

GESTALT PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED SPINAL CORD INJURY AND ARE MOVING BY WHEELCHAIR

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Abstract. *The aim of the work was to examine the therapeutic impact of Gestalt individual psychotherapy to the disabled people after spinal cord injury, using experimental structured dance movement and/or life educational program in the community rehabilitation settings. The results. The effectiveness of Gestalt individual psychotherapy and rehabilitation in the local community was essentially described using some major qualitative indices: quality of the involvement into community moment, which is mostly reflected by a person's subjective perception of how the community accepts him/her; the effectiveness of their involvement into the local community, which depends on the duration and quality of the transitional period from rehabilitation in the hospital to the one at home: people who engaged in community activities (for example, wheelchair dancing) faster and more tended to notice the effectiveness of rehabilitation. Conclusion. It is necessary to apply Gestalt individual psychotherapy in the community rehabilitation for the disabled as the psychotherapeutic model is empowering both - a person and communities to help the disabled move from the expectation of being 'care cases' to enabling their ability to fulfil personal and social changes accordingly. Specifying the aims of the work, the main results obtained, and the conclusions are drawn.*

Keywords: *Spinal cord injury; local community; rehabilitation and individual Gestalt psychotherapy, wheelchair dancing experiments, education in community.*

Introduction

Many communities are essentially inaccessible to individuals with mobility impairments, rendering the individual a virtual prisoner in his or her home, completely reliant on family and friends (Burns, O'Connell & Rathore, 2012). When a person is unable to move independently he/she loses access to communication, which affects not only his/her identity, self-esteem, self-expression and self-realization abilities, but also his/her presence in society: he/she becomes in some way 'invisible' and vulnerable. The disabled become aware of themselves as marginalized members of society, suffering not only physical but also psychological isolation, experiencing negative emotions both towards themselves and towards society, they also face financial hardship in Lithuania.

Spinal cord injury (SCI) medicine and social change practitioners can learn from recent experiences in order to identify, develop and operationalize appropriate interventions for future disasters (Burns, & et al., 2012). The specific challenges are including: coordination and mobilization; identification and procurement of required expertise; initial survey and assessment; health care delivery; community reintegration and health maintenance; and sustainability and capacity building (Burns, & et al., 2012).

The people who have suffered SCI and are moving by wheelchair become aware of themselves as marginalized members of society, suffering not only physical but also psychological isolation, experiencing negative emotions both towards themselves and towards society, they also face financial hardship in Lithuania (Soraka, Sapezinskiene, 2008).

Community reintegration and health maintenance identified challenges (Burns et al., 2012). A primary goal of rehabilitation is successful community reintegration (Burns et al., 2012). The reality of this goal in many settings is questionable in Lithuania.

The research problem. The most important aspect of research problem is that patients and people with disabilities, as members of the society, have equal rights regardless of their health problems. They have a right to a better physical, social, psychological and spiritual well-being of their lives. Attitudes towards patients and people who have suffered SCI and are moving by wheelchair are changing in foreign societies and in Lithuania, with the tendency to accept them as equal members of society and to be included in social institutions (Sapezinskiene, 2006).

The aim of the work. To examine the therapeutical impact of Gestalt individual psychotherapy to the disabled people after spinal cord injury, using experimental structured dance movement and/or life educational program in the rehabilitation settings.

The Social Change and Social Healing from Viewpoint of the Individual Gestalt Psychotherapy

For people after trauma, suffering from spinal cord injury and moving by the help of the wheelchair the major change happens in their social life. Metaphorically speaking their life splits. They are going through a conflict between two lives: former and present (Sapezinskienė, 2006). People after spinal cord injury by themselves usually divides their life into few periods: before trauma and before cord injury, when they were able to move without wheelchair and after - when were already paralysed. The former period, when they do not felt any pain and were healthy and present period, when they always feel pain and inadequate and lost (Sapezinskiene, 2006). Their life stage when they were able to live and move like everybody else, they call - life, the traumatizing, crisis period - death and present time - presence - existence. Existence is defined as being, as presence, as way of being of human personality. To exist means to be, to live. First definition of the existence was introduced by Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Healthy (currently not feeling ill) people also similarly are dividing their life when social or psychological trauma happens, when their expectations, relatives are lost, when they are emigrating or changing their social environment (Sapezinskiene, 2006).

Social change

The term social change to refer to shifts in significant behavioural patterns, values and norms in a culture, society, neighbourhood, community or workplace: sometimes this change is intentional; sometimes it is not. Social change is often supported by movements that inspire discontented members of society to rise up against people who have vested interests in the ways things are and who feel threatened by the uncertainty that change generates (Melnick, 2017). Conflicts gives opportunity for changes. Conflict is a field phenomenon in which two different world views, i.e. perceptions of reality, occupy the same place at the same time (Nevis, 2005, Melnick, 2017). Conflict and aggression are normal, occurring at all levels of system – intrapsychic, interpersonal and group, as well as between systems, cultures and societies (Melnick, 2017). When seeking social change one of the effective individual psychotherapy is Gestalt psychotherapy.

Social healing, using Gestalt psychotherapy

Individual psychotherapy is a place for a disabled to work through psychological issues as these issues emerge within the context of a one on one therapeutic alliance with a psychotherapist (Klein et al., 2013). Considerable evidence links the concept of therapeutic alliance with psychotherapy outcome for a “wide range of diagnoses in populations. One of the most eligible definitions of the Gestalt psychotherapy is

by Bowman (1998): ‘Gestalt therapy is – process psychotherapy with the goal of improving one’s contact community and the environment in general, spontaneity and authentic dialogue between client and therapist’.

The Gestalt approach has always had a philosophy of inclusion (Melnick, 2017). Gestalt theory and methodology explained as a social healing practice, which according to Goodman is in the service of creating a better society, rather than as an exercise in self-development (Melnick & Nevis, 2009). It is valid to raise a question - is Gestalt social intervention, supporting processes or solving problems? (Denham-Vaughan, 2014). Answering to that question we notice that in reality Gestalt is dual social healing intervention including process support and problem solving. The best what is possible to do, is to adapt and to learn good in your own social environment. Using Gestalt psychotherapy is possible purposefully evaluate and perform social healing intervention using such Gestalt constructs as awareness, phenomenology, field, presence, resistance, contact style, energy management and the cycle of experience (Melnick, 2017). The emphasis in Gestalt therapy is on using awareness and the phenomenological approach to establish a full sense of what is in current time, without effort to judge or to change (Taylor, 2014). The Paradoxical Theory of Change is exactly this: change follows when we do not try to be different but instead fully accept how we are. In the case for persons after SCI it is important to draw attention to which position in the society they find themselves according to power position. In this case is eligible social power definition by Nevis and Melnick (2012): ‘power as ‘an experience occurring between or among people and not something lodged in an individual person or group’. The problem for trauma persons with SCI is ‘that they lack the neurobiological functioning to be able to claim their embodied existence in present time (Taylor, 2014). In order to achieve opposite goal for disabled persons, moving by the help of the wheelchair, we apply wheelchair dance.

Experimental structured wheelchair dance movement

Dance is a worldwide human activity that involves complex whole body movements through space synchronized to music (Paterson et al., 2018). Scientific studies show, that dance has impact on health, especially on person’s psychological state (Koch et al., 2014).

Dance and movement therapy (DMT) process scheme, using various techniques based on the “here and now” principle. (Goodill, 2005; Sapezinskiene, Soraka, 2016; Terada, 2017) DMT is a psychotherapeutic method, using the dance and movement process to maintain the emotional, cognitive, social, physical functioning of individuals, helping them to become more involved in social relationships and social interactions (Sapezinskiene, Soraka, 2016). This principle is the same basic key of the Gestalt psychotherapy technique and is called therapeutic experiment. The movement experience had provided a dynamic opportunity to explore the relationship

between body and emotions, to evoke awareness and explore choice, and respond to complex situations more effectively. Moving actively, with full effort, can allow strong feelings, such as anger, rage, or joy, to be more consciously experienced and expressed, making them more available for verbal processing. Depending on one's needs in the moment, sensing and responding to the body through movement can be used effectively to regulate or contain emotion. Wheelchair dancing can have a host of positive psychological and physical effects (Saad, 2012).

Research Methodology and Methods

The methodological basis of the study is defined by the paradigm of social breakthrough, which is eligible for exploring social changes and experiences of individuals after SCI. Phenomenological method of qualitative research was applied for 24 people after spinal cord injury from their local community during three-month period spent in Monciskes, Svetoji (the summer camp for the disabled in Lithuania).

Gestalt individual psychotherapy was used for people who have suffered spinal cord injury and are moving by wheelchair. All the respondents participated in Gestalt group psychotherapy sessions and rehabilitation in the community and half of them (13) participated in the program of wheelchair dance experiments, others (11) – in the life educational programme. Injured, who suffered the traumatizing event 0.3 to 10 years ago, answered the questions of a qualitative in-depth interview and described the impact of individual Gestalt therapy. Participants of the research were interviewed what impact they had of individual Gestalt psychotherapy using experimental structured dance movement and/or life educational program in the rehabilitation settings. Results of the research were processed using content analysis and selecting significant codes.

Results and discussion

It was determined that similarly to the works of other authors (Kuipers et. al., 2011), three major code indices were attributed to value-based description of a local community as certain 'place' and involvement into the community: social integration; occupation; independent lifestyle. During our study, one more important index that reflected power and powerlessness continuum was discerned. The effectiveness of Gestalt individual psychotherapy and rehabilitation in the local community was essentially described using some major qualitative indices: quality of the involvement into community moment, which is mostly reflected by a person's subjective perception of how the community accepts him/her; the effectiveness of involvement into the local community, which depends on the duration and quality of a transitional period from rehabilitation in the hospital to the one at home: people who engaged in community activities (for example, wheelchair dancing) faster and more tended to notice the effectiveness of rehabilitation. People who participated in wheelchair dance education were less likely to emphasize

powerlessness and negative image of the community in comparison to those who did not engage in the local community after their rehabilitation in the hospital. We find the same suggestions as Viluckiene (2016): the individuals after spinal cord injury face the disability only during secondary socialization, after internalization of social typifications of disabled body of negative meaning, the overcoming of which and successful socialization requires the involvement into new social group or community, i.e., into a positive social structure, confirming their identity.

Conclusions

Obtained results showed, that it was properly applied individual gestalt psychotherapy using experimental structured wheelchair dance movement and/or life educational program in the rehabilitation settings. It was established that individual Gestalt psychotherapy impacts positively not only as psychotherapeutic but also as social changes intervention for the individuals who are suffering after spinal cord injury and moving by the help of wheelchair. According to Bowlby (1988), in psychotherapy, the therapist ‘provides conditions in which his patient can explore his representational models of himself and his attachment figures with a view to reappraising and restructuring them’. In individual Gestalt psychotherapy the attachment process takes place with the psychotherapist and the client’s therapeutic process unfolds within the safety and protection of this one on one relationship. It is necessary to apply a psychotherapeutic model empowering a person and communities to help the disabled move from the expectation of being ‘care cases’ to enabling their ability to fulfil personal and social changes accordingly. Gestalt individual psychotherapy and rehabilitation of the disabled was and still remains one of the main ways of integrating into the society with a malfunctioning and limited function.



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GEŠTALTO PSICHOTERAPIJA ŽMONĖMS, PATYRUSIEMS STUBURO SMEGENŲ PAŽEIDIMŲ IR JUDANTIEMS VEŽIMĖLIU

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Nepriklausoma tyrėja

Santrauka

Po traumos ir negalėdamas savarankiškai judėti žmogus netenka bendravimo galimybių, kas paveikia ne tik jo tapatybę, savigarbą, saviraišką ir savirealizacijos gebėjimus, bet ir jo buvimą visuomenėje: jis tampa tarsi „nematomas“ ir pažeidžiamas.

Tyrimo problema. Užsienio visuomenėse ir Lietuvoje keičiasi požiūris į pacientus ir nugaros smegenų pažeidimų patyrusius žmones, kurie juda neįgaliųjų vežimėliais, bet neaišku, kaip juos priimti: kaip lygiaverčius visuomenės narius ir įtraukti į socialines institucijas (Sapežinskienė, 2006).

Darbo tikslas. Ištirti geštalto individualios psichoterapijos poveikį neįgaliesiems po nugaros smegenų pažeidimo, judantiems vežimėliu, naudojant eksperimentinę struktūrizuotą šokio judesio ir (arba) gyvenimo edukacijos programą reabilitacijos aplinkoje.

Tyrimų metodologija ir metodai. Tyrimo metodologinį pagrindą apibrėžia socialinio proveržio paradigma, tinkama tirti socialiniams pokyčiams ir asmenų patirčiai po nugaros smegenų pažeidimų. Buvo taikyti kokybinio tyrimo fenomenologiniai metodai. Tyrimas vyko neįgaliesiems skirtoje stovykloje Lietuvoje, Monciškėse. Vasaros stovyklos, vykusios tris mėnesius, metu individuali, priartinanti prie poreikių, geštalto psichoterapija buvo taikyta žmonėms, patyrusiems nugaros smegenų pažeidimų ir judantiems neįgaliųjų vežimėliais. Visi 24 respondentai dalyvavo geštalto individualioje psichoterapijoje ir reabilitacijoje bendruomenėje, pusė jų (13) – eksperimentinėje struktūruoto šokio – judesio su vežimėliais – programoje, kiti (11) – gyvenimo edukacinėje programoje. Neįgalieji, patyrę traumuojantį įvykį prieš 0,3–10 metų, atsakė į kokybinio giluminio interviu klausimus ir aprašė individualios geštalto psichoterapijos poveikį. Tyrimo rezultatai buvo apdorojami naudojant turinio analizę ir parenkant reikšmingus kodus.

Rezultatai ir išvados. Buvo apibrėžti sutampantys ir su kitų autorių darbais (Kuipers et. al., 2011) trys pagrindiniai kodų indeksai: įsitraukimo į bendruomenės veiklą kokybė, kurią dažniausia atspindi subjektyvus žmogaus suvokimas, kaip bendruomenė jį priima; įsitraukimo į vietos bendruomenę veiksmingumas, kuris priklauso nuo pereinamojo laiko-

tarpio nuo reabilitacijos ligoninėje iki namų trukmės ir kokybės; galios ir bejėgiškumo kontinuumas. Respondentai, dalyvavę struktūruoto šokio – judesio su vežimėliais edukacijoje, rečiau pabrėžė bejėgiškumą ir neigiamą bendruomenės įvaizdį, palyginti su tais, kurie po reabilitacijos ligoninėje nedalyvavo vietos bendruomenės veikloje. Būtina taikyti įgalinančią asmenį ir bendruomenės individualios geštalto psichoterapinį modelį, padedantį neįgaliems asmenims pereiti nuo tendencijos, kad jais bus pasirūpinta, prie savo galios atradimo ir savęs įgalinimo įgyvendinti asmenybės ir atitinkamai socialinius pokyčius.

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