



Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Section - 2014

I35 Assessing Group Therapy for Parricides

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After attending this presentation, attendees will either gain or reinforce a conviction of the power of group treatment for patients facing severe challenges and will be able to convey this experience in their own teaching.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community's teaching members by showing the positive influence on future generations through their attentive supervision. It will impact the broader forensic science community by illustrating through example the value of group therapy to the quality of care for forensic patients.

Background: Parricide, the killing of a parent, is rare among crimes, accounting for only 2% of homicides. Thus, it was surprising to find some 15 patients with this history in a maximum-security forensic hospital in Connecticut, which at the time was a 25-year-old, 100-bed facility. The state's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services operates the hospital, which also serves some inmates (from the Department of Corrections) who pose special challenges or are nearing the end of their sentences with unresolved, serious mental health treatment needs. A literature review confirmed the impression that parricidal patients are especially challenging to treat, explaining their overrepresentation in the hospital's population. Applying convictions regarding the effectiveness of group therapy gained from early in residency training, and the continued influence of mentoring by senior community psychiatry faculty, it was decided to offer weekly group therapy specialized for willing patients with a history of parricide. The group became known as the Genesis Group.

Objective: To evaluate the subjective effectiveness of the Genesis Group, a weekly psychotherapy group for forensic inpatients who had murdered or attempted to murder a biological or psychological parent, along with demonstrating the benefits of the training received and, in turn, given by the therapists.

Method: Following **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** approval from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, 12 former or current Genesis Group members participated in individual 30-minute semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences in the Group. The interview entailed 19 open-ended questions covering different aspects of the group experience. Topics included the group's size, valued therapeutic themes, participants' attitudes, group leaders' characteristics, and recommendations for improving the group's effectiveness.

Results: Analysis of completed responses began with identification of common themes elicited by each question. Following this, the answers from all questions were compared and contrasted for a rich representation of the patients' impressions and suggestions. As a whole, the responses indicated that participants felt that they had gained significantly from their experiences in the group, and they offered useful suggestions.

Conclusions: The Genesis Group appears to be effective in meeting its therapeutic goals. Participants reported feeling that they had achieved a helpful distance from, and tolerance for, the emotions related to their crime of parricide. They no longer felt themselves as defined by their past parricidal behavior. They felt at least a sense of having grasped their crime dynamics. They gained an understanding of their mental illnesses, a fitting sense of responsibility, and a fresh redefinition of themselves in terms of personality rather than criminality. Thus, the mentoring in group treatment that the therapists had received was affirmed by its application to a particularly challenging subset of forensic patients.

Parricide, Mentoring, Treatment