

Group Counseling

Lecture 1

Historical Perspective of Group Therapy

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Introduction to Lecture One

This lecture will define group counseling, explain the importance of group counseling, identify types of groups and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of group counseling. The purpose of this lecture is to introduce you to group counseling techniques and help you to conduct effective group therapies as well as help you to appreciate group dynamics in therapeutic counseling practice.

Lecture Learning Outcomes

At the end of the lecture, you will be able to:

- i. Define group therapy.
- ii. Explain the purpose and benefits of group therapy.
- iii. Identify different types of group therapy.
- iv. Differentiate between individual and group therapy.

Introduction

Group counselling mainly involves coming together of a small group of members with common specific goals, shared their problems or concerns where they provide empathy and support to each other. The group members are also assisted in developing their existing skills in dealing with interpersonal problems, reducing self-harm, promoting self-care and self-esteem, and or/ changing negative behavior among others.

Why Group Therapy?

According to Corey (2004) Group counselling has preventive as well as remedial goals. The counselling group has a specific focus which may be educational, vocational, social, or personal. The group involves an interpersonal process that stresses conscious thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Counselling groups are often problem oriented with their content and aim determined largely by the members from the onset. Group counselling tends to be growth oriented in that the emphasis is on discovering internal resources of strength.

Definition of Group Therapy

Group therapy or group counseling is a general term used to indicate a type of a group whose main purpose includes increasing members self-awareness in terms of their thoughts, feelings, and actions/behaviors; assists them to clarify the changes they most want to make in their lives and offers them some of the tools or life skills necessary to make the desired lifelong changes. Most therapy groups consist of eight (8) to twelve (12) members for effective processing and attention to individual needs within a group. Group therapy observes all ethical principles as applied in individual counseling and members mainly share what they are comfortable sharing within a group context (Corey, 2012).

Historical Perspective of Group Therapy

Group therapy originated in response to a shortage during World War II of personnel trained to provide individual therapy. At first, the group therapist assumed a traditional therapeutic role, frequently working with a small number of clients with a common problem. Gradually leaders began to experiment with different roles. Many of them discovered that the group setting offered unique therapeutic possibilities (Corey, 2004, 2008). Individual therapies sometimes cannot meet diverse needs of clients that can only be met in a group context. For example, groups of people

struggling with addiction and those who need to feel a sense of belonging because they wish to identify with similar experiences, would work best in group context. Such clients include those suffering from chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDS, gender identity and expression, cancer, diabetes or mood disorders like bipolar, or those going through challenging times in life like bereavement, losses and change in relationships like separation and divorce. For children, teens and youths, group work has proven to be very effective in schools and rehabilitation centres (Yalom, 2015).

Purpose of Group Therapy

Group therapy is intended for people who would like to improve their ability to cope with difficulties and problems in their lives. It has the following functions:

- It has preventive as well as remedial goals.
- Usually has specific focus like educational, vocational, social, and personal.
- Promotes interpersonal process that stresses consciousness thoughts, feelings, and behavior.
- Emphasis is on discovering internal resources of strength through trust, empathy, and compassion.

Basically, the role of a group counsellor is to facilitate interaction among the members to help them assist each other, establish personal development goals, and acquire life skills for coping with current and /or future challenges.

Goals of Group Therapy

Some of the common group therapy goals include helping members to:

- learn to trust oneself and others.
- increase awareness and self-knowledge; to develop a sense of one's unique identity.

- recognize the commonality of members needs and problems and to develop a sense of universality.
- increase self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-respect, and to achieve a new view oneself and others.
- develop concern and compassion for others.
- find alternative ways of dealing with more normal developmental issues and of resolving certain conflicts.
- make specific plans for changing certain self-defeating behaviors and to commit oneself to follow through with these plans.

Types of Groups

According to (Corey, 2012), groups can take many forms that may include but not limited to:

Group Counselling which usually focuses on a particular type of problem, which may be personal, educational, social, or vocational. It is often carried out in institutional settings, such as schools, college counselling centres, and community mental health clinics.

Personal-Growth Groups: Offers an intensive experience intended to help relatively healthy people function better on an interpersonal level. Personal growth groups range from those with an open structure, in which participants shape the direction of the group, to those characterized by a specific focus.

T-Groups or Laboratory-Training Groups: They are usually referred training groups, laboratory-training groups, or sensitive-training groups. They tend to emphasize the human relation skills required for successful functioning in a business organization.

Structured Groups: These focus on one theme mainly by agencies, schools and college counselling centres. The themes usually depend on the interest of the leader and the population of the group.

Such groups share the aim of providing members with increased awareness of some life problem and the tools to better cope with it. For example, stress management, overcoming perfectionism etc.

Self- Help Groups: Serve a critical need for certain populations that are not met by professional mental health workers. Such groups are composed of people with a common interest, provide a support system that helps reduce psychological stress and give members the incentive to begin challenging their life.

Classification of Groups

Groups are mainly classified as follows:

- Open verse closed groups.
- Voluntary verses involuntary groups
- Heterogeneous verses homogeneous groups

Open verses Closed Group.

An open group is one where members are allowed to join the group at any time at any stage while a closed group is one where members are not allowed to join once the group has started. So, at times the groups operate as cohorts in terms of formation time, membership criteria and other group formation norms. Disadvantages of open group include threat to confidentiality and lack of trust among members.

Voluntary verses Involuntary Group

A voluntary group is one where members willingly join through informed consent. This totally guarantees commitment while an involuntary group is one where members are mandated by institutions parents or teachers, and it can either be closed or open. Depending on the end goal

agenda, the choice of groups will differ but when a client volunteers to join group process, the outcome is likely to be positive because they take personal responsibility over their choice.

Homogeneous verses Heterogeneous

A Homogeneous group is a group where all members have common issues while a heterogeneous group is a group where members are with diverse issues but with a common goal which is getting help and growth. Homogeneous groups are easy to process where issues are very sensitive and need specialized attention. Such groups are like alcoholic anonymous groups, people living with a chronic illness or people in situations that attract stigma and discrimination from the wider community.

Differences Between Individual and Group Therapy

Group therapy is characterized by the following:

- Careful selection and recruitment of members
- A high level of interaction.
- Good structures group norms.
- Clear goals oriented to be achieved and serve as a unifying factor as well.
- Dynamic interdependency.
- Group dynamics that direct the group process and achievement of set goals
- Facilitators working together with group members.
- Defined life span depending on the number of sessions and goals set.

Individual therapy

Individual therapy is characterized by the following:

- It is simply one on one (the counselor and the client).
- It does not have a common goal to be achieved like in a group, goals are client led.

- Rapport is created between a therapist and client to build trust that is necessary for a therapeutic relationship and therapy outcomes.
- Does not have norms but clear roles and responsibilities of the client and the counselor.

Advantages of Group Counseling

Group therapy has a variety of advantages but adequate training in group work is essential to ensure effective and successful counseling outcomes. The effort involved in setting up and leading groups is important because groups have immense power to move people in creative and more life-giving directions if well designed, processed and evaluated from the initial stage to termination.

Yalom, 2015 and Corey, 2004 suggest many positive attributes associated with group therapy. Some of the advantages include empathy from multiple sources due to vicarious identification and understanding of members' situation from others, constructive feedback from multiple points of view is shared by group members, there is hope instilled from other group members who may have gone through and coped with a similar situation, mutual aid because members give and receive aid and help, normalization from removal of stigma from problems seen as socially unacceptable by the larger society, practice of new behaviors because other members provide a new opportunity to try out new behaviors in a safe environment, role modeling for other members and leaders serve as role models and enhanced interpersonal socialization because groups provide opportunity to overcome isolation and learn social skills.

Disadvantage of Group Counseling

Sometimes group environment may not be safe, for example, on confidentiality and other safety measures. Groups can encourage member conformity or dependence, creating scapegoats because groups may isolate individual members for attacks and blame. At times groups may focus on a few members who are assertive or talkative in giving help, while ignoring silent members. If some

groups require financial implications, some members may be thrown out yet they would benefit better from a group context.

Conclusion

In this lecture, we have defined group therapy, given the rationale behind conducting group therapies, explained the importance of group therapy, identified different types of groups and evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of group therapy. In our follow up lecture, we shall learn more about dynamics in groups or in other words group dynamics.

References and Further Reading

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