Abstract

Introduction: Even though it is expected that patients and therapist will agree on when to terminate psychotherapy, quite often patients discontinue treatment on their own. This study aims to better understand dropout in psychoanalytic psychotherapy (PP). Method: Baseline and post-treatment interviews were conducted with six adult women classified by their therapists as dropout patients at a PP outpatient clinic. Results were analyzed using Bardin’s content analysis. Results: Content analysis generated five categories (reasons for treatment, goals, readiness to change, previous treatment, transference) for the baseline interviews and three categories (change process, results, interruption) for post-treatment interviews. Unclear treatment goals, low readiness to change, early signs of negative transference and resistance, and absence of recognition of their own participation in problems emerged in baseline interviews. In most cases, the patient’s evaluation of the therapeutic relationship was not determinant of dropout. Therapeutic gains, dissatisfaction, and resistance during the psychotherapeutic process seemed to be associated with noncompliance. Conclusions: Decisions to initiate, continue, or quit PP depend on multiple factors, such as initial goals, readiness to change, insight capacity, awareness of personal problems, resistance, and transference. However, these factors should be considered in view of the methodological limitations of this study. Further investigation of PP dropout is still necessary.

Keywords
Patient dropout, psychoanalytic psychotherapy, qualitative research, mental health services.