

Changes in Interpersonal Problems and Ego Defenses in a Group Psychotherapy Setting

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Date received: 5/12/2008

Date accepted: 1/1/2009

Background: The aims of the current study are to evaluate changes in interpersonal relations and in ego defenses and to find possible relations between such changes and changes in different group factors.

Subjects & Methods: Eleven patients participating in a group psychotherapy program were assessed using the Interpersonal Problems Scale and the Ego Defenses Scale to determine personal changes. Group changes were assessed using the California Psychotherapy Alliance Scale (CALPAS), Group Climate Questionnaire-Short form (GCQ-S), Curative Climate Instrument. The study continued for six months.

Results: The results of the study showed significant change in individuals

vulnerability to be easily influenced by others ($P=0.04$) whereas, ego defenses changed significantly as evidenced by the decrease in immature defenses particularly acting out and dissociation ($P=0.02$; $P=0.02$ respectively). Multiple correlations were found between changes in interpersonal problems and ego defenses and group alliance, group climate and curative climate in the group.

Conclusion: Group psychotherapy is effective in bringing about changes in patients involved in that mode of treatment. These changes are both affected by and reflected on different group factors particularly alliance, engagement and cohesion.

Keywords: Group psychotherapy; Interpersonal problems; Ego Defenses; Group Climate.

Abbreviations:

IIP-32= Inventory of Interpersonal Problems
DSQ-40= Defense Style Questionnaire

CALPAS= California Psychotherapy Alliance Scale
GCQ-S= Group Climate Questionnaire-Short form

Egypt. J. Psychiatry, June 2009; 29(2): 23-30

INTRODUCTION

Budman, et al. (1987) presumes that group therapy has curative possibilities that are indigenous to the group treatment mode. According to this theory, the group becomes a "Social microcosm" of the outside world in which maladaptive inter-personal patterns are replayed, recognized, and acknowledged. As group members reenact their interpersonal difficulties in the group, they are likely to receive disconfirming evidence about the beliefs that are causally related to mal-adaptive interactions. This provides individual group members with a unique opportunity to become aware of problematic inter-personal behaviors and to experiment with new, more effective ones. Kelly, (2000) concluded that the ultimate goal of group experience is to promote the prosocial interactions and reduces the problem behavior.

Defenses are major means of managing instinct and affect. Although they are adaptive in nature, they can as well be pathological (Vaillant, 1988). The impact of patients' defense mechanisms on group alliance was stressed by Despland, et al. (2001). These authors carried out a study to assess the relationships among defense mechanisms, therapist interventions, and the development of alliance in a sample of 12 patients undergoing Brief Psychodynamic Investigation (4 sessions). The results showed that the degree of

adjustment of therapists' interventions to patients' level of defensive functioning discriminated a low alliance from both improving and high alliances. The results suggest that the adjustment of therapeutic interventions to patients' level of defensive functioning is a promising predictor of alliance development and should be examined further, alongside other predictors of outcome.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The material used in the current study is driven from the psychotherapy group conducted in EL-Minia university hospital. EL-Minia psychotherapy groups are divided into either male group (Formed of exclusively male patients) or female groups (Formed exclusively of female patients). This division was undertaken for cultural considerations. Data reported in the study was taken from the male psychotherapy group. Sessions are held once weekly for a period of 90 minutes and is followed by post group discussion for additional 60 to 90 minutes.

Procedures and scales used:

The study was held between the 12th of November 2000 (Session No. 1) and the 6th of May 2001 (Session No.24) the total duration of the study was six months.