Self Help Groups

History

- Mutual support is a key factor in self-help groups.
- The first anonymous groups developed in the 1930’s during the depression and can be seen today in such groups as Alcoholics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous.

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Classification of Self-Help Groups

- Categories of self-help groups include: Crisis, permanent and addiction groups.

- There are groups that attempt to change society and groups that attempt to change how their members react to society.

- There are groups that attempt to affect change within their members and those that seek to help members adapt rather than change.
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Classification of Self-Help Groups

- There are groups that focus on growth or self-fulfillment (e.g. Recovery Inc.).
- There are groups that focus on social advocacy (e.g. Committee for the rights of the disabled).
- There are groups that attempt to create alternative patterns for living (e.g. Gay rights groups).
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Classification of Self-Help Groups

- There are groups that provide a safe haven for people seeking protection from the pressures of life or society (e.g. addicts).

- There are mixed types of groups that come from shared living or life situations (e.g. bereavement groups).
Self Help Groups

Commonalities between Self-Help Groups

- They have a peer orientation.
- They have a problem focus.
- Members are estranged in some way from societal norms.
- They have an ideological base.
Self Help Groups

Theoretical Rationale

- Most self-help groups are based on sociological or psychological theories.

- Change mechanisms found to be helpful in self-help groups include:
  - Mutual support: Social support buffers the adverse psychological impact of stressful life events or strains.
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Theoretical Rationale

- Helper therapy: Doing something for others gives one a sense of adequacy and empowerment.

- Role of ideology: These are beliefs of the self-help group through which interventions are applied.

- Essential parameters: Each member will give and get help for similar life-disrupting problems. Group process is characterized by empathic responses and less judgment or skepticism.
Self Help Groups

The Leader’s Role

- The leader plays a peripheral role. If the leader is too directive or controlling, the effects of helper therapy, empowerment of the individual and the self-help ideology can be thwarted.

- Roles of professionals in self-help groups include: Guest speakers, leaders or co-leaders, consultants or advisors, organizers and coordinators, group observers, evaluators and/or procurers of resources.
Self Help Groups

The Leader’s Role

- Dangers associated with not having a professional lead the group include:
  - Less control over dominant group members.
  - Risk of overly ideological interpretation of the group process.
  - A leader who is either authoritarian or totalitarian which can cause significant harm to members.

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Goals and Objectives

- To help group members resume active and successful coping.

- The ideology of each group will lead to specific and different methods of facilitating adaptive coping within its members.

- Each group creates rituals, rules for behavior and slogans to emphasize group beliefs and bind members together in solidarity against a common problem.

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Selection and Composition

- Self-help groups are characterized by open access. There is no screening procedure as in a counseling or psychotherapy group.
- The groups tend to be both heterogeneous and homogeneous. There is diversity among membership but each person shares the same problem or issue.
- Group size usually is somewhere between 10-50 people, depending upon the group and its purpose.
- How often the group meets usually depends upon the group and its goals. All are different.
Self Help Groups

Other Considerations

- Self-help groups might employ a variety of support. For example, self-help groups might use guest speakers, films, skill training or study groups.

- There is no professional code of conduct for leading self-help groups. However, a professional leader of such a group is usually bound by their own professional code but a nonprofessional is not.

- These groups tend to be diverse as there is no restriction on age, race, gender etc.