on:
  – Child mental health and behaviour (7/7 studies showed +ve outcomes)
  – Child aggression (2/2 large studies showed +ve outcomes)

• **Mixed evidence** of impact of interventions on:
  – Caregiver mentalizing (5/7 showed +ve outcomes)
  – Parenting stress (2/3 studies showed +ve outcomes)
  – Parental self-efficacy (2/3 studies showed +ve outcomes)
Example 1 – mentalizing in schools

Whole system approach

Multi-level approach

Teacher training

The Resilience Programme (Valle et al., 2016, 2018; Skaarup, 2018)
Example 2 – fostering and adoption

Whole system approach

Training/support of professionals

Training for foster/adoptive parents

Direct therapeutic work

MBT-F (Midgley, et al., 2018, 2109)
MBT-C (Rowny, 2019; Ramires et al, 2012)
MBT-C groups (Ingleby-Cook, 2013)
Where are we today with mentalization-based interventions for school-age children?

A wide range of mentalization-based interventions have been developed for school-age children.

Lack of commonly-used measures to assess mz in school-age children.

More systematic evaluation of interventions is required!
Thank you!

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