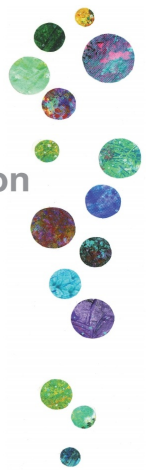


## Gifted adult clients in mental health care



*Although giftedness is not a part of the DSM-classification, a lot of gifted adults in mental health care report psychological problems linked to their giftedness. How to address these sort of problems is not yet a part of the training of mental health care professionals.*

*Giftedness and related problems are overlooked and typical behavior is not recognized and understood. This can result in wrong or partly wrong diagnoses, misunderstanding, frustrated clients and mental health care professionals, and premature ending of the consultation.*

*The aim of this leaflet is to provide information about the problem areas, a possibly gifted person could be asking for help about. It can be used in a first screening of clients and possibly help to build a base for an effective course of treatment.*

### What is giftedness?

Quite often it is thought that giftedness is mainly a case of a high IQ (e.g. an IQ score above 130). The problem with this definition is that it does not give any insight into the specific traits of gifted people. What does it mean to be this intelligent? Research and clinical studies have shown that a new definition is necessary. At the IHBV we use this description that is made in 2007 by a panel of twenty experts:

*A quick and clever thinker, who can deal with complex issues. Autonomous, curious and driven nature. A sensitive and emotional, intensely living person. He or she loves creating.*

(Kooijman-van Thiel, M. (red.), 2008).

The specific traits of gifted people have the downside that they differ strongly from average. This requires a larger capacity to adapt and hence can increase the chance of something going wrong in this process. On the other hand the specific traits come with specific developmental needs. In general this is not enough provided for. This increases the chance of the development going askew. The following is intended as an aid during a screening to recognize behaviors that could indicate giftedness.

### Signals that could indicate a gifted adult

- Abstract and overly thoughtful way of speaking.
- High values, strong sense of justice.
- Non-conventional life choices.
- Very specific interests and hobbies.
- Quick and associative thinking; skipping steps causing confusion and not being understood.
- Highly sensitive in psychomotor, sensory, intellectual, imaginative and/or emotional areas.
- A lot of changes of schools / careers, interruptions.
- Completed a high qualification without a lot of effort, or a remarkably low qualification or not been able to finish an education.
- A very strong need for autonomy, with the downside of not being able to accept rules.
- A rational approach to problems (but the emotion is there on the background).
- The client takes up the role of the professional.

### Additional diagnostics

An intelligence test can determine the IQ score, but it is recommendable to be cautious. A score of e.g. 128 does not mean that the client is not gifted. Clients can have lower scores because of performance anxiety, a history of not performing up to potential, a low education, background problems in the developmental system, a different mother tongue, dyslexia and the problems the client came to seek help for. To get a score that is too high, is not possible.

The decision to take an intelligence or personality test is made in interaction between the professional and the client. The professional gives a good explanation about the tests, their significance in the diagnostic process and considers together with the client whether testing is not too aggravating or stressful. In practice it is known that other diagnoses can coexist with giftedness: mood disorders, anxiety disorders, relationship problems, and work and learning related problems. Other psychological problems can coexist. Allergies are also common. The behavior of gifted adults can resemble AD(H)D, ASS and/or personality disorders (Webb et al, 2005).

### Problems of gifted adults applying for mental health care

#### *Frequent intrapersonal problems*

- Existential solitude and depression
- Anxiety for failure and feelings of uncertainty about one's own abilities (possibly in combination with the awareness of one's talents).
- Adaptability problems / the sense of not belonging with others, being different from others.
- Unable to stop thinking, flight of thoughts and ideas.
- Emotional inner world, experiences and rollercoasters of physical sensations.

#### *Frequent interpersonal problems*

- Being called too serious, too sensitive, impatient, stubborn, too intensely preoccupied with own interests, know it all, overly idealistic.
- Overly living up to (real or assumed) expectations of others.
- Relationship problems: not feeling understood, being disappointed in others, not being able to see depth and intimacy fulfilled in relationships.
- Workplace related problems: e.g. conflicts with superiors, feeling unconnected with colleagues, often ending up in the position of scapegoat or whistle-blower.

#### *Frequent functioning problems*

- Problems in executive functions: planning, organization and concentration.
- Specific learning disabilities as a result of e.g. dyslexia or dyscalculia.

Translation: Henriëtte Pilkes

### References

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Webb, J.T., Amend, E.R., Webb, N.E., Goerss, J., Beljan, P., Olenchak, F.R. (2005). *Misdiagnosis and dual diagnoses of gifted children and adults*. Tucson, Arizona: Great Potential Press, Inc.