Projekt HEALTH-ED

Mechanisms of pathological exercise: Effects of moderate vs. high intensity physical exercise on cognitions and affect in patients with eating disorders (HEALTH-ED)

Principal investigators:
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Funding: German Research Foundation / Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft DFG

Background:

Eating disorders are among the most dangerous and treatment-resistant mental disorders. Problematic or maladpative exercise is one of the most complex and understudied symptoms and maintaining factors of this condition. At the same time, exercise usually has positive effects, including on mental health conditions. More knowledge about how exercise – and exercise intensity - relates to affective and cognitive processes is therefore essential for the development of tailored treatment approaches.

Aim of the study:

This study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the psychological mechanisms that underly both positive and negative effects of physical activity in eating disorders. The intensity of exercise (moderate vs. high) will be modified in an experimental condition (cycling sessions) and the effects on emotional processes (such as the regulation of negative mood) and cognitions (e.g. pressure to be thin, body dissatisfaction) examined - both immediately following the intervention and in terms of its effects on everyday life.

The study focuses on a comparison of people with an eating disorder (anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa) who exhibit problematic/maladaptive exercise with those who do not, and with healthy control subjects. The study also includes an investigation into the role of neurobiological factors (MRI) and cognitive functions.

The study will start in April 2027 and run for 3 years. It will be conducted at two sites, Freiburg and Mannheim.

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