

NARRATIVE THERAPY AND ITS USEFULNESS WITH THE GERIATRIC POPULATION

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PURPOSE

- The purpose of our presentation is to address the growing need that exists for counseling services tailored to the geriatric population (Okura et al. 2010)
- According to the Administration on Aging (2011) there are approximately 41.4 million elderly adults with a steady growth in this population since 2000 (Administration on Aging, 2011).
- The Administration on Aging (2011) also states that there are approximately 572,440 individuals above 65 years of age in Louisiana.
- Okura et al. (2010) found that neuropsychiatric systems are highly prevalent in adults older than 71; those diagnosed with dementia and / or cognitive impairment from this population may also struggle with functional limitations in daily living.

GOALS

- One goal of our presentation is to discuss the potential usefulness of narrative therapy and basic counseling skills when working with members of the geriatric client population, aged 70 and beyond, who struggle with varying levels of dementia and / or cognitive processing.
- Another goal is to generate discussion and interest on engaging in practice and scholarship in the area of geriatric counseling to meet the growing need.

OBJECTIVES cont...

- The third objective is to describe characteristics of memory in the context of aging and counseling individuals in the geriatric community that struggle with declines in cognitive processing and memory.
- The fifth objective is to examine the usefulness of Narrative Therapy and basic skill usage in order to work through some of the challenges associated with providing effective counseling services to older adults, beyond age 70, that struggle with varying stages of dementia and cognitive processing.

OBJECTIVES

- The first objective is to describe challenges that can occur when counseling clients in the geriatric population who experience dementia and /or a decline in cognitive processing.
- The second objective is to describe characteristics of the geriatric population including common themes, developmental tasks, needs, and psychosocial stage of development.

RATIONALE / ASSUMPTIONS

- The role of memory in contributing to definitions of self, supports the idea that an exploration of memory may in fact provide a sense of individual meaning enabling one's ability to work through challenges associated with memory loss and old age in general.
- While a decline in memory functioning, as is seen with clients at various levels of dementia, can negatively impact one's sense of self, exploring past memories that are able to be recalled and allowing for the re-construction or validation of those narratives may improve overall psychological functioning.
- Memory is comprised of many evolving dynamics including experiences from childhood, adolescence and adulthood. It has been theorized that memories of previous experiences significantly impact the manner in which we relate to self, others and the environment. In this context, it can be said that, memory loss has the potential to negatively impact one's psychological well-being (Morack, Ram, Fauth, & Gerstorf, 2013).
- Sharing the content of memories in the form of stories is a technique that provides opportunities for individuals to reconstruct the meaning of those memories and in this sense, a narrative therapy approach represents a counseling approach to explore important memories (Richert, 2003).

SCOPE

- While there are many potential areas of focus in counseling within the geriatric population, this presentation is centered on counseling with older adults, aged 70 and older, who are in the beginning, intermediate, or late stage of dementia with a cognitive decline.
- The information shared today could also be applied to any age group in counseling that struggle with dementia or issues involving cognitive impairment.

DEFINITIONS AND POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

- A standard age of 65 is commonly accepted as being the beginning of the geriatric period (Newman & Newman, 2009).
- Needs vary across groups but are usually centered on basic tasks associated with daily living like bathing, dressing, food preparation, eating and toileting (Newman & Newman, 2009).
- A standard age of 65 is commonly accepted as being the beginning of the geriatric period (Newman & Newman, 2009).
- Typical life transitions during this stage can include a transition to new living arrangements, limited finances, grieving the losses of loved ones and other phenomena associated with this developmental stage of life; these events may negatively impact memory, trigger depression, and have other psychological and psychosocial effects (Newman & Newman, 2009).
- Do they even believe in counseling, have they ever received counseling before, or beliefs that only “crazy people” go to counseling.

DEFINITIONS AND POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS, cont...

- Needs vary across individuals in the geriatric population and are often times centered on basic tasks associated with daily living like bathing, dressing, food preparation, eating and toileting (Newman & Newman, 2009).
- Death and dying are common themes associated with the geriatric stage of life; individuals in this age group often think and are more aware of their own mortality and that of friends (Newman & Newman, 2009).
- Individuals in the geriatric population are more likely to experience the death of a peer compared to individuals in other age groups (Newman & Newman, 2009)

DEFINITIONS AND POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS, cont...

- Major health complications in individuals 75 or older are often times followed by a sudden onset of dementia and individuals in this age group are more likely to experience a major health event compared to other groups (Newman & Newman, 2009).
- Individuals aged 75 and older are more likely to experience failing health and functioning including gradual sensory loss including decreases in vision, hearing, taste and smell (Newman & Newman, 2009).
- This population can experience complications with medications that might impact memory or substance abuse

Counseling Trends in the Geriatric Population

1. According to Morgan (2013), characteristics of therapy with individuals in the geriatric population are generally “palliative” versus “curative” (p. 94).
1. Arean and Cook (2002) report that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Interpersonal Therapy and Supportive Psychotherapy are among the most frequently utilized approaches.
2. According to Arean and Cook (2002), CBT has been successful in assisting clients with finding a deeper sense of meaning as it relates to death and dying compared to treatment of symptoms with psychopharmaceuticals.

Counseling Trends in the Geriatric Population cont...

1. Morgan (2013) suggests that further research into therapeutic interventions with the geriatric population could focus on utilizing guided techniques that assist clients in this population with exploring the past in search of the happy memory.
2. It is possible that individuals who struggle with emotional difficulties in the population under-report their experiences as they are often times defined as being 'normal' characteristics of growing old (Alexopolous, 2005).

MEMORY AND COGNITIVE PROCESSING IN THE GERIATRIC POPULATION

1. Memory function can be conceptualized within the context of a common model that separates memory functions into the following categories: the sensory register, short-term memory and long-term memory (Rosnick as cited in Newman & Newman, 2009).
2. Cognitive processing involves various neural functions including memory, decision-making, problem-solving and others (Newman & Newman, 2009).
3. An aspect of cognitive processing is represented by the ability to store information into short-term memory then transfer that information into long-term memory and then to retrieve it from long-term memory is of particular interest to researchers attempting to better understand the manner in which cognitive processing occurs in memory functioning in the elderly population (Rosnick as cited in Newman & Newman, 2009).

MEMORY AND COGNITIVE PROCESSING IN THE GERIATRIC POPULATION, cont...

1. Challenges for individuals aged 70 and older have been associated with impairment in mental functioning specifically in being able to store new information, transfer that information into long-term memory and then recall that same information at a later time (Rosnick as cited in Newman & Newman, 2009).
2. Horne (1979) suggested that neural functions associated with cognitive processing decreases with age (as cited in Newman & Newman, 2009).
3. Individuals who struggle with cognitive decline and memory impairment tend to experience significant deficits in short-term memory abilities compared to long-term memory functions; memories of childhood, for example, may be more salient compared to experiences that occur in the present tense (Bartz & Lewis, 1970).
4. Individuals aged 70 and older are disproportionately impacted by dementia, which increases the likelihood that counselors will encounter an individual with dementia when working with adults aged 70 and older (Conwell, 1995).

MEMORY AND COGNITIVE PROCESSING IN THE GERIATRIC POPULATION, cont...

1. Many individual differences in the memories of older adults exist and helping professionals have challenged the notion that aging is a definitive causal factor in memory loss and cognitive decline (Cooper, Fisk & Hertzog, 1996).
2. Research suggests that the geriatric population is disproportionately affected by neural dysfunction that leads to a decline in cognitive processing including memory impairment (Spaan, Raaijmakers & Jonker, 2005).

THE IMPACT OF MEMORY LOSS AND COGNITIVE DECLINE ON WELLNESS

1. Memory decline and cognitive processing has been associated with a loss in an individual's view and experience with self (Addis, Tippett & Prebble, 2013).
2. Self-concept has been viewed as consisting of memories with memories and awareness representing a significant role in the development and maintenance of self-concept (Addis, Tippett & Prebble, 2013).

NARRATIVE THERAPY

- Narrative therapy is an intervention that involves storytelling (Kanofsky & Leib, 2003).
- The counselor's role is to facilitate the client's telling of his or her story by utilizing basic counseling skills like paraphrasing, reflecting, restating and others (Richert, 2003).
- The goal of narrative therapy is to provide clients with an opportunity to reconstruct the meaning of their story in a way that provides a deeper sense of understanding of the elements of their story and the impact their story has on their life and general sense of self (Kanofsky & Leib, 2003).
- The client's role is to actively engage in the process by sharing their story and analyzing portions of their stories with the goal of reconstructing or re-shaping the story with the desired result of personal growth (Richert, 2003).

NARRATIVE THERAPY, CONT...

- The philosophical underpinnings of narrative therapy are based on social constructionism.
- Narrative therapy is based on the idea that individuals construct their own realities through social experiences and that individual constructions of their social realities can be used during the process involved in this type of therapy.
- Counselors utilizing narrative therapy facilitate a story-telling process that provides clients with the opportunity to understand their situation through the meaning captured in the 'story'
- Counselors facilitate a process of re-storying and this allows individuals to reconstruct the meaning that is attached to their 'story' .

NARRATIVE THERAPY, CONT...

- Narrative Therapy has been described as being theoretically consistent with counseling in a multicultural context due to its relationship to the idea of social constructionism
- Narrative Therapy provides clients with the opportunity to better understand their autobiographical selves (Addis, Tippet, Prebble, 2013).
- Utilizing Narrative Therapy as an approach with the geriatric population provides the opportunity to explore past memories that contribute to a client's sense of self.

THE USEFULNESS OF NARRATIVE THERAPY WITH THE GERIATRIC POPULATION

- Individuals in the geriatric population have lived for several decades, and these experiences, which are stored in the form of memories, significantly contribute to one's sense of self.
- Utilizing a Narrative Therapy intervention to explore significant life events from the past provides clients with opportunities to better understand these experiences and this can result in a better understanding of self.
- Utilizing a Narrative Therapy approach that is focused on past-life experiences with individuals in the geriatric population can be particularly fitting as long-term memory of events that occurred in the past, during childhood for example, appear to be the least affected by cognitive decline and memory function.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES IN UTILIZING NARRATIVE THERAPY IN THE GERIATRIC POPULATION

- A challenge that can occur when using narrative therapy with involves clients forgetting while sharing their stories.
- Clients may be unable to benefit from the deeper sense of meaning, a goal of narrative therapy, due to issues with cognitive processing and poor memory functioning that can limit one's ability to make basic cognitive connections involved in achieving this type of self-awareness.

UTILIZING BASIC COUNSELING SKILLS TO WORK THROUGH MEMORY CHALLENGES

- Clients who have difficulty remembering their 'stories' or who experience a great degree of forgetting during session may benefit from consistent restatements and counselor-tracking.
- Clients in the population who experience difficulty understanding something that is being said by the counselor or is having difficulty explaining him or herself can receive assistance from the counselor through the counselor's use of a paraphrase or a reflection

Other Ideas for Working with the Geriatric Population

- One important area is that clinical services with individuals 75 and older should start with an assessment that can detect cognitive decline and memory dysfunction.
- Also, tailor the informed consent process so that it includes specific information about the utilization of narrative therapy including the usage of basic counseling skill to work through some of the challenges involved in narrative therapy with this population as it relates to cognitive decline and memory.

CONCLUSION

- Difficulties with memory functioning and cognitive decline can negatively impact the counseling process when any intervention is used.
- Utilizing Narrative Therapy with a focus on long-term memory in the geriatric population may be beneficial to those who struggle with cognitive decline and diminished memory functioning.
- Overall, interventions that are memory-centric may be beneficial to counseling work with individuals in the geriatric population.

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