

## **Group Counseling**

### **Lecture 6**

#### **Psychoanalytic Group Counseling**

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### **Introduction**

According to psychoanalytic group work, members are instructed to interact with each other and with the therapist as openly and nondefensively as they can. In the course of the group process, three major types of communications manifest themselves: 1) accurate observations of and responses to events and personalities within the group, 2) transference reactions (transference occurs when a member shifts feelings about a significant person in his past to other members, and 3) projections and/or more primitive projective identifications (Aronson, 2016).

### **Definition**

Psychoanalytic Group Therapy or counseling refers to the application of psychoanalytic principles to the treatment of individuals in small groups. The goals of this form of psychotherapy are to elicit and ultimately to work through the core conflicts of each member of the group (Aronson, 2016).

### **Expected Lecture Outcomes**

- i. Define the term psychoanalytic group therapy.
- ii. Describe the psychoanalytic stages of group counseling.
- iii. Explain the roles and responsibilities of a group psychoanalytic group counselor.
- iv. Discuss the skills and techniques applied in psychoanalytic group counseling.

## **Definition of Psychoanalytic Group Counseling**

Therapists provide a climate that helps clients re-experience early family relationships. To uncover buried feelings associated with past events that carry over into current behavior. Therapists facilitate insight into the origins of family psychological development and stimulate a corrective emotional experience (Aronson, 2016).

The leader should encourage the development of positive transference, giving the client a sense of safety and acceptance. The client freely explores difficult material and experiences from their past, gaining insight and working through unresolved issues. The counsellor or the group leader is an expert, who interprets for the member and for the group (Gitau, 2024).

## **Understanding Psychoanalytic Group Counseling**

Each member inevitably reveals the patterns of feeling and acting they developed in their original family and that they still maintain in their intimate relationships outside of the group via the network of multiple transferences they establish in the group. Concomitantly, they project unacceptable aspects of themselves onto individual members, the therapist, or the entire group. Projective identifications are more likely to characterize group members with severe ego disturbances, but they also appear, although to a lesser degree, in the communications of neurotics and character disorders (Gitau, 2024).

The analytic group therapist employs repeated interpretations of the emergent transferences and projections in order to bring their unconscious determinants into awareness. As in individual analytic therapy, he/she systematically interprets relevant aspects of the patient's fantasies, defenses, and security operations. The analytic group counselor has the added advantage in group therapy of being able to point out the precise interpersonal impact that each member's behavioral patterns have on others (Aronson, 2016).

## **Psychoanalytic Group Counseling Stages**

There are three distinct stages or phases of psychoanalytic group therapy.

### *Free Association Stage/Phase*

This phase allows the members to share freely about themselves, they are given room to just share what they are thinking and feeling without judgement. The group leader, however, gives an instruction but refrains from directing how the instruction flows during the discussion. Some of the activities can be as simple as sharing an embarrassing moment one went through as a child. Members may feel a bit awkward and can experience anxiety as they start sharing and they find themselves talking about things they would not talk about before. In this phase they record feeling light (emotional relief) but they do not why (Gitau, 2024).

### *Analytic Phase*

This is the middle phase of analytic group therapy; the members typically ally themselves with the therapist's goals and begin to interpret each other's behavior and to deal with individual and group resistances. They also establish a group culture that rewards those members who demonstrate a willingness to experiment and to change. You can see members having the courage to share in the group what they have never shared before in their lives. The emotional risks are encouraged to move to the next phase of insight. Elicitation and working through of core conflicts proceed most effectively if group resistance is maintained at an optimal level. One of the most crucial skills required of the analytic group therapist is that he be able to resolve any group resistances that threaten to impede untrammelled communication within the group (Aronson, 2016). This phase has a mixture of relief and resistance, and the leader needs to note this, share with the group without telling them what to do.

### *Insight Phase*

In this phase, the group leader and the members make sense of what is going on within themselves and are also able to have insights of the other members' experiences. They start explaining to the members what they think could be happening to them after they share their experiences and stories. They can pick resistance blocks and share in the group. They ideally become analytical in their interactions (Greenberg, McWilliams, & Wenzel, 2014).

The leader does the same too and because he is experienced, he offers better insights to individual members and the entire group as well. This stage marks the end of the growth and development of the members insight into their blocks in life. It is assumed that, once they know what the underlying issue could be, their insight will help them develop working solutions, resolve past issues, and create or restore relationships that are helpful and /or productive (Gitau, 2024).

### **Goals of Therapy:**

The following are the guiding goals in psychoanalytic group therapy.

- Helping the members to bring into the conscious the unconscious material.
- Helping the members to work through a developmental stage that was not resolved or where the member became fixated.
- Help the member adjust to the demands of work, intimacy, and society.
- Help the member to experience emotional relief (catharsis).
- Help members to strengthen their ego for rational decision making.
- Reduce defense mechanisms in their interactions and sharing.
- Grow in self-analysis and ego strengthening.
- Mindfulness

## **Psychoanalytic Applied Techniques**

The common psychoanalytic techniques applied in psychoanalysis group therapy are discussed as follows according to Gerald Corey (Corey, 2016).

*Free Association* is a process where the member verbalizes any thoughts that may come without censorship, no matter how trivial the thoughts or feeling may be to the client. Feeling vulnerable to being in that state.

*Dream Analysis* is a process where the member narrates their dreams to the counselor. The counselor interprets the obvious or manifest content and the hidden meanings or latent content or any painful or undesirable thoughts, memories, feelings or impulses from the conscious. Fantasies are also considered in this space.

*Analysis of transference* is a process where the client is encouraged to attribute to counsellor those issues that have caused difficulties with significant authority figures in their lives. The counsellor helps the client to gain insight by the conflicts and feelings expressed.

*Analysis of resistance* is a process where the counsellor helps the client to gain insight into what causes form the basis for a hesitation or halting of therapy.

*Interpretation* is a process where the counsellor helps the client to gain insight into past and present events.

## **The Psychoanalytic Group Leader**

Therapists provide a safe climate wherein members can explore the full range of their feelings. They adopt a role free status to allow the members to take over and flow freely in their conversations. The leader needs to work through members resistance shown by their defense mechanisms. They need to have expert experience in one of the mental health disciplines like

psychiatry, psychology, clinical mental health counseling, psychiatric nursing as well as training experience with people with severe emotional problems (Gladding & Newsome , 2018).

### **Benefits of Psychoanalytic Group Therapy**

The members experience the following benefits.

- Strengthened ego.
- Reduced internal conflicts and negative emotions.
- Reduced anxiety
- Restore broken relationships.
- Enhanced insight

Despite the stated benefits of psychoanalytic group therapy, leaders acknowledge resistance happens in the process and shows up as defense mechanisms like protection, reaction formation, sublimation, displacement, introjection among others (Greenberg, McWilliams, & Wenzel, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

In this lecture, we have covered the introduction to psychoanalytic group therapy, the key concepts of psychoanalytic therapy as applied in group therapy, stages of group therapy, the characteristics of the leader and the benefits of psychoanalytic group counseling. In our follow up lecture, we shall learn more about cognitive behavioral group therapy.

### **References**

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