



Family Systems Theories of Substance Abuse

Psychology 470

Introduction to Chemical Addictions

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Background

- It has been observed that alcoholism runs in families for several centuries.
- The question is why
 - Genetic Theories Nature
 - Learned Behavior Nurture
- Minimal research on other substances

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Family Systems

- Will focus on alcoholism
- Contends that alcoholism is caused by dysfunctional family systems
- Generally uses the “traditional” family as a system.

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Background

- Generally, people tend to marry people similar to themselves
 - Same SES, Education, racial groups, racial groups, etc.
- Also engage in similar social groups

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Families

- Are similar to other groups
- Undergo a variety of transitions
 - Marriage
 - Fiscal pressures in early marital years
 - Early childhood years
 - Job and location changes
 - Adolescent years
 - Children leaving home
 - Others

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Many Aspects of Being in a Family

- Have a variety of different psychological and sociological systems that occur
 - Parental Modeling and Parental styles
 - Triangulation
 - Communication issues
 - Fiscal pressures
 - Emotional stability

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Elements of Family Systems

- Each family system has
 - Rules
 - Ways of communication
 - Verbal and Non-Verbal
 - Shared values
 - Boundaries
 - Patterns of interaction

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Result

- In normal systems there is a balance
 - There is ebb and flow among the units
 - Family tries to reach a state of homeostasis
- Imbalanced systems
 - Are out of balance
 - Families must compensate for the imbalance

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Dysfunctional vs. Imbalanced

- Dysfunctional
 - First described by Ackerman
 - Used to describe relationships, parenting, behavior, individuals, other
 - Is often shame-based and used in a negative connotation
 - Often used in a labeling context
 - You have a codependent, enabling, dysfunctional relationship with your spouse
 - Does not help the person
 - May make the person feel hopeless, ashamed, etc.

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Imbalanced

- First described by Satir
- Uses a mobile model
 - Shift the mobile, everything changes
- Has a better connotation
 - Is easier to perceive a change if the system is imbalanced vs. dysfunctional

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Family Contributions to Addiction

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Many Ideas and Models

- Communication problems
- Difficulty or a reduction of intimacy
- Fears of being abandoned or smothered
- Issues of emotionality
- Family learning/modeling/reinforcement

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Communication

- “What We Have Here is a Failure to Communicate”
- Persons have difficulty communicating with other in the family
- Find that when you drink booze, you become less shy, more talkative, can communicate better.
- Also causes more aggressive behavior
- Increased tolerance, need more booze
- Results in more problems
- Communication cannot occur unless you are drinking

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Problem

- Communication problems also occur when you are drinking
- Cannot conduct a rational conversation with a person who has been drinking
- Cannot do therapy with a person who is drinking
 - At high levels, person does not even recall what you said.

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Conclusions

- Communication issues can contribute to family issues and addiction problems
- Probably does not cause the addiction

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Intimacy, Abandonment, Emotionality

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Initially

- Alcohol/Drug use is used to facilitate to the interpersonal relationship
- Can be seen in dating rituals
- Can be seen for discussions within the relationship.
 - Need a drink so we can “open up”
- Problem
 - Increased tolerance

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Later

- Need more substances to “communicate”
- Need more substances to “dull the pain” in the relationship
- Result
 - Increased consumption
 - Decrease or problems in communication
 - Creates balance problems within the family

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Result

- Family stresses increase
- Family dysfunction increases
- Develops into a cycle.
 - Problems increase
 - More consumption of compounds
 - More problems

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Family Members

- Initially assist with the development of the use and dependence
- Help maintain the dependence
- Can hinder the recovery of the individual

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Analysis

- No doubt families have an impact on addiction and recovery
- Is correlated with addiction
- Does not mean families cause the addiction.

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Other Problems

- How do you explain adolescent addiction Family modeling
 - Adolescent observes use among parents
 - Engages in those behaviors
 - Does not explain use/addiction when parents do not drink.
 - Can explain how drinking in some societies remains low

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Conclusions

- Families have an impact on the addictions process.
 - Families probably do not cause the addiction process
 - Are correlated with the process
- Families also have an impact on recovery
- Families often experience great stress when a member becomes an abuser or dependent

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