

Group Meetings and their Effect on Psychotic Patients Behaviour

*By Seham Rashed, Mervat M. EL. Geneidy, Sanaa
A. Imam and I. EL-Kerdany*

ABSTRACT

This research focuses upon the behaviours of psychotic patients in ward group meetings. Studied were 15 male psychotic patients with a mean age of 27.2. These were grouped daily in meetings of 45 minutes duration for four weeks. Ward environment and problems of daily living in the ward were the main themes of group discussion. Observations of group behaviour were recorded weekly.

Findings showed that patients behaviour in group improved significantly over the four weeks. Positive reactions increased and negative ones decreased. In addition, patients pattern of interaction within the group changed favourably.

These results were interpreted to indicate that group ward meetings are an effective approach in helping to achieve the goals of psychiatric treatment mainly setting limits on symptomatic behaviour and learning basic psychosocial skills.

INTRODUCTION

When patients are admitted to a psychiatric inpatient treatment facility, it is usually because they are having difficulty in coping with daily living situations especially in regard to their relationship with other people. They frequently have difficulty in communicating their thoughts and feelings to others and in perceiving situations in a realistic and undistorted manner. Interpersonal relationships have often deteriorated, and these patients feel rejected and alone.

Sweeney (1978) stated that many practitioners who have worked with psychiatric patients have long felt that the environment in which

psychiatric treatment is conducted can influence the outcome of the patient's therapy, that is, the environment itself can be an instrument of treatment.

This was in agreement with Keys & Hoflinger (1974) who stated that the interpersonal environment in which a patient lives may be therapeutic or non therapeutic depending almost entirely on the intent and ability of the staff.

Group techniques in general can be very valuable in many branches, but according to Sommer (1965) they are of most importance in a psychiatric setting.

The main aim of this study was to identify the effect of introducing group meetings on psychiatric patients behaviour within the group. The meetings were held with the purpose of helping patients discuss ward problems, ventilate their feelings and socialize them.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The aim of the study was achieved through the use of an observation sheet including items pertaining to the different behaviour in groups. The items were listed into positive reactions and negative reactions.

The sample of the study constituted 15 psychiatric male patients with different diagnosis in Maamoura Mental Hospital. Their age group ranged between 20-30 years with a mean of 27.2.

The patients were grouped in meetings of 45 minutes duration daily for four weeks to discuss matters related to the ward environment and how to improve it. The group was lead and observed by the researchers.

Observation of group behaviour was recorded weekly. Data collected were sorted and tabulated in number and percent under positive and negative reactions and forms of interaction.

For comparing the frequencies in the fourth week with those of the first week, the binomial distribution was used.

RESULTS

The following results showed the progress, whether positive or negative, in the patients' reactions and interactions over the four weeks period. Statistical significance was tested only between the first and fourth week, as the starting and ending points.

The changes in patients' reactions within the group is shown in table (1). In the first week, no one was able to come alone, while (10) 66.7% of the patients came alone in the fourth week. The difference was statistically significant at the 5% level ($P = 6 \times 10^{-8}$). The frequency of "showing solidarity" increased significantly from (2) 13.3% in the first week to (8) 53.3% in the fourth week ($P = 2 \times 10^{-4}$). As regards "release of tension", (6) 40% of the patients were able to do it in the first week, this increased to (11) 73.3% by the fourth week and the increment was statistically significant ($P = 0.007$). "Showing agreement" was exercised by (5) 33.3% of the patients in the first week and by (11) 73.3% of the patients by the fourth week. Again this change was statistically significant ($P = 0.001$). As for the negative reactions, the frequency of those who showed tension and disagreement slightly decreased from (3) 20% in the first week to (1) 6.7% in the fourth week, however this difference was not statistically significant.

Antagonism was shown by (3) 20% of the patients in the first week, and disappeared by the fourth week, this drop was statistically significant ($P = 0.035$) while (8) 53.3% of the patients kept away from the group in the first week, no one did so by the fourth week. This change was statistically significant ($P = 1 \times 10^{-5}$). As regards involvement in "side talks" (3) 20% of the patients were involved in the first week while only one (6.7%) occurred in the fourth week. Again the drop was statistically significant.

TABLE I

Changes in patients' reactions within the group
(Number = 15)

Patients' reactions	1st week		2nd week		3rd week		4th week		P
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
I — Positive reactions :									
1. Comes alone	—	—	6	40	8	53.3	10	66.8	6×10^{-8}
2. Shows solidarity	2	13.3	7	46.7	7	46.7	8	53.3	2×10^{-4}
3. Shows tension release	6	40	5	33.3	11	73.3	11	73.3	0.007
4. Shows agreement	5	33.3	—	—	9	60	11	73.3	0.001
.....									
II — Negative reactions									
1. Shows disagreement	3	20	2	13.3	3	20	1	6.7	0.132
2. Shows tension	3	20	3	20	3	20	1	6.7	0.132
3. Shows antagonism	3	20	3	20	2	13.3	—	—	0.035
4. Away from the group	8	53.3	6	40	2	13.3	—	—	1×10^{-6}
5. Involved in side talks	3	20	3	20	—	—	1	6.7	0.132

There were some fluctuating changes in the patients' pattern of interaction or information (26.7%) for each were markedly increased by the fourth week 53.3% respectively (Table II), this change was statistically significant.

On the other hand, table (II) also shows that the ability to initiate

a talk was increased significantly within the group. While initiation occurred only once (6.7%) in the first week. It happened to increase to 10 (66.7%) times by the fourth week ($P = 6 \times 10^{-9}$).

TABLE II

Changes in the patients' interaction within the group
(Number = 15)

Interaction	1st week		2nd week		3rd week		4th week		P
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
I — Initiation of interaction :									
1. Asks for opinions	4	26.7	2	13.3	6	40	3	20	0.205
2. Asks for information	3	20	4	26.7	4	26.7	3	20	—
3. Asks for suggestion	2	13.3	3	20	5	33.3	1	6.7	0.278
4. Initiate the talk	1	6.7	11	73.3	9	60	10	66.7	6x10-9
.....									
II — Attempted Answer :									
1. Gives opinions...	4	26.7	5	33.3	11	73.3	8	53.3	0.020*
2. Gives information	4	26.7	6	40	8	53.3	7	46.7	0.054

* Significant.

DISCUSSION

It has been reported by Lippett and White (1943) that different group climates affect group behaviour on variables such as spontaneity of the group, the number of friendly remarks made by group members to each other in meetings, the amount of aggressive behavior, the degree to which normal free sociability is inhibited and the general amount of satisfaction or dissatisfaction within the group. This seems to agree with the results of the present study where there was an improvement in tension release from 40% in the first week to 93.3% in the fourth week, the friendly atmosphere that prevailed helped the patients to 'loosen' and to be able to express themselves more freely. Spiegel and Spiegel (1967) stated that the influence of patient-patient contacts is increasingly demonstrated to be one of the major therapeutic influences on a ward. This agrees with Mons and Monts (1970) who found that the social climate of the ward, if improved by group meetings as was the effect in this study increases the patients' liking for each other and thus probably the extent of patient-patient contact and mutual therapeutic influence.

The study also revealed that the introduction of group meetings had a very good effect on the patients regarding their ability to initiate talks 6.7% in the first week to 66.7% in the fourth week. It has repeatedly been reported by Bethelheim and Sylvester (1948) and Martin (1950) that minor changes in ward milieu can bring about an increase in appropriate behaviour on the part of severely regressed patients. This was supported by Mitchell (1974) who stated that all people live in groups and that mental disorder arises when people can no longer for various reasons function properly within the group to which they belong. So in fact, putting people together in a group and encouraging them to interact can be very fruitful. According to Reichmann (1959) loneliness seems to be such a painful, frightening experience that people will do practically everything to avoid it. The results of the study seems to agree with that, the number of patients who came on their own during the first week were nil, but increased gradually to 7% during the fourth week (Table I).

According to Saslow and Matarazzo (1962) the goals of psychiatric treatment are commonly shared no matter what the specific approach. They can be reduced, in their opinion to two main ones : controlling or setting limits on symptomatic behaviour and learning basic psychosocial skills.

The present study reveals that group meetings are an effective approach in helping to achieve these goals. It is evident from table II that the peak for initiation of interaction was the third week with a relative drop during the fourth week. This could perhaps be attributed to the patients' negative feelings associated with the termination of the group. Sene (1969) stated that patients often experience a surge of anxiety when treatment ends. This is often coped with by withdrawing from the relationship. The same justification was given by Zahourek and Crawford (1978) who found that termination is equivalent to the death of a loved object. Patients use their characteristic patterns of defense in coping with the pain. In spite of that, according to Del Campo (1978) the healing process of the emotionally disturbed person consists of gradual undoing of maladaptive behavioral responses used as a defense against pain and anxiety resulting from faulty perceptions about the self and environment.

In an atmosphere relatively free from external threat, the individual experiences re-integration of disturbed thought processes and his latent resources are uncovered and strengthened.

In their study, Visser and O'Sullivan (1976) stated that the interaction that took place led both patients and staff to examine the treatment situation, and better ways of encouraging patient responsibility were thought of. They finally concluded that psychiatric ward staff should concern themselves with problems and relationships rather than symptoms.

REFERENCES

- Bethlehem, B. and Sylvester, E. (1948) Therapeutic Milieu. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 18: 191-206.
- Del Campo, I.H. (1978) Psychiatric Nursing Therapy, Philosophy and Methods. *JPN and Mental Health Services*.
- Keys, G. and Hoflinger, C. (1974). *Basic Psychiatric Concepts in Nursing* 3rd. Edition. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co.
- Lippett, R. and White, R. (1943) The Social Climate of Children groups. In Barker, R. (ed.), *Child Behaviour and Development*. New York: McGraw Hills, Chapter 28.
- Martin, M.G. (1960) A Practical Treatment Program for a Mental Hospital 'beck' Ward. *American J. of Psychiatry*, 116: 758-764.
- Mitchell, R. (1974) Advances in Psychiatry. *Nursing Times* 28: 1851-53.
- Mons, R. and Horts, P. (1970) Differential Effects of the Social Atmosphere of Psychiatric Wards' in Human Relations 23: No. 1: 47-60.
- Reichmann, F.F. (1959) Loneliness. *Psychiatry*, 22: 1-15.
- Saslowsky, G. and Matarazzo, J.D. (1962) A Psychiatric Service in General Hospital: A setting for social learning. *Int. J. Soc. Psychol.*, 8: 5-18.
- Sommer, R. (1965) Working Effectively with Groups. *American Journal of Nursing*, 60: No. 2.
- Spiegel, H.P. and Spiegel, D. (1967) Perceived Helpfulness of others as a Function of Compatible Intelligence Levels. *J. Couns. Psychol.*, 14: 61-2.
- Sene, B.S. (1969) Termination in the Student-Patient Relationship. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*. 1: 39-45.
- Sweeney, L. (1978) Psychiatric Patients' Perceptions of their Milieu Therapy Program. *JPN and Mental Health Services*, pp. 28-32.

- Visher, J.S. and O'Sullivan, M. (1970) Nurse and Patient Responses to a Study of Milieu Therapy. *Amer, J. Psychiat* , 127-4.
- Zahourek, R.P. and Crawford, O.M. (1978) Forced Termination *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 4:193-199.

AUTHORS

- Dr. Seham Rashed. Assist. Prof. Psychiatry — Faculty of Medicine — Alexandria University.
- Dr. Mervat M. El Gueneidy — Dr. Sanaa A. Imam. Lecturer Psychiatric Nursing — Higher Institute of Nursing — Alexandria.
- Dr. Ibrahim Et Kerdany, Lecturer of Family Health — High Institute of Public Health.

اللقاءات الجماعية وتأثيرها على سلوك المرضى الذهانيين

الموجز

يركز هذا البحث على سلوك المرضى الذهانيين في اللقاءات الجماعية في اجتماعات العنابر ، وقد تمت الدراسة على خمسة عشر مريضاً ذهانياً ذكراً بمتوسط عمر ٢٧٫٢ سنة ، وقد أجريت اللقاءات الجماعية يومياً لمدة ٤٥ دقيقة للقاء الواحد وذلك خلال أربعة أسابيع ، وقد كانت مواضيع النقاش الأساسية حول بيئة وظروف العنبر والمشاكل اليومية المتعلقة بالحياة في العنبر .

وقد تم تسجيل سلوك الجماعة اسبوعياً

وقد أظهرت النتائج أن سلوك المرضى في المجموعة قد تحسن بشكل دال خلال أربع أسابيع فزادت الاستجابات الايجابية ونقصت السلبية وبالإضافة فان نمط التفاعل بين المرضى خلال اللقاء الجمعي قد تغير الى أفضل .

وقد فسرت هذه النتائج باعتبارها دالة على أن اللقاءات الجماعية في العنابر هي مدخل ذو فاعلية في المساعدة على تحقيق العلاج الطبقي وبشكل أساسي في الحد من السلوك المرضى (بالأعراض) وتعلم المهارات النفسية الاجتماعية الأساسية .

ABSTRAIT

Les rencontres de groupes et leur effet sur le comportement de patients psychotiques.

Cette recherche se concentre sur le comportement de patients psychotiques à travers des rencontres par pavillon ou salle. Quinze patients psychotiques mâles dont l'âge moyen est de 27.2 ont été sujets à cette étude. Ceux-ci ont été groupés quotidiennement pour des rencontres de 45 minutes pendant quatre semaines. Les problèmes du milieu du pavillon ou de la salle et les problèmes de la vie quotidienne ont été le sujet essentiel des discussions des rencontres du groupe. Des observations concernant le comportement du groupe ont été notées hebdomadairement.

Les résultats ont montré que le comportement dans le groupe s'est amélioré d'une façon significative au cours des quatre semaines. Les réactions positives ont augmenté tandis que les réactions négatives ont diminué. De plus le genre des interactions dans le groupe a changé d'une façon favorable.

L'interprétation de ces résultats a montré que les rencontres du groupe d'une salle constituent une approche qui aide à achever le but du traitement psychiatrique essentiellement par l'établissement de limites sur le comportement symptomatique et l'éducation de bases de compétences psychosociales.