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Children and adolescents with functional somatic symptoms: EMPOWERMENT AND ILLNESS BELIEFS AFTER FAMILY THERAPY

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BACKGROUND:

Functional somatic symptoms (FSS), also named medically unexplained symptoms or somatization, is a subjectively real and distressing phenomena beyond deliberate control of the patient. (1)

Young patients with FSS are common and can present in all clinical settings. Clinical presentation varies from self-limiting to severe and disabling symptoms with impairment in several domains of daily life.

A biopsychosocial framework, considering the relative contribution of biological, psychological and social factors, is generally accepted for the understanding of FSS.

Research in adults has shown psychological treatment to be effective for FSS. Especially the effect of CBT has been systematically examined and documented. Dysfunctional illness beliefs and improvement of empowerment may be important areas to target in the treatment (5)

However, the present knowledge about use of psychological treatment and significance of illness perception and empowerment in children and adolescents with severe FSS is limited. Furthermore, even though it is generally accepted that family factors are significant in the development and perpetuation of FSS in children, specific research on family based treatment is scarce (1)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

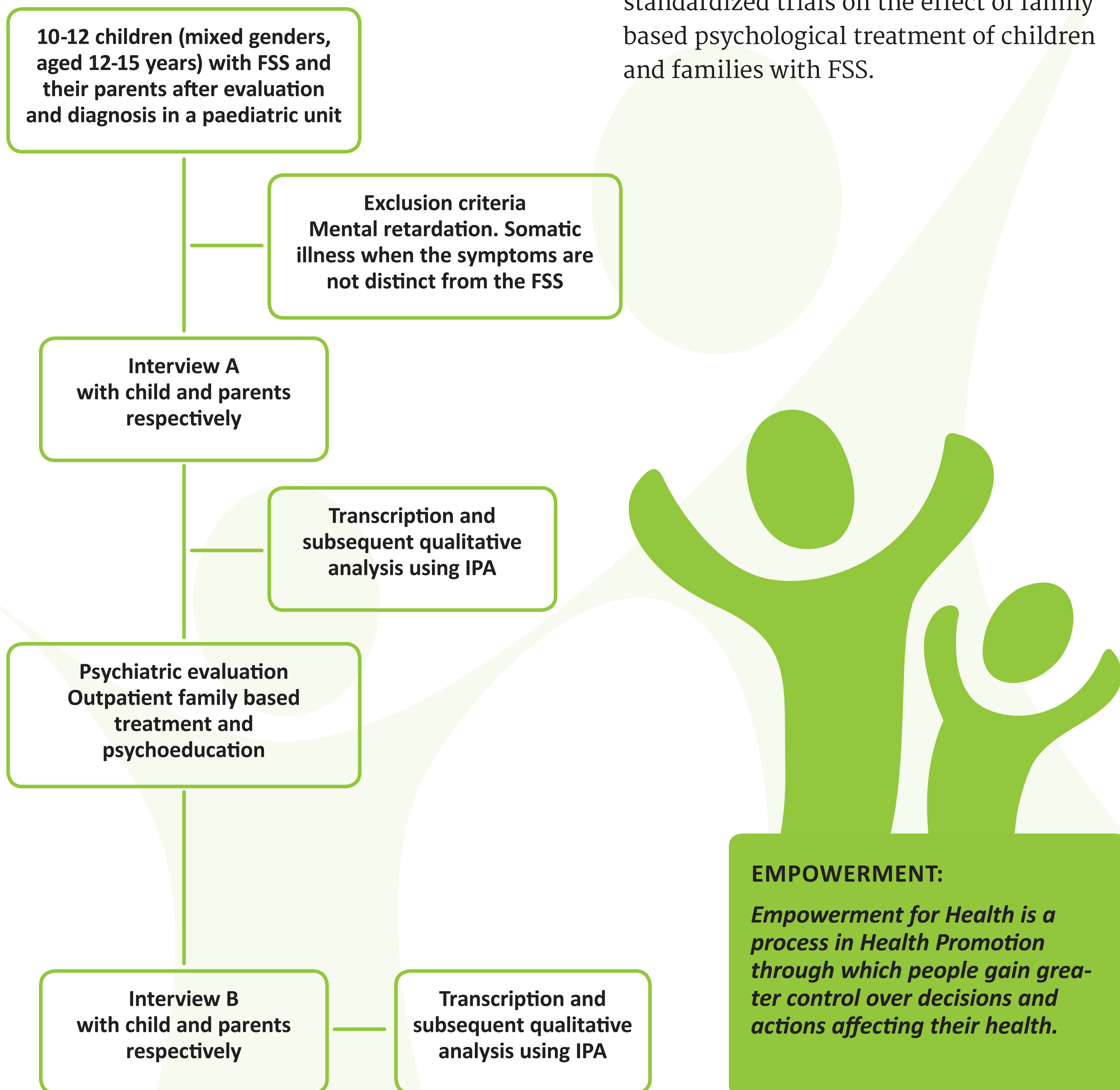
1. How do children with FSS and their parents experience, understand, explain and cope with the symptoms after a diagnostic assessment and explanation of the diagnosis in a pediatric unit?
2. How do illness beliefs and sense of empowerment evolve and change during specialized family based treatment and how does this influence on the children's and parent's symptom experience and coping strategies?

ILLNESS BELIEFS:

How illness is experienced by an individual, including personal understanding and interpretation of symptoms, thoughts about treatment and prognosis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- A qualitative study with data collection by semi-structured interviews with approx. 10 children with FSS and their parents respectively.
- Data analysis will be conducted with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a well-described qualitative method combining hermeneutic and phenomenological thoughts.



PERSPECTIVES:

By providing new and valuable knowledge about how specialized treatment with family therapy and psychoeducation is perceived and experienced, and how the treatment program affects illness beliefs and sense of empowerment, the results can be used in

- Planning future family based treatment of children with FSS.
- Planning future research, for example standardized trials on the effect of family based psychological treatment of children and families with FSS.

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