Overview of Family Systems

Psychology 470
Introduction to Chemical Addictions
Steven E. Meier, Ph.D.

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Background

- Families have a major impact in substance abuse and treatment
- Are also a major protection against use and treatment as well.
- Each member plays a role
- Roles may be different in different cultures
- Family itself has a function in the community
- What is considered a family differs in different cultures

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Lots of Different Types of Families

- Traditional family
- Single parent household
- Family having a step-parent
- Child being raised by a grandparent
- Same-sex couples
- Interracial couples
- Children being raised by foster parent
- Hillary’s villages
- Other

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Why is the Family Important?

- Families are the base unit in all societies and cultures
- Provides support structure for the participants
  - Major role is child rearing
  - Secondary role is family support
    - May include extended family as well
  - Tertiary role is community involvement
- Families influence substance abuse
- Substance abuse influences family functioning

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Family Systems

- Family systems are dynamic
  - Members change
    - Births, enter by marriage, deaths
  - Persons in the family change
    - Grow up, have problems, have good and bad experiences
  - Relationships change
    - Marriage, divorce,
  - Context changes
    - Move, new jobs, new house and neighborhood
    - New schools

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Family Systems Models Theory

- Several different models
- Revolve around different themes
  - Rituals and Routines
  - Shame
  - Rules and Roles
Overall
- Models view the family as a homeostatic system
- Family is seen as a unit, regardless of “cost” to individual members
- Individual’s use serves as a stabilizing function
- System maintains the behavior to prevent change

Change Causes Stress
- System is balanced like a scale
- Add problems it becomes of balance
  - Substance abuse
- Family tries to rebalance
  - Isolates the abuser
  - Members take on more roles
- Change can be positive or negative
- Systems in general tend to resist change
  - Changes: positive, negative
- Change requires adaptive energy, adjustment requires resources
- Systems resist change (systems seek and preserve homeostasis, equilibrium, or balance)

Other Models Related to Family Systems
- Behavioral
- Stress-coping
- Have a more empirical base

Family Systems Models

Rituals and Routines Models
- Steinglass
- Contends there are two different types of alcoholic related families
  - Alcoholic Family
  - Family with an alcoholic member

Alcoholic Family
- Chronic alcoholism is the central organizing theme
- Alcoholism has inserted itself into every aspect of family life
  - Behavior of the alcoholic elicits responses from the family members
  - Family members behavior becomes impaired
- Causes more drinking
- Cycle continues
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Family Behaviors

• Are homeostatic in nature
• Are organized to return stability to the family
• Causes continued drinking
• The family system ultimately becomes organized to maintain the drinking
• Normal rituals may be disrupted by the drinking
  • Meals, holidays, etc

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Family Growth

• Encompasses the family developing
  • Clear boundaries
  • Family Themes
  • Choosing clear boundaries
  • All decisions revolve around these areas
  • All become disrupted when families have alcoholic members
  • Family ultimately consolidates and defends its identity
  • Passes on the learning to future generations (unless confronted and changed)

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Shame Systems

• Normative Shame
  • Is necessary for social functioning
• Shame-bound families
  • Engage in pathological patterns of communication
  • Instills a sense of toxic shame in their offspring
  • Ultimately disrupts real relationships
    • Promotes secrets and changes boundaries
  • Causes disruption in the family
  • Causes problems in all aspects of their lives

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Families

• Construct networks to hide alcoholism from each other and the community.
• Alcoholism is also correlated with
  • Emotional abuse
  • Sexual abuse
  • Physical abuse
• Each problem is surrounded by secrecy
  • Secrets inhibit the members
  • Stops changes in behavior
  • Permits the behaviors to continue
• Parents can help children by explaining the alcoholic is responsible for the behavior, not the child

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Rules and Roles Models

• Wegscheider – Cruise
  • Six typical family roles
    • Dependent (alcoholic)
    • Chief enabler (spouse, powerless spouse)
    • Hero (overachieving child)
    • Scapegoat (delinquent child)
    • Lost child (isolated child)
    • Mascot (immature child)

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Dependent Role

• Is the alcoholic
• Is dependent on others to help him/her maintain his/her addiction
• Is self-centered
• Focused on the next time of use and to avoid withdrawals
• Denies any of the above apply to him/her
Chief Enabler Role
- Usually the spouse
- Tries to help the alcoholic
- Supports the alcoholics drinking
- Needs to pickup the roles of the alcoholic as well as maintain their own
- Is often seen as powerless in the family but often has a lot of power over the other family members

Family Hero Role
- Child that can do no wrong
- Has exceptional grades
- Wins all the events
- Etc.
- Is an overachiever in all aspects
- Provides the hero aspects to the family

Family Scapegoat Role
- Is the reason the alcoholic drinks
- Is the Black Sheep
- Is the person that always causes problems for the family
- Blame is always placed on this person for the family’s problems
- Very difficult to change out of this role even with family counseling

Lost Child Role
- This is the one that seems to be lost in the family.
- No one pays attention
- Just is kind of there

Child Mascot Role
- Is the family clown
- Always makes everyone laugh
- Always getting attention by engaging in some behavior out of the ordinary
- Hard to change this role as well
- Gets lots of reinforcement

Other Aspects
- Members may have one or more roles in the family
- Roles may shift over time
- May see some of the roles in normal families
- In alcoholic families, the roles are very rigid and more intense.
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When User is Trying to Recover

- Person tries to regain original or traditional role or position in the family system
- Includes
  - Decisions regarding sex and intimacy
  - Difficulties in parent-child relations (discipline, communication)
  - Developmental changes, family life cycle transitions, situation changes

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Problem

- Members try to maintain their roles and positions
- Lack trust
  - You (the user) let us down before
  - Power
    - I like the power I now have thank you
    - I have had to do these tasks for a long time.
    - I need to keep doing them because you are going to use again

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Problems With the Models

- Most theories are descriptive and lack scientific rigor (Steinglass)
- Imprecise, untestable, commonsense
- Gender bias (e.g., Goldner)
  - Boundary called a family does not take into account the other social forces in the community.
  - Families are not equal – Females have less power than men in families and society
    - Cannot ignore that fact.
- Are correlational in nature
- Often are developed after the fact.
- Have a lot of face validity

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Defenders of Family Systems Models

- Criticisms are irrelevant
  - Main value is not from scientific models
  - Is a different approach to conceptualizing clinical problems and interventions

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Behavioral Models

- Based on principles of behavioral theory
- Contends
  - All behavior is learned and maintained through environmental or social consequences (reinforcement and punishment)
- Insists on
  - Rigorous and data driven set of procedures
  - Regularly monitored scientific methodology
  - Social Learning and Cognitive models
    - Have added that cognitive processes often mediate between the person and environment
      - Social learning / modeling, expectancy, others

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Models Contend

- Families use reinforcement to maintain the drinking behavior
  - Positive – give attention to when the person is drinking
  - Negative – protects the individual from negative consequences for using
- Also use Punishment
  - Inflict penalties for using substances
- Problem
  - All three approaches causes an increase in using the substance.
Differ From Other Family Approaches

- Focus begins on behavioral assessments
- Target
  - Antecedents of the behavior
  - Nagging, communication issues
  - Consequences of the event
  - Feel good, don’t need to go to work
- Treatment focuses on observable events
- Causes are linear not circular
- Are heavily researched (unlike other approaches) and have strong empirical support
- Unlike other approaches, are not used as much.

Stress-Coping Models

- Are similar to behavioral models
  - Both address addiction within the individual
  - Both include marital and family relationships
- Does not view the family as a unit unto itself. Instead the family is used for the stress and coping of individual members.
- Contends use is to temporarily decrease life stress and strain.

Focuses on

- Stressful life circumstances
- Social resources
- Individual coping responses
- Can be useful to:
  - Identify the processes for relapse
  - Processes by which family members adapt to the user

Stress

- May not cause the use
- Stress may be associated with consequences after use and ultimately maintains the use
- Use may actually reduce the stress
  - Family stays away
  - Spouse does not bother you with things to do.
  - If you are out drinking, people are not yelling at you
    - Immediate vs. delayed consequences
    - You want to go “Where everybody knows your name”

Conclusions

- Families have a role in the behavior
- May or may not cause the behavior
- May play a role in the maintenance of the behavior
  - How it does depends on the model
  - How reliable or valid the model is varies
- Has a role in the treatment process
  - May not be as important as other factors.