



Overview of Family Systems

Psychology 470

Introduction to Chemical Addictions

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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

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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

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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)

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Other Models Related to Family Systems

- Behavioral
- Stress-coping
- Have a more empirical base

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Family Systems Models

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Rituals and Routines Models

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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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Lost Child Role

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

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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

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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 to 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 / modelling, 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.

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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.

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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

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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

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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"

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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.

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