

CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH GROUPS

SUPPORT GROUP MEETING ASSIGNMENT

PROFESSOR ANDERSON YOON

KATHY E. SALAZAR

ALLIANCE UNIVERSITY

March 9, 2023

As part of the clinical social work practice with group assignment, I visited Elmhurst Hospital's Child/Adolescent PHP Program located in Queens, New York. This program provides intensive highly structured outpatient behavioral health services to stabilize patients suffering from acute mental health symptoms. Patients are referred from the inpatient unit or from outpatient community programs. Patient received active treatment for seven hours per day five days per week for a maximum of six weeks. I attended Monday's Psychotherapy group from 11:00am to 12:00pm. This group took place in the Art & Crafts room on the 10th floor. There were three adolescents present, one Hispanic male and two girls, one Hispanic female and one Indian female. Usually there are seven to eight patients attending PHP. The leaders were two psychologists' interns.

The group session was open effectively as leaders provided encouragement and direction. Participants were adolescents ranging from 13 to 16 years old. Participants were directed to seat around the table. There was markers and paper for them to use. Two participants were brought in from one of the inpatient units and another came from home. This session was the third meeting of a six-week program. Initially, participants were disengaged and needed constant redirection to focus, it seems more like they didn't want to be there or they were being resistant. According to Corey, (2015), when working with adolescents, they can manifest rebellious attitude towards the leader or towards any authoritarian figure. Leaders seem to be aware of their own dynamics and countertransferences when they were being confronted by the participants, they did not react defensively as they understood the transference nature of their behavior. As part of the dynamic, participants knew each other from previous sessions, there was no new patients in this session. Group seems to be at the intimacy stage they knew each other and were comfortable sharing. One leader gave me the opportunity to introduce myself. I

provided my name and told participants I was a social work intern and I was there to learn more about support groups. The leader then proceeded to initiate session by asking participants how they were doing and to report any progress or difficulties they experienced since the last time they met. There were negative and positive emotions expressed. One participant expressed anger because he remained inpatient and couldn't wait to be discharged. Second participant talked about her progress, feeling better, managing her anxiety, and almost reaching her goal to go home. The third participant did not sit with the group but instead was standing by the window looking at her phone, participant was rebellious and refused to participate in the conversation. Few times this participant requested to go to the bathroom or to go and get her coat because she was cold. It was noticeable that her behavior was interrupting the other participants' attention and she was avoiding interaction. After few minutes one of the leaders went outside and brought participant back in. Participant then sat down and became distracted with drawing on a piece of paper with her head down at all time avoiding eye contact. The main leader used effective communication skills and reminded participants about the goals they were working on and the purpose why they were in PHP. Leader also emphasized that PHP was a six-week program and every meeting was important for each participant to reach their goal to recovery. Participants were encouraged to participate in session and to be open to engage in group discussion. Leaders used active listening and questioning skills to drive participants' attention as part of their leadership skills. Leaders used a structured exercise called the inner child work which is an approach to recognizing and healing childhood trauma. Inner child work focuses on addressing our unmet needs by reparenting ourselves. Leaders explained the exercise and each participant received a list of questions asking what they would do if they were the parent. The main leader when over each question, providing space and the opportunity for each participant to write their

answers, then each participant was given the opportunity to explain what they wrote.

Participants were challenged to think and write their thoughts which encourage them to express their feelings. Behaviors were noticeable during session as each participant expressed their emotions differently allowing leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of this exercise. During this dynamic, client's strengths and resources in dealing with real-life issues were addressed.

According to Corey, pg. 155-156, the major modification of the psychoanalytic technique is the emphasis on the here-and-now of the client's life rather than exploring the there-and- then of childhood. Leaders used different intervention strategies during this exercise that were effective.

Partial Hospitalization Program is a psychoeducational program designed to educate and empower clients to be able to better manage their psychiatric symptoms, mental illness, or behavioral health problems. PHP is an open-ended group. The group was at a transition stage and the goal is to improve symptoms management, provide coping skills and connect individuals with effective supports. In this group, a participant was reluctant and hesitant to participate, other was guarded and the other was a difficult group member. When working with adolescents, adolescence stage is a critical period for cognitive, social, and emotional maturation during which individuals undergo notable developmental changes that establish behavior patterns that may persist into adulthood. Because PHP is a short term program, therapist have a short time to work with clients and therefore they have to make the most of each session, participants are expected to fully participate. As I observed, the aim of PHP is not to cure the patient with this brief short term therapy, but rather help participants, foster changes in behavior, thinking, and feeling.

Having the opportunity to sit in a self-help group has provided me with the opportunity to better connect the different practices we have done in class and understand the various dynamics

that take place when facilitating a group. PHP is a short term program that provides emotional support, information, and assistance in problem solving. According to Zastrow and Hessenauer (2019) pg. 6-7, PHP can be considered a “direct service” self-help group where each individual receives emotional support, psychoeducation and coping skills to manage their mental health conditions. The success of any self-help group lies on their group leadership taking into consideration the willingness participants have to be involve, in participating and most importantly achieving their goals. (M. Corey, Corey & Corey, 2014) indicates that the value assigned to a specific population in a group counseling setting is important. For this group observation, I agree that PHP is effective as a counseling group suited for children, adolescents and adults coping with mental health conditions. Leaders showed competency working with this group, by providing a safe place to express conflicting feelings, participants were able to share how they feel with other peers and they were open to question their values when talking about their “inner child”. The effective group leaders used appropriate skills that were on point with the effectiveness of the goal they were trying to achieve during the session. It is important to understand the major principles of groups and as a future clinical social worker one must continue practicing to improve skills and competencies needed to run groups.

REFERENCES

Corey, G. (2015) Theory and Practice of Group Counseling. Cengage Learning.

Zastrow, C., & Hessenauer, S. L. (2019). Empowerment Series: Social Work with Groups: Comprehensive Practice and Self-Care. Cengage Learning.