Group Dynamics

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Abstract:Group dynamics is one of the most important parts in social work group practice. Because interactions among group members a large extent affect the whole group work. The appropriate group dynamics can help group members fulfill their needs and know more about what they will achieve in this group.

Keywords: Group Dynamics; Social Work; Practice

Introduction

If poor group dynamics appear in group work, it will not only harm the progress of group work, but also make physical or mental trauma for group members. Besides, one of the worker's most important tasks is to help groups develop dynamics that promote the satisfaction of members' socio-emotional needs while facilitating the accomplishment of group tasks (Toseland & Rivas, 2012). The group dynamics not only refer to the interactions among group members. Moreover, Toseland & Rivas (2012) has given a 4-dimension of group dynamics. Social workers should understand more about group dynamics and how to develop group dynamics to help groups achieve goals. So useful group dynamics are necessary in social work group practice.

1.What is Group Dynamics

Above all, it is significant to know the meaning of group dynamics. The forces that result from the interactions of group members are often referred to as group dynamics. Groups are social system made up of elements and their interactions (Toseland & Rivas, 2012). In other words, the group dynamics can help groups to use the mutual interactions of group members to achieve the organizational goals or fulfill their common needs. The interactions of group members can make forces to improve the group functioning and satisfy members' participation. But only appropriate group interactions can help the group work progress[1].

2. Four Dimensions of Group Dynamics

Four dimensions of group dimensions are particular important for social workers to understand more about group dynamics. The four dimensions of group dynamics include communication and interaction, cohesion, social integration and influence, group culture. Importantly, these four dimensions are not independent, but interrelated. The four dimensions of group dynamics are the essential group work skills for social workers to grasp. This paper will illustrate the four dimensions of group dynamics with examples.

2.1 Communication and Interaction Patterns

Communication and interaction patterns contain communication process and interaction process. Communication is the process by which people convey meanings to each other by using symbols. Communication entails (1) the encoding of a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings into language and other symbols, (2) the transmission of these symbols or language, and (3) the decoding of the transmission by another person (Toseland & Rivas, 2012). To use a learning guidance

group to explain communication process, members will discuss a difficult part of their study together through mutual communication and help each other to solve problems. If member A wants to help member B to solve problems, the member A will use his understanding to convey a message to help member B. When the member B receives the message, the member B will decode the message through his understanding. If the member B figures out the problem correctly, the transmissions between members are precisely[2].

Social worker also should become aware of interaction patterns in social work group practice. Patterns of group interaction contain maypole, round robin, hot seat and free floating. The maypole, round robin and hot seat are leader-centered patterns. Although these three patterns are the leader structure, it also focuses on different ways of members' communications. The maypole means that the communications are from leader to member. The round robin refers to members take turns talking. The hot seat is meaning that an extended back-and-forth between the leader and one member as the other members watch (Toseland & Rivas, 2012). And the free floating is group-centered pattern. It is important that all members take responsibility for communicating.

3. Group Cohesion

Group cohesion is the result of all forces acting on members to remain in a group (Festinger, 1950). That is to say the group cohesion is to make group members want to stay in this group. The group cohesion is made up of three components, including member-to-member attraction and a liking for the group as a whole; a sense of unity and community so that the group is seen as a single entity; a sense of teamwork and esprit de corps with the group successfully performing as a coordinated unit (Forsyth, 2010). Moreover, according to Cartwright (1968), the four most important reasons for the group members to stay in the group are the need for security, affiliation and recognition, effective resources from group, their expectations and results of groups, comparison with the previous group experiences. In general, a cohesive team should be able to meet the needs of the group members' physical and psychological needs, provide a good group experience, and achieve the goals of individual and group[3].

What kind of group can be called as a cohesive group? Here can use a relief pressure group to explain group cohesion. Social workers set up a relief pressure group in the community. The main population focus on the 24 year old to 40 year old men that suffer from work and family pressures. In the group discussion, the group members are able to talk about the things comfortably that they are not happy with in the pressure of life. Besides, the group members are also gradually become friends from the listener, and they are also happy to recommend their use of a good way to relieve the pressure to everyone in the discussion. Not only as a member of the group, but also as a friend hopes that everyone can work together to ease the pressure and solve the problems of the group.

4. Social Integration and Influence

Social integration refers to how members fit together and are accepted in a group. The social integration help groups to build unanimity about group's goals and help member to move forward in an orderly to achieve goals effectively.

Norms are shared expectations and beliefs about appropriate ways to act in a social situation such as a group (Toseland & Rivas, 2012). There are a lot of different personalities in the group, norms can help the group to make people of different personalities integrate into the group. And norms pay more attention on the group members' behaviors whether are acceptable in the group.

Roles have a momentous influence on the social integration and it is also essential for increasing the social integration in the group. Roles are shared expectations about the functions of individual in the groups. And roles define behavior in relation to a specific function or task that the group members are expected to perform. (Toseland & Rivas, 2012) Roles can help the group members know what to do and how to do in the group. There is a case to show how roles can help the group. In the earthquake trauma-counseling group, a social worker serves as the group leader, other group members also has their roles. In order to make every member integrate in the group, the group members' roles will discuss together so that members can do what they expect to perform[4].

Norms, roles and status have a great impact on the social integration of groups. They can help groups to maintain the

balance of groups and enhance the social integration of groups through different group skills. However, they also can restrict the expression and potential ability of members. The groups' atmosphere may become stagnant because of excessive restrictions. Hence social workers should use them appropriately to improve the social integration. Used these method, the social integration can make the group members fit together and let the group members work together for a common goal.

5. Group Culture

Group culture refers to values, beliefs, customs and traditions held in common by group members (Olmsted, 1959). The culture of the whole society is diverse, social workers also will encounter a lot of people from different cultures in the group work practice. In addition, basing on Levi (2007), culture can be viewed as having three levels. At the surface, symbols and rituals displays the culture of the group. At the deeper level, culture is displayed in the way members interact with one another. And the deepest level of culture includes the core beliefs, ideologies, values held in common by members. These three levels also can use in the group work practice. Group culture can emerge quickly in a homogeneous group. But group culture appear slowly in multicultural group, it needs to run in between the team members and then slowly to reach a consensus[5].

For instance, social workers hold an elderly service group in a Shenzhen's community, but there are some elderly can't understand Cantonese and part of the elderly can't understand Mandarin. They also have different symbols, culture and values. In this situation, social workers should help the elderly to understand other symbols and respect other culture. Moreover, the elderly can share their different values in group meetings and form a common value in group actives. Group culture will emerge when the group members can accept other members' values and have a common value. Group culture not only can give a sense of security to the group members and increase their participation in activities, but also can avoid some members isolate to the group.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, it mainly introduces what is the group dynamics. Four dimensions of the group dynamics are crucial to the group dynamic, consisting of communication and interaction patterns, group cohesion, social integration and influence, and group culture. The communication and interaction patterns focus more on the interactions among group members. The group cohesion pays more attention on the forces, which make members want to remain in the group. The social interaction and influence lay more emphasis on using norms, roles and status to let the group members fit together. And the group culture aims to make a group to have own group culture. These four dimensions are the important components in the group dynamics. Every dimension can have a significant impact on group dynamics[6].

However, four dimensions are not separately, but connected. The communication and interaction patterns are the based part to all the groups. What the goals want to achieve in the groups, people should communicate with their members. The group cohesion can make members remain in the group, so that the group members can accept other members and work together to achieve the goals based on the social integration. Lastly, the group culture can make a balance in the groups and make the group members feel more safety in the groups.

Therefore, the group dynamics is vital for the social work group practice. Positive group dynamics can make the groups grow stably and make the group members have a good group experience. Additionally, it also can successfully achieve the individual and group goals. It is useful for social worker to apply in the social work practice.

References

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