

THE EFFECT OF ENCOUNTER GROUP ON SELF - ESTEEM OF ALCOHOLICS

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SUMMARY : *The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of the group experience on the self - esteem of the alcoholics. We used the encounter group experience as an independent variable.*

Patients were choosen randomly and were divided into two groups. The test group was administered individual supportive psychotherapy and encounter group whereas the control group was given only individual supportive psychotherapy. The self - esteem scale of the patients were evaluated and the differences between the groups were examined. The encounter experience was found to be effective in increasing the self - esteem of alcoholics and the results were discussed.

Key Words : *Alcoholic, Self - Esteem, Encounter Group.*

INTRODUCTION

For years the concept of self - esteem has been studied and various definitions has been made. Sullivan (1953) defined self - esteem as an emotion that helps people feel competent in their relationships with others. Brisset (1972), on the other hand, defines self - esteem as self - evaluation. While according to Chrzanowski (1981) self - esteem is a feeling of wholeness and self - acceptance, according to Adler, self - esteem is a transition from the feeling of inferiority to superiority (19).

When all these definitions are considered, self - esteem can be defined as a feeling accepting one's self as the way he is, a feeling of confidence and self - approval. In short, self - esteem is being in peace with one's self.

Low rates of self - esteem plays an important role in the evolution of neurotic symptoms and

psychosis (6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 19, 20, 21).

Many support the view that substance addicts have significant defects of self - esteem. Indeed, research on groups of substance addicts and alcoholics have shown that people in these groups have relatively lower self - esteem than the people in normal groups (18).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

70 male patients hospitalized in Alcohol Department of Gazi University Hospital have been included in this research. Patients have been appointed to experiment and control groups equally through random selection. Throughout the hospitalization period, special care was taken to make sure that both groups acquired equal help from clinic activities and therapy methods. Besides routine clinic activities, the experiment group (n=35) was provided with personal therapy and encounter group to

analyze its influence. To the control group, on the other hand, together with clinic activities only supportive personal therapy was assigned.

In the research Rosenberg Self - Esteem Scale (RSES) which is developed by Rosenberg and accepted to measure self - esteem is used. Studies on the validity and reliability of this scale in Turkey was carried out by Çuhadaroğlu (1986).

RSES included 12 sub - scales designed for one's self - evaluation. Patients are asked to fill the scale themselves. In this research "the self - esteem sub - scale" which is one of the 12 sub - scales that form the RSES was used. According to an interview with Çuhadaroğlu (1991), self - esteem sub - scale for adults can be employed as a single format and by itself. In self - esteem sub-scale there exist 10 points designed according to Guttman measurement style. These points with positive and negative meanings are given in successive order. The answers are evaluated within their internal evaluation system with points from 0 to 6. Patients with points from 0 to 1 are evaluated to have high self - esteem and those who have points from 2 to 4 are considered to have average self - esteem. Finally patients with points from 5 to 6 are accepted to have low self - esteem.

The week after the alcohol withdrawal effects of patients recess, they are given the scale during their first meeting with the researcher. The patients who took the first part of the scale had been selected to the experiment and control groups randomly. The clinic personnel had shown special attention during hospitalization and discharge periods of patients in order to maintain objectivity in the evolution of groups. In addition, throughout the research, the hospitalization period of patients have been kept constant between 5 to 6 weeks. Special care has also been taken to make certain that patients in both groups benefited equally from various activities and therapy throughout their hospitalization period. The patients were also provided with 45 minute personal interviews twice a week, so that they acquire equal benefit from the therapy. At the end of the hospitalization period the patients who are going to be discharged were given the RSES again as the last test.

The aim of this research is to analyze the effect of the variable group life. For this reason the control group formed with patients who only received personal therapy was compared with the experimental group of patients who received both personal and

group therapy. Besides the clinic activities the experimental group was also provided with group therapy. However apart from the provision of group therapy, the experimental and control groups were followed within the same environmental conditions. The 45-60 minute group therapy was carried out twice a week for 4 weeks with encounter group therapy characteristics (12, 13).

During the therapy encounter, openness and honesty, self - awareness, attention to emotions and "now and here" concept have been stressed. Within this encounter group individuals reacted to each other or to the rules imposed on the group by individuals. Efforts were made to give an encounter opportunity to the whole group. Special care was taken to include the group members to the discussions and to base the therapy on one member's support to the other in their reactions to the subject. Meanwhile the therapist stressed the importance of group responsibility and the responsibility of each member to be open before the group.

The scale has been assigned numbers after it was applied to both groups as the pre - test and the last - test. The difference between the points of pre-test and the last - test was taken and with the pre - test - last - test comparison model the difference between groups and the differences between these variations themselves have been analyzed. A non - parametric test, Mann - Whitney U Test, was applied in order to determine the significance of the difference between averages.

RESULTS

According to the research results, when the differences between averages of the two groups are contrasted, the experimental groups were observed to display a significant difference on the $p < 0.001$ level in relation to the control group ($sd : 2, t : 4.28$).

When the groups are evaluated within themselves, while the self - esteem levels of patients in the control group who received only personal therapy, have shown an increase, the self - esteem levels of patients in the experiment group who received both personal and group therapy have displayed a greater and more evident increase ($X_{T2-T3} = 0.95$).

As a result, the findings have shown that group life is an influential way in increasing self - esteem.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research have displayed that

there exists a marked increase in the self - esteem levels of patients in both groups after the therapy. In other words, both personal therapy and personal therapy plus group therapy have been influential in increasing the self - esteem levels of alcoholics.

Alcoholism is an illness with both personal and social sides. For this reason, besides not drinking, a person's efforts to establish healthy relationship with others, to adjust to his environment and to have a regular life are also very important elements of recovering from alcoholism. In order to accomplish all these, a person should, first of all, be able to think positive about himself.

A study on alcoholics, displayed that low self - esteem level of alcoholics is caused by the depression these people tend to have. According to Barnes (1979) and Nerviano (1983) alcoholic and prealcoholic people's characteristics display depressive symptoms. These symptoms are increased dependence, a decrease in self - esteem, high neuroticism and decreased autonomy.

When all these points are considered, it can be concluded that both supportive personal therapy and encounter groups are helpful in directing depressive and dependent, self - centered, isolated, introvert people who have low resistance to objections, sociopathic tendencies, low self - esteem and try to find comfort in alcohol to feel better.

The comparison of experimental and control groups, displayed that the self - esteem level of the experimental group has shown a clear recovery in contrast to the self - esteem level of the control group. This observation leads to the conclusion that group therapy tends to be more influential in the treatment of alcoholism.

Low self - esteem is a basic factor in most psychopathologies and its symptoms originate from efforts to deal with the emotions related with self - esteem. Therefore, according to this view, the therapist's efforts to increase the self - esteem level of a patient can be considered as therapeutic. This is also true for group therapy.

During group therapy, the patient realizes that his problems are not unique, that other people help in finding solutions to his problems, that group members listen and value his thoughts, that he can get information useful in dealing with the problems of life, that he can be at the center. He also notices that other group members and he himself have cha-

acteristics that he had not noticed before and that he belongs to the group. All these emotions and observations support self - esteem of the patient throughout the therapy.

Indeed comparative studies have shown that alcoholics display higher recovery levels with the help of group therapy (8). Also studies on various patients and normal adults displayed that encounter group activities too, lead to an increase in self - esteem (16).

As a conclusion, the information presented above may lead to the view that through group therapy self - esteem (that is already supported by personal therapy) can be further influenced positively. The fact that in recent years group therapy has been effectively used in alcohol treatment (5, 16, 17), both during hospitalization and afterwards once more points out the importance of this subject and this study.

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