

Considering Family Therapy Process and Relevant Theories

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Abstract

Family is more than a group of individuals living together in certain physical and psychological space. In other words, family is a natural and social system with specific features. It is a system postulating certain principles, roles, power structure, socializing relationships and communications, talking methods, and problem solution for effective performance of diverse duties.

Most difficulties in life are traceable best way within family. Families are powerful forces in their entirety effective on members' health or compatibility, whether in their advantage or disadvantage. Consequently, family therapy is interference concentrated on dealings among family members that attempts to enhance family function as a unit made of individual members of family.

Keywords: family, family therapy, structural theory, behavioral and cognitive-behavioral approach

1. Introduction

"Family", as a social system, is a group of individuals living together through marriage, reproduction, and children upbringing. This social system or organization has had significant role along the history in growth and socializing human beings. No doubt, family is the main organization in preparing condition for child's physical, mental, and social growth and welfare, and a mediator in making him/her to achieve (physical, mental, and social) balance (Wood, 1996). Socializing and introduction to cultural laws, roles, and values take place naturally in family in a way child becomes a social being through his/her early dealings in family. This is the reason family has been considered significant by psychologists since a long time ago (Mousavi, 2003, p. 45).

Family is not only a system, but also a subsystem in human society. Factors such as race, social and economic status, education, sexuality, residing country, immigration, religion, political connections, and life cycle of family have impact on it. Complexity caused by these impacts and their interrelations in forming family being and concept in every culture, render defining family function or inefficiency difficult (Azazi, 1997, p. 34).

Inefficiency refers to inappropriate family patterns, improper family dealings, stress and morbid behaviors as well. Families experience anxiety and stress in difficulty, pressure, and tension in a way family members feel misery, failure, and nervous. Pressures and tensions may be deranged family system, unless family conform or alter inefficient existed pattern with new condition. Actually, mental-behavioral failure in a member is traceable in family dealings. In many cases, failure in behavior by a member originates from wrong dealings in family (Ahmadi, 2005).

1.1 Family Therapy Definition

Family therapy is interference concentrated on dealings among family members that attempts to enhance family function as a unit made of individual members of family. Psychologist in family therapy attempts to break inflexible inter-generation patterns that cause stress within individuals or individual interrelations. It is possible to set forth each family member's concerns in this way. However, this method is just applicable to children since daily reality of children is influenced directly by family context (Mousavi, 2003, p. 45).

Generally, families profiting by family therapy process are as following: families having drug user or psychopath member, families having a member with physical disorder that affected family function in one way or another, divorced families, remarried families, death of a member, families involved in cultural and economic difficulties, families involved in indirect problems such as problem in children upbringing or psychological problems of a member, and families referring to specialist advisors or psychologists for decision-making and help in minor

matters. Taking consideration on the role of family during the time of seeking advice comes to forth and therapy carries on according to therapist's approach (Nazari, 2007, p. 34).

2. Method

Methods of the study are inductive reasoning and in terms of time are cross-sectional and in terms of relationship between variables is correlation.

3. Results

Theories Relevant to Family and Family therapy: Salvador Minuchin, Montalvo, Fishman, Rosman, etc., are major theorist in this regard that believe in family function entails family structure, subsystems, and boundaries. Therapists sketch out family pattern mentally and attempt to accomplish appropriate family structure that looks like a theater director in performance. Techniques in therapy are: reconstruction, attachment, message extension, demarcation, etc.

3.1 Structural Theory

In this manner, structural family therapy is in line with other approaches to family system in its regard to family context in appearance of issues and problems and seeking treatment for them. Nonetheless, in respect to its organization and using judicial figures of speech, whether in explaining problems or seeking treatment and emphasizing on therapist's direct and active guidance, it is a unique approach. Structural family therapist aims to adjust family organization actively in first step based on the assumption that individual behaviors change and symptoms reduce in the following to changes to family dealings (Goldenberg, 2006, p. 34).

3.2 Behavioral and Cognitive-Behavioral Family Therapy

In behavior theory, which is mainly based on early formations in education theory, family members are part of client's normal milieu under any circumstance. Behaviorists have observed importance of cognition in face-to-face dealings (Goldenberg, translated by Naqshbandi et al., 2006). Cognitive-Behavioral Family therapists believe that families and couples are influenced by their milieu. In family therapy, family and therapists can determine specific behavioral goals, consider present behavioral patterns, and acquire new behavioral patterns. Its major theorists are William masters, Virginia Johnson, Joseph Wolpe, Bandura, etc. This approach of treatment assumes, based on behavioral and cognitive theories, behaviors are maintained or removed through their consequences. Inappropriate behaviors are adjustable. Unreasonable cognitions are adjustable as well, that their adjustment can change family or marital behaviors and dealings. In this approach, therapist plays the role of an instructor or a specialist reinforcing appropriate behaviors. Techniques in this approach are negative reinforcement, extension, extinction, economic permission, mental escape, reasonable collation phrase, modeling pattern, etc.

3.3 Key Ideas in Relationship Enrichment Approach

A primary idea in relationship enrichment is that absence or incorrect understanding of ourselves and close people around us exhaust our function. Understanding ourselves and close people around us mutually help us to perform better; therefore, one of the major concerns in relationship enrichment is to enlarge to this understanding. So, in relationship enrichment approach, in enrich relationships, individuals are highly capable in understanding in order to convey it. The goal is not just to enlarge understanding but to ameliorate past injuries, to strengthen function in present, and to confront possible losses in future. When relationship enrichment skill is educated, it becomes a permanent behavioral capacity of individual and it is applicable if it necessitates. It helps individuals to behave beyond changing present condition. It reinforces individuals' capability in performance as well. Thus, behavioral skills and patterns change and they are substituted with more efficient methods after learning relationship enrichment skills.

Dorothy and Boss emphasize values and morals are basic to all activities in family. Values are assessment elements as well which means they function as principles for selection in the field of substituted activities. Psychologist is to notify clients about basic ideas in relationship enrichment treatment approach for participants' free and honest cooperation.

Relationship enrichment approach is based on four fundamental issues of congeniality, language and relationship, emotional expression, and reception (Nazari, 2007, pp. 162-164). One of the theorists in this regard is Ackerman who is called grandfather of family therapy at times. He reflects on family as an organization of people in dealings. Each person is considered an important subdivision in family as family is subset to society. For better understanding of family function, received information from other sources should be considered as well. Each unique family member is seeking issue in regard to roles and family commitment vis-as-vis series of human

values and family behavior as a social unit. Family disrupts to converse parties if the tension among family members exacerbates. The most different member becomes scapegoat or weaker party in this regard, gradually he/she becomes isolated, and he/she becomes the blame for gaps within the family. In regard to symptoms, Ackerman attempted to figure out deep current emotions such as fears, mistrust, disappointment, and will to revenge. By excited responses he probed how the feelings in family are, what the complementary roles are, and what kind of deep and broad family tensions are. Ackerman helped family members to know about other family relationship patterns and to reach a joint point and intimacy with new ways, once family members recognized about their fear, emotions, and thoughts (Goldenberg, 2006, pp. 142-149).

3.4 Theories of Phenomenology in Psychology

a. Empiricist/Humanist Theory: Empiricist/humanist family therapy is upshot of techniques in phenomenology (Gestalt therapy, psychodrama or mental role playing, client-centered therapy, opposite group confrontation) that had been well-known among individual therapy approaches in 1960s. Instead of relying on specific technique, these therapeutic skills were concentrated on the methods that were specific and favorable to a client or family. All empiricist/humanist therapists emphasized on choice right, free will, and especially human capability in personal causation and cultivation. They are active and disclosers in a way they take advantage of several inspiring methods and techniques in order to lead client to his/her emotions, imaginations, and personal experiences. During therapy, client is urged to be sensitive to here and now, and current life experiences; ignoring impulsions and suppressing emotions are not considered efficient. Empiricist family therapists moderate their approach with unique tensions and behavioral patterns in each family. They attempt to not impose any presupposed idea to family as much as possible.

Empiricist family therapists work out on present instead of unveiling past experiences. They concentrate on present and the condition taking place now between family and an active and caring therapist. Dealing among family members are encouraged between involved groups by therapist in order to make them experience more enhancing behavioral patterns. It is an opportunity for individuals for self-motivation, free speech, and personal growth. This emphasis on inter-subjective experience instead of techniques is impetus for enhancement and perfection in this approach (Goldenberg, 2006, pp. 171-173).

b. Phenomenological Theories of Subjectivity: The main concern in phenomenological theories of subjectivity is on the condition of subject's perception of the world around in present. It is followed by future consideration about individuals' ability in achieving potential talents.

3.4.1 Propositions of Carl Rogers's Theory

Carl Rogers, American psychologist and pioneer in subject and personality study, utilizes phenomenological approach. He considers this fact that human is born with kind of inherent and innate impetus to actuate potential and intrinsic talents. This makes human being completely active and functionary. On the other hand, Rogers introduces a mental therapy called person-centered approach in order to help individuals that environmental factors halted them from natural course of life. In this approach, therapist is indirectly in state of reception. Rogers's propositions are as following:

- Self-actualization

His theoretical propositions are based on the assumption that he attempts to help individual actualize his/her potential talents. Like other humanist theorists, Rogers believes self-actualization-innate and intrinsic inclination for activating inborn individual potentials and abilities is a fact and general principle that does not require prove or vindication. When a theory is based on an assumed truth, error or fallacy is not predicable in it just as it is in mathematics. Yet the problem is that truth for one may not be the equivalent for others which marks phenomenological approach limited. Our outlook and trust to self-actualization are also dependent on our view of human nature.

- Individual Potentiality

Just like individual's perception of the world around, self-actualization is potentiality in a way the supposed actualized potentiality differs from one individual to another. Recognizing individual potentiality is impossible since potentiality is actualized in future. No one can claim an individual's optionality is realized or not, even it cannot be a claim that what extent (less or more) of potentiality is actualized, since it may become more and better in future. Self-actualization in one individual prompts him/her to challenge more to accomplish and reach higher points in self-concept.

Self-actualization may expose to environmental conditions or personal problems. Therefore, Rogers believes that we have to create a society in which each individual accomplishes self-actualization easier. He proposes a

specific approach to help individuals with certain personal problems. It is necessary to discuss this approach of therapy.

- Full Individual Functionary

Rogers assumes an individual in effort to actualize his/her potentiality and self-concept. Whether this child will develop to such adult or not is pertinent to social milieu, since that adult has been for years in such milieu in so doing in influence of others' behavior to accomplish actualization. Thus, social milieu is significant for self-concept.

- Unconditional Positive Regard

If parents receive and respect children fully, children consider unconditional regard as positive experience. Such children are able to grow with unconditional self-esteem which is one of the main functionary issues for self-concept. On the other hand, children regarded negatively or conditional with parents will not be able to actualize his /her potentiality.

- The Condition of Worthiness

Unconditional regard is, whether by parents to children or by individual to himself/herself, is a basic to Rogers' theory. When a mother expresses to a child I will regard and care you if you behave in my request, it is conditional regard rather than unconditional regard. Such mother regards child with certain values and such condition of worthiness will be part of child's self-esteem.

- Client-centered Therapy

Rogers define an ideal and functionary individual as following: an ideal individual who is ready to experience; he is not defensive; he is conscious; he has unconditional regard; and he is in harmony and compatible. For helping individuals whose ideal behavior and self-concept has been unproductive and in vain, Rogers introduces a guideless therapy that he calls client-centered therapy. In his theoretical system, clients—he applies the word client instead of patient—not experienced unconditional positive regard has been prevented from full functionary. Here and in this condition, therapist attempts to able clients accomplish such regard. This means therapist in the therapy is a person who does not judge and guide, yet receives clients' perceptions, feelings, and emotions.

Though therapist is not able to interpret the world from client's point of view he attempts to sympathize with client and suggest him/her that he/she is understood and perceived. By experiencing unconditional positive regard along with reception and sympathy of therapist, client is prepared to experience true emotions, less to be defensive, and to have positive self-esteem. This process causes client to have harmonious dealings and helpful compatibility. In other words, client is able to become a full active and functionary individual in this kind of therapy (Santrock, 2006, p. 34).

3.4.2 Abraham Maslow' Humanism

Abraham Maslow is a theorist considering personality and subject from phenomenological point of view. He believes people have a series of needs that include physiologic, objective, and abstract ideals; and he considers ideal needs do not set forth as far as their basic needs are fulfilled. His approach is mainly humanistic for his regard to enhance human positive condition. He believes like Rogers that basic human nature and innate is self-actualization. But unlike him, he does not admit self as the only source of human behavior. Maslow introduces an inspiring theory that relies on a hierarchy of innate needs in organized levels that their fulfillments provide life satisfaction. This hierarchy of needs can be considered as pyramid (Figure 1) in which physiologic needs such as water, food, sexual desire, and excretion are in the base of pyramid, and need for self-actualization is at top and summit of pyramid. Maslow arranges needs for security, belonging, love, self-esteem, confidence, interest, and aesthetics between physiologic needs in base and need for self-actualization at summit.

In Maslow's opinion, needs in the base of pyramid should be fulfilled before needs in upper levels. Thus, needs such as belonging, love, self-esteem, confidence, interest cannot be considered as far as physiologic needs and need for security are not fulfilled. Similar condition is also necessary for accomplishing self-actualization.

It should be noted that the closer is the location of a need to lower levels of pyramid; the needier one will be to others' behaviors. In this case, one is relied on others for providing essentials of life such as food, shelter, and security; even one is needed to others for senses of belonging and love. Respect and self-esteem is much an intersubjective issue as well. When one's needs of cognition, interest, and aesthetics are fulfilled, he/she experiences pretty self-sufficient. Yet, this is self-actualization that makes one really independent of others.

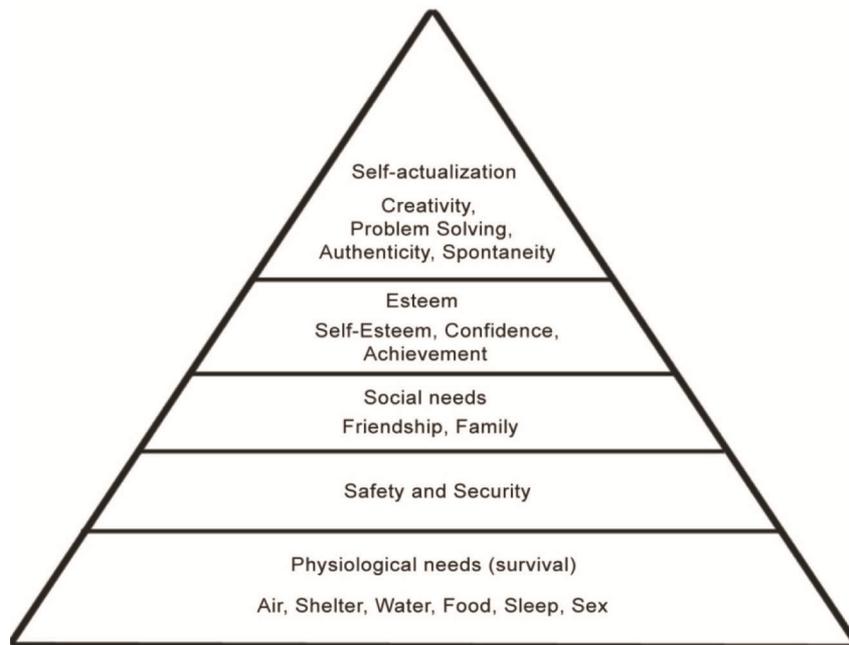


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Considering needs in hierarchy as like in pyramid, to reach self-actualization requires ascending from below to above levels in a favorable society. In this ascension, one needs others' cooperation and confirmation. In Maslow's view, if one is not able to reach self-actualization or actualize potential talents, society is responsible since it does not empower individual with required facilities and services. Conclusively, in order to provide capabilities for self-actualization and enabling potentials, society should be created in a way that obviates individual's needs for food, clothing, housing, security in appropriate way. In such society one is able to experience belonging, love, respect, confidence, and aesthetics. It is humanistic society Maslow represents (Salvador, 1994, p. 54).

3.4.3 Georg Kelly's Personal Construct Theory

Georg Kelly introduces a phenomenological theory about personality that relies on individual's perception of himself/herself and his/her milieu, in contrast to Maslow and Rogers that emphasize on emotions and feelings. Kelly believes human life is shaped and constructed through the concepts and perceptions one attributes to the surrounding world. Human being makes certain constructs about world and utilizes them for interpretation of phenomena. In this regard, his theory is just like scientists in a way he specifies hypotheses similar to scientists' hypotheses, and then he does experiments on them. If constructs are confirmed they are admitted, and if they are not conformed, they are altered or rejected. Kelly invents constructive alternativism in order to specify the process.

-Personal Constructs

In the process to find out about the world around, one makes ideas and hypotheses, specifies ideas, and makes constructs in this regard. Constructs by individuals are different since they have different experiences. These constructs shape the core of personality. As far as one makes different constructs based on different experiences, debate over the true nature of things are useless. Kelly believes perception of reality is depended on kind and form of constructs. The same procedure and reasoning are considered true about interpretation of phenomena. Realities and phenomena do not have innate meanings, yet their meaning is depended on the construct applied.

Constructs direct and lead behaviors.

Constructs of the self and the world designate expectations of realities and interpretations. Therefore, they direct our behaviors.

4. Discussion

Personal construct for an individual is just like a hypothesis for a scientist, since they should be experimented for validity and credibility. Similar to a scientific hypothesis, it reinstates if it is confirmed, and it is rejected or altered on the other hand. So, constructs are exchanged or substituted. Not only does it enable one to adapt himself/herself with different constructs, but also people are able to then have different constructs for phenomena. Kelly calls the process constructive alternativism.

Individual Differences: one of the main issues in personal construct theory is emphasis on individual differences in a way every individual has his/her own series of personal constructs. This is subordinate principle in Kelly's theory. There is no room then for determining personal types or extending similarities among individuals. Another implied issue in personal construct theory is related to function of cognitive processes in individual. Each person shapes his/her own specific constructs and assesses them through experiences. Based on these assessments then one makes himself/herself compatible or adapts for new experiences. As the constructs are made by own, they bring about responsibilities. In addition, they direct one's behavior; in consequence, one is responsible to his/her behavior that is influential in viewpoints. This is what Kelly then calls humanist tradition. Kelly's humanism is beyond Maslow and Rogers' humanism. Though Maslow and Rogers blame society for individual's failure in accomplishing self-actualization, Kelly believes failure is personal since this is constructs that fail an individual. Personal construct theory has primary similarities with individual cognition. Constructs reflect one's view to the world. They reflect general formations in one's emotional states as well that they include senses of threat, fear, guilty, distress, and hostility. When certain constructs do not anticipate correct interpretation, one has to modify individual constructs. Threat takes place when a significant part of individual construct system is not definite; for instance, an individual who knows himself as a worthy architect and a well bread-winner of family feels threatened when he is fired for falling apart of a building he designed. Kelly calls it fear when features of construct system are unknown, for example when a punctual student comes late to class.

Sense of guilty is the result of deviation from certain directions and beliefs. A student feels guilty when he knows himself a dutiful and responsible person, but it happens at times he has failed in doing his assignments or he has to cheat in his exams.

Distress comes to forth by an awareness or cognition. In this situation, one's personal constructs are not able to confront or overcome to a new sense of facing with stranger or unfamiliar situation. In other words, this experience is outside of range of experiences in individual's construct system. One feels distress under any circumstance, since new people and situations are inevitable. Just suppose a situation that one meets for the first time a person who cannot speak English so that he does not understand him/her. In this situation, if one's constructs rely on people who everybody can speak English and the only people with hard of hearing cannot understand, one feels distress in meeting a person who does not know English, since his/her construct cannot cover such condition and experience.

One is able to effectively adapt the construct of reality that everyone speaks English, overcome to probable distress. There are other ways of adaptation in order to overcome distress. One way is to escape distressful situation by avoiding strangers or keeping off from people who does not know English language. This way is incompatible since limits one's range of activities and experiences.

Another incompatible way to overcome distress is to attempt to match situations with constructs. As one considers the person who does not know his/her language a man with hard of hearing, he/she may start shouting in order to impress upon. Kelly calls this behavior hostility.

Fixed-role Therapy: Kelly in his theory, that personal constructs are at the core of one's personality, considers incongruity among constructs and experiences as the source of mental problems. Thus, for treating and eliminating such problems, it should be attempted to modify or regulate personal constructs. Kelly introduces fixed-role therapy for this process.

This process starts with an exact and full assessment of client's construct system, and then therapist prepares a fixed plan for client based on assessment. This plan considers a fictitious person similar to client, yet has different constructs. Therefore, client is asked to behave in a situation that he has problem (Gill Gorell, 2004, p. 25).

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