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Emotional empathy and cognitive styles in psychodynamic group therapy: UAE experience

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Background: Practice of group therapy has been unexpectedly accepted against the pre-assumption that patients could reject the idea of self-disclosure in presence of strangers.

Objectives: The present study is designed to study group psychotherapy experience in United Arab Emirates (UAE). The group cohesion process along the time of therapy is studied. A trial is also made to explore impact of attending these types of groups on aspects of thinking described as cognitive styles as fears of failure and anger expression; as well as cognitive orientation of emotions and empathy.

Method: In the current case- control study 80 patients (40 males and 40 females) between 19 – 45 years old with different DSM-IV psychiatric diagnoses were recruited and subdivided into four groups. Each group contained 20 patients; 20 males and 20 females allocated to attend group therapy (Male Group (MGp) & Female Group (FGp)), while other 20 males and 20 females allocated as comparative groups not attending group therapy (Male Comparative (MCm) & Female Comparative (FCm)). All groups were further compared with frequency matched healthy volunteers served as control group that consisted of (20) males in MCI group and (20) females in FCI group. Sharing groups were subjected to clinical psychiatric examination and base line psychometric assessment using Fear Of Failure (FOF1), Trait Meta Mood Scale (TMMS1), Arabic Anger Scale (AAS1) and Emotional Empathy scale (EES1). Each patient in Male Group (MGp) & Female Group (FGp) attended at least 40 sessions in closed group along 1year duration. Group cohesion was monthly assessed using GCS (1-12) for both groups. Psychometric re-evaluation at the end of 1year was made for all groups using same tests (FOF2), (TMMS2), (AAS2) and (EES2). All available scores were subjected to statistical analysis.

Results: Base line readings showed statistically significant higher scores of (FOF1) and (AAS1) in patients groups compared to control groups ($p < 0.00001$) and lower scores of TMMS1 and EES1 ($P=0.0020$ for the 3 male groups & $P<0.00001$ for the three female groups). However, differences between groups of patients (MGp vs. MCm) and (FGp vs. FCm) were non-significant in FOF1 ($p=1$ & $p=0.28809$), AAS1 ($p=1$ & $p=0.5186$), TMMS1 ($p=0.6326$ & $p=0.6773$) & EES1 ($p=0.7491$ & $p=1$). Generally females showed more regular attendance of group sessions compared to males but difference was non-significant statistically. Patients' assessment of group cohesion generally increased along the 12 months as denoted by GCS scores. Patients attending group therapy demonstrated variable levels of improvements compared to other groups of patients not attending group therapy and compared to controls. FOF2 demonstrated definite improvement in MGp compared to MCm group ($p=0.0283$) and in FGp compared to FCm group ($p=0.0480$) but still improvement is beyond normality compared to control groups ($p < 0.00001$). EES2 demonstrated definite improvement in MGp compared to MCm group ($p=0.01813$) and in FGp compared to FCm group ($p=0.038434$) and improvement could reach normality level compared to control groups (p non-significant). All TMMS2 scores of patients groups increased on treatment regardless attending group therapy or not. Improvement in males reached normal levels compared to control group ($p=0.1220$ for the 3 male groups); but not for female patients ($p=0.0021$ for FGp vs. FCI). However, FGp patients showed more improvement than FCm group ($p=0.0044$). AAS2 demonstrated definite improvement in scores of all groups of patients after treatment with no significant difference between MGp&MCm group ($p=0.6756$) or FGp&FCm group ($p=0.1903$) but still improvement is beyond normality by comparison with control groups ($p < 0.00001$).

Conclusion: Group therapy has been successfully accepted among UAE psychiatric patients improving their fears about failure and empathy and to variable degree cognitive orientation of emotions but not anger expression.

Biography

Hala Fakhry is a Professor of Psychiatry in Cairo University, Egypt. She is also the Head of Psychiatric Department at Kuwaiti Hospital, Sharjah, UAE. She is a member of APA, CCPA, CACCF, EPA, and EGTA with Clinical Experiences for 29 years in management of Psychiatric cases, Liaison Psychiatry and Addiction treatment. She is Skilled in psychotherapy (Psychodynamic) and has Medico Legal & Forensic Psychiatry Experiences. She is sharing in Psychiatric National and International Conferences across the Globe (1998-2017). Dr Hala has over than 30 publications in both National and International Journals (1993-2017) and Teaching Experiences for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

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