

FAMILY PSYCHOTHERAPY AND TECHNIQUES

Pulatova Gulnoza Murodilovna

FarDU, Lecturer in the Department of Psychology

Abstract

This article provides information on the basic definition and content of the concept of family psychotherapy. The history of the development of systemic family psychotherapy shows that this area of practice is not as developed as most schools and approaches to psychotherapy. In this sense, modern approaches to family psychotherapy, a summary of the conducting techniques of the methods of psychotherapy used, form the main content of the article.

Keywords: Psychological Counseling, Psychotherapy, dysfunctional family, family psychotherapy, relaxation, N. Pezeshkian, rational-emotional psychotherapy.

Introduction

Psychological Consultation is a practical field of modern psychology. It is a process of interaction between a psychologist and a client, aimed at providing qualified assistance in solving the client's problems, teaching them how to resolve these issues, and fostering their personal development. The sources of psychological counseling include psychotherapy and strictly scientific psychological knowledge.

Today, psychotherapy is widely used to address psychological problems within families. The term "psychotherapy" originates from the Greek words psyche (soul) and therapy (treatment, care). In a narrow sense, psychotherapy refers to the treatment of mental illnesses using psychological tools. In a broader sense, psychotherapy also involves providing psychological assistance to healthy individuals (clients) who face various psychological difficulties or seek to improve their quality of life.

Family Psychotherapy

There are at least four definitions of family psychotherapy:

1. A method of psychotherapy that focuses on addressing specific family problems (e.g., analytic family psychotherapy, behavioral therapy, etc.).
2. A set of psychotherapy techniques aimed at correcting a client's psychological, social, and biological condition with the help of their family.
3. A specialized field of psychotherapy based on specific theories (systems theory, cybernetics, communication models, etc.).
4. Systemic family psychotherapy, which focuses on the psychological interactions between two living open systems—the family and the psychotherapist—to optimize their functioning. This includes behavioral family therapy and other approaches.

Structural Approach in Family Therapy

In the structural approach, the adolescent is considered the "symptom carrier," while the family is regarded as the actual patient. Structural interventions aim to reorganize family structures to improve the functioning of all members and create a more balanced family system. For example, rigid families may need open communication and negotiation, while disorganized families may require hierarchical structuring. Restoring parental supervision and collaboration in the family subsystem ensures effective leadership and child-rearing. In fragmented families, therapists help unify family members by assisting the "identified patient" and identifying shared benefits for all. It is important that the goals set for modifying family structures align with the family's capacity to process and accept change.

Strategic Family Psychotherapy

Strategic family psychotherapy focuses on analyzing family hierarchy disruptions. This therapeutic approach is based on power manipulation strategies, meaning the therapist redistributes authority among family members. It assumes that behavioral abnormalities arise from an imbalance in power distribution. The behavioral direction of family psychotherapy is grounded in learning theory principles and employs classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and other training methods.

Narrative Therapy in Modern Family Psychotherapy

A major trend in contemporary family psychotherapy is the development of constructive or narrative therapy. The term "narrative" derives from English and refers to storytelling, describing, and visual representation. Every field of family psychotherapy incorporates positive strategies that can be applied when working with children and adolescents.

In general, it is necessary to identify dysfunctional family patterns that can be modified. The affective, behavioral, and cognitive expectations of each family member must be considered. A dysfunctional family is one where certain functions are disrupted, while a well-functioning family establishes rules that fulfill each member's needs for self-expression, growth, change, acceptance, and approval. In family psychotherapy, it is essential to identify family resources, abilities, and motivation to promote change and address pressing issues.

The Role of Family Therapy

Family psychotherapy is a distinct type of therapy aimed at correcting interpersonal relationships and addressing emotional disturbances within families, particularly those manifesting in one of its members. The history of systemic family psychotherapy indicates that this field has not developed as extensively as other psychotherapy schools. Many psychotherapeutic approaches focus on couples' relationships or parental conflicts. Various psychotherapy schools describe family counseling and therapy in different ways, including transactional analysis, gestalt therapy, client-centered approaches, Adlerian therapy, rational-emotional therapy, and behavioral therapy.

The key idea of systemic family psychotherapy is that a family is a social system—a dynamic network of interrelated individuals and characteristics. A family is "a living organism resembling fire rather than crystal" (Chernikov, 1997). It is an open system that continuously interacts with its environment. Furthermore, a family is a self-organizing system, meaning its behavior is purposeful, and the source of change lies within itself (Chernikov, 1997).

Common Psychotherapeutic Techniques in Family Therapy

Some frequently used psychotherapeutic techniques in family therapy include:

1. Effective use of silence
2. Learning to listen
3. Teaching through questions

4. Paraphrasing (summarizing responses)
5. Comprehensive summarization
6. Clarification
7. Confrontation
8. Role-playing
9. Creating "living sculptures"
10. Reviewing and analyzing video recordings

Additionally, psychogymnastics, psychodrama, autogenic training, and relaxation exercises are widely applied in family therapy.

The Role of Relaxation in Stress Management

According to Hans Selye's theory, the body's automatic response to stress occurs in three sequential phases: alarm, resistance, and adaptation. As stress progresses, its intensity gradually diminishes, leading to a state of relaxation. If adaptation fails or is absent, psychosomatic disorders or other psychological disturbances may arise. To maintain health, an individual should counter stress impulses with relaxation techniques. By doing so, they can interfere with any of the three stress phases, ultimately preventing psychosomatic disorders.

The Influence of Family Environment on Children

A child's future family life, relationships with a spouse, parenting style, and interactions with relatives are significantly influenced by their experiences in their parents' household. One of the prominent researchers on this topic, N. Pezeshkian (1993), identified three key aspects of this influence:

1. Attitude toward stress
2. Emotional sensitivity and its social consequences
3. Norms of social behavior

Pezeshkian emphasized love, trust, hope, patience, attentiveness to others, the ability to establish close relationships, faith, and religious feelings as fundamental emotional norms. These emotions develop through identification with parents and siblings, shaping a person's capacity for trust and empathy. The behavioral norms learned in a family setting include honesty, tidiness, sincerity, fairness, ambition, thriftiness, loyalty, and integrity. According to Pezeshkian, differences in emotional expectations between spouses are a primary source of marital conflicts, while behavioral norm disagreements are generally easier to resolve in psychotherapy.

Conclusion

Expanding the application of psychotherapy methods within families is crucial in modern society. A theoretical approach to psychological consultation enhances the effectiveness of practical results.

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