

Introduction

This chapter deals with adult groups designed by various practitioners to meet specific needs in the community agency settings in which they work, oftentimes providing affordable group services to underserved client populations. The group proposals illustrate ways practitioners have applied the concepts discussed in this book to various client populations in a community. We hope these group proposals will help you to think creatively about how to design groups to effectively meet the needs of your diverse client populations.

Among the group proposals are a women's support group for survivors of incest, a men's group in a community agency setting, a domestic violence group, and a group for people with substance use disorders. In addition, the value of group work with older adults in various community settings is highlighted in three proposals: a group on successful aging, an older adult bereavement group, and a group treatment program for institutionalized older people.

Group treatment is the preferred approach in many community agencies devoted to providing services for diverse client populations with a wide range of problems. Group work practitioners also must have an understanding of the functioning of agency systems, including how the agency is structured, policies and procedures that affect clients and treatment staff, political issues, and the existing needs of both the clients and the agency. Group work enables community agencies to offer cost-effective and clinically appropriate therapeutic services typically serving a critical need that otherwise would not be addressed due to limitations on funding in many mental health agencies. Counselors must understand the many types of client populations seen within agency settings to design effective group treatment programs tailored to meet the specific needs of these clients.

Group Work With Women

Although groups for women are as diverse as the women who comprise them, they share a common theme in their support for the experience of women. Members learn that they are not alone, and they share and begin to critically explore the messages they have internalized about their self-worth and their place in society. A group can provide women with a social network, decrease feelings of isolation, foster a sense of universality, and create an environment that encourages sharing of experiences. Kees and Leech (2014) state that groups help women to understand the systemic origins of many of their concerns and can be instrumental in changing oppressive environments in which they work and live. They believe that group members come to realize their worth and their ability to give back to each other through shared experiences, wisdom, and courage. "Groups provide women with support, hope, and empowerment to overcome adversity and they provide knowledge and education to help improve women's individual situations in life" (p. 518).

Among the many advantages for women who choose to be in a women's group are discovering their personal strengths and resources, working on interpersonal relationships in the group context, eliminating patriarchal oppression, practicing and modeling new behaviors in a safe environment, and finding their "voice." In the group environment the members often find their voice to express their concerns, fears, secrets, and dreams. The dominant voice in a patriarchal society is based on independence, autonomy, and aloneness, and women learn early on that connection is undervalued. They may believe that what they have to contribute is not valued. In a group, women do not risk being taken for granted, for all voices are valued and encouraged.

Another advantage of women's groups is the opportunity to construct a gender analysis of what it means to be female in a patriarchal society. The gender analysis aids women in becoming aware of the external causes of their pain and struggles. It helps women differentiate between the external and the internal causes of the concerns they bring to a group. The power of the group suggests to its members that both personal change and societal change are possible.

UP PROPOSAL

Women's Support Group for Survivors of Incest

Following section is written from the perspective of Julie-Corliss, LCSW. (For further information about the group, contact Lupe at her private practice; telephone: 512-1850; email: LupeLCSW1@aol.com.)

Child sexual abuse of children by family members continues to draw the attention of mental health professionals. A disclosure encounter with a trusted family member not only typically results in a major psychological trauma but also frequently leads to emotional problems for the survivor later in life. Some of the common problems include impaired self-esteem, negative identity formation, difficulty in intimate relationships, sexual revictimization, and repeated victimization (Gerrity, 2014; Latham, 1992).

Various types of groups are being used in treating survivors of childhood sexual abuse including support groups, psychoeducational groups, time-limited groups, open or open-ended groups, and retreats (Courtois, 2004). This group proposal describes a time-limited group designed to enable women to begin the process of working through unresolved issues related to their incestuous past. Today, with the rapidly changing

state of mental health care, being able to conduct time-limited groups is even more advantageous because it is cost-effective, efficient, and fits the demands for short-term treatment.

Organizing the Group

The literature reveals that group therapy for survivors of childhood sexual abuse is effective and cost-effective (see Gerrity, 2014). For survivors of childhood sexual abuse, a combination of group and individual therapy may be more effective than either treatment alone (Lubin, 2007). Briere (1996) recommends concurrent group and individual therapy due to the stress resulting from clients' own memories and from hearing the stories of other group members. Structure is an important dimension in group treatment because it provides safety and allows the group members to observe consistent and clear boundaries in the therapeutic process (Gerrity, 2014). In providing a safe and therapeutic environment for incest survivors, the main goal is to empower these women by helping them get past the molestation and

group format with proper screening can result in a therapeutic group experience. Overall, I continue to find that carefully planned groups greatly enhance the treatment of incest survivors because they can be seen on a regular basis and can be provided with continuity and the support they need for healing. The women in these groups are able to develop a strong support network that

provides them with the strength and courage to begin to resolve past issues, overcome negative patterns, and set healthy goals for their future. Perhaps the greatest message they receive is that they “deserve” to feel good about themselves and lead more productive lives. Through the years, group members have felt safe to return for brief treatment if they feel a need for further consultation.

Group Work With Men

LO3

An increasing number of men are giving expression to both masculine and feminine dimensions of their personalities. However, many men in our society still live according to a traditional masculine model of what it is to be a man. Some men are caught in rigid roles, and they may be sanctioned if they deviate from those roles or display characteristics that are not associated with their gender. Men may be so involved in their roles that they become alienated from themselves. They no longer know what they are like within because they put so much energy into maintaining an acceptable image. There is usually a price to pay for being restricted by and living by traditional male roles, especially for those men who are not in agreement with what is now considered to be truly “masculine” in our society. Men may pay a steeper price than their female counterparts for engaging in gender-atypical behaviors, which encourages men to remain deeply entrenched in masculine roles. Some men become so involved in their roles that they become alienated from themselves and no longer feel connected with their inner selves. Regardless of cultural background, gender roles that men have incorporated from cultural conditioning need to be understood and challenged if men are to make choices about aspects of their masculine identity. The challenge for men is to define who they want to be for themselves, whether that involves conforming to or rejecting traditional gender roles.

An emerging counseling emphasis on *positive masculinity* presents a more optimistic picture of changes taking place in gender roles. Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) contend that positive masculinity should be given center-stage status in counseling boys and men and in conducting psychological research. Working from a framework of positive masculinity, Englar-Carlson and Kiselica (2013) transcend stereotypes and emphasize men’s existing strengths; focus on men’s capacities and resources; identify the qualities that empower men; view men for who they are and who they can become rather than who they are not; recognize what is right with men rather than dwelling on what is wrong with them; and shift attention to the parts of men that are good, kind, creative, successful, and capable.

Traditional forms of individual therapy may not be the best way to reach male clients. Groups for men offer some unique advantages in assisting men in clarifying their gender roles, helping them cope with life's struggles, and in developing a sense of positive masculinity. Rabinowitz and Cochran (2002) describe how men's groups are able to deepen a man's experiences. In such a group, men are given the opportunity to face and express their disappointments and losses. Rather than denying their psychic pain and wounding, men are provided with a context where they can bring all of their feelings into the open and where they can be healed by the support of others in the group. Themes and issues that often emerge in group work with men include trust, vulnerability, fear, shame, strength, weakness, male-male relationships, competition, family-of-origin issues, sexuality, friendship, dominance, submissiveness, love, hatred, dreams, grief, obsessions, work, and death. In a men's group, members learn a great deal about themselves by sharing their experiences. One powerful intervention is the leader modeling appropriate self-disclosure by sharing some of his own life experiences.

All-male groups provide men with the support they need to become aware of the restrictive rules and roles they may have lived by and provide them with the strength to question the mandate of the masculine role. Men's groups provide a place for connecting with other men, a place to be heard, and a place to talk about being a father, having a father, relationships, divorce, aging, and transitions (Englar-Carlson, 2014). Rabinowitz (2014) states that a major benefit of participating in a men's group is the acceptance, validation, and support that each man receives. For some men, it may be the first time they have been able to reveal past experiences and traumas with the support of other men. The men's group provides the intimate connection that many men desire but often do not receive in their lives.

Most men's groups contain both a psychoeducational component and an interpersonal, process-oriented dimension. The following proposal describes such a group that one of our colleagues has facilitated for about 25 years in a large health maintenance organization in a community agency.

GROUP PROPOSAL

A Men's Group in a Community Agency

The following section is written from the perspective of Randy Alle-Corliss, LCSW, who works in a large health maintenance organization (HMO). (For further information about this men's group, contact Randy via email at RandyLCSW@aol.com.)

This proposal describes a group aimed at helping men explore ways they experience and express their gender

roles. It contains both a psychoeducational component and an interpersonal, process-oriented dimension. The purpose of this group is to provide men coming to a psychiatric counseling center with an opportunity to work together on common issues such as depression, stress, marital and relationship difficulties, parenting concerns, work-related issues, loneliness, and isolation.

The members' evaluations of their experience at the follow-up session are typically positive and constructive. Many of the men say they had been looking for this kind of group for years. They often report that they greatly valued the opportunity to discuss personally significant topics in a group setting. They report feeling less depressed, less isolated, and being more able to recognize and communicate their feelings. Some men return to the group later when their benefits allow them the opportunity for continuing their treatment.

Men report that the group has helped them to manage their anger more effectively, to develop more male friends, and to become more assertive. Many of the men are able to use the feedback they receive in immediate ways by becoming more aware of their feelings and more communicative in their relationships. They begin to think of themselves and other men more positively. In general, they say that they feel more content with themselves, they feel a wider range of emotions, and they are able to laugh and have more fun.

Group Treatment of Domestic Violence Offenders

LO4

Group work is well suited for treating male offenders because of the therapeutic factors operating in a group. These therapeutic factors, discussed in detail in Chapter 8, can be helpful in addressing abusive behavior patterns. Specifically, increased universality, cohesion, and interpersonal learning are potent factors in the reduction of group members' domestic violence recidivism (Waldo, Kerne, & Kerne, 2007). The efficacy of a group approach in treating domestic violence offenders is supported by research for some groups (Lee, Sebold, & Uken, 2003).

In *Solution-Focused Treatment of Domestic Violence Offenders: Accountability for Change*, Lee and colleagues (2003) describe a treatment program that created effective, positive change in domestic violence offenders. This approach has a recidivism rate of 16.7% and a completion rate of 92.9%. More traditional approaches typically generate recidivism rates between 40% and 60% and completion rates of less than 50% (Lee et al., 2003). The approach focuses on holding offenders accountable and responsible for building solutions rather than emphasizing their problems and deficits, which is dramatically different from the traditional approach to this problem. This approach is time limited and is brief when measured against traditional program standards, consisting of only eight sessions over a 10- to 12-week period.

The solution-focused approach strongly emphasizes formation of concrete, achievable, behavior-specific goals that each participant must establish by the third session and must continue to consistently work on throughout the treatment process. The group facilitators use changes associated with each group member's goal to assist him in redefining who he is as an individual, a family member, and a community member.