Social Support Groups

SPH - H180 Stress Prevention and Management

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A) Social support is “the exchange of assistance through social relationships” (Social Support). This exchange of assistance can be seen amongst family members, friends, coworkers, classmates, or any other group of individuals who often collaborate. In 1954, John Barnes found patterns of social relationships that were not explained by families or work groups. Through this, he noticed that social relationships were positively affecting people's’ lives and their behaviors. However, it was not until 1976 that John Cassel linked this relationship with health.

Social support served as a “protective” factor to people’s vulnerability on the effects of stress and health. Social networks are very closely related to social support.

B) Uses of Therapy – how it is used, populations who use it

There are many different types of therapy that can benefit one’s physical and mental health. Social support groups can benefit both mental and physical therapy. It is a method in which the person who is going through something is able to be helped by those around them. There are numerous ways that people can get help: friends, family, and even pets. Several organizations and government aid are available to the public. A good portion of the population who have had trouble with drug use often go to organizations who hold these types of meetings, where they can get advice from others who have been in their situation. Most are often given a sponsor, which is someone who they trust in to help keep them clean when they aren’t in the meetings.

The different types of help include Emotional support, Tangible support, Informational support, and Companionship support. Emotional support occurs when the friends and family surrounding a person offer empathy, trust, love, etc. They show that they are there to help and
that they aren’t going to leave. Tangible support is when a person is helped out financially, or with material goods; the giving of physical things. Informational support is when people offer advice and information that potentially could be used to solve problems. Companionship support is the thought of belonging to a group. This can happen when a group of friends invite someone who is going through a difficult time in their life to participate in a group activity.

C) Research & Theories

Social support groups have developed a couple of theories and have yielded some positive results. There are various factors that contribute to the success of the social support group for deducting stress. One of the most important uses of social support groups is allowing an individual to have a sense of belonging. This allows for a person to who feels lonely to feel connected with family, close friends, and pets. If a person knows that he/she is not alone, can go a long way when dealing with stress. This allows for a person to raise there sense of self-worth and be called a friend reinforces the idea that you are a good person. The best for a person to create a strong social network is by being a good listener, staying in touch and not getting jealous. It is vital to celebrate friend’s success and not become jealous. Another important theory about Social support network is too stay alert and avoid any situation that can drain a person’s energy. It is important to surround yourself who are constantly positive and are overly critical. People who are engage in high levels of social support tend to live healthier and longer lives.

D) Scientific Research

The effectiveness of social support groups is something that has been studied by many researchers and these studies differ far and wide. The reason behind this lies in the obvious
reasoning that social support groups are used to treat many different diseases, ailments and disorders. It has attracted the attention of so many researchers due to the fact that social support easily ties into the topics they may have already been researching. In order to keep in line with this course’s subject matter, we found some studies that were looking into the effectiveness of social support when it came to stress prevention and potentially stress-related diseases.

A study done by a group of doctors at Yale University titled “Social Support and Resilience to Stress” discusses social support in many different settings. They believe that social support can lend a helping hand and exists in neurobiology all the way to clinical practices. As stated in the journal, “The harmful consequences of poor social support and the protective effects of good social support in mental illness have been well documented.”. They outline a few past studies that have shown the efficacy of social support against stress. While day-to-day stress experienced by the common man may not be that difficult to ease, they found that social support was easing trauma-related disorders such as PTSD. It is very interesting to see how they define social support as something that does not have to be clinical. They show the very importance and helpfulness of those loved ones around you. Social support, according to the study, is defined as “a network of family, friends, neighbors, and community members that is available in times of need to give psychological, physical, and financial help”. Social support can be speaking with your friends, your family giving you money, or somebody giving you a ride to school in the rain. The study concludes by stating that social support brings out a humanistic side to everyone that can help foster relationships that will give health and happiness to those suffering from daily stress, depression (which often stems from stress), and many other illnesses.
E) Future – outlook for this therapy, feasibility, challenges to increasing use, etc

Social support therapy has a variety of different meanings and ways that it could be useful. For example, social therapy provides emotional support by making those around the person needing help, more affectionate and making the person feel cared for. Furthermore, the group aspect of social support therapy allows one to feel more comfortable discussing their feelings with those who are similar, emotionally.

The future of social support therapy seems to be stable. There are numerous of different types of therapies and social support therapy has implemented itself as a useful tool for issues like PTSD and substance abuse related issues. Social support has essentially always been the same since the beginning of its use. While other forms of therapy have technological aspects to them, social support focuses on the simple interactions and bonds of people, making it a much more feasible form of therapy than others. Furthermore, simply by having a best friend to talk on the phone or meet for lunch is something that could really change a person’s emotional outlook and it is also much easier and convenient to support someone in this manner. Therefore, this is very feasible because it likely that someone has at least one person as a support system and it is much more convenient.

Although social support therapy has an immense use within society, there are a few issues that would decrease the likelihood of this form of therapy helping someone. Having close friends around to make one feel better is always helpful unless these “friends” are constantly disagreeing with one’s issues or they stigmatize the situation someone is in. Although, this is usually not an issue if you have close friends that are always reliable. During the group meeting aspect of social therapy, people may feel uncomfortable discussing their emotions and issues in a
room full of strangers for the first time. This could lead to even further trust issues and make those seeking help less interested in returning if they feel judged or unsafe in the group environment. Furthermore, social support therapy is a challenge because the attitudes of those in need vary dramatically. If someone initially feels skeptical about this form of therapy, this may lead to suppressed results or social therapy not working entirely. Without having a positive approach to this form of therapy, it is very likely that it will not work. This is an issue that challenges the use of social support therapy because it is hard to be positive about serious issues that are constantly affecting someone’s life like PTSD, Depression, or substance abuse.

F) Personal Experience and/or Commentary – an account of your experience with this therapy in its relation to SM and/or your opinions on the therapy with rationale

As an international student who just left her family and started to live in a faraway country, I had a very hard time adjusting my stress in the first year. Frankly, I wasn’t feeling upset at all when the semester just began. On the contrary, I felt relieved, because for the first time I could do whatever I want without asking for my parents’ consent.

However, the feeling of freedom last about 2 months. With the courses becoming difficult and my performance getting too poor to reach my expectations, I started to feel overwhelmed and anxious. At the same time, I was also experiencing a very crucial change in my life. Since I’m living away from my family now, there are a lot of things I had to get used to. I can no longer wish other people to solve a problem for me when there is one. For the most of the time, I need to rely on myself instead of other people. This idea grew in me as time went by. In order to act independent and not to worry my parents, I tended to keep all the complaints to
myself. Sometimes I got lucky to overcome a difficulty on my own successfully, but sometimes I didn’t; and when that happens, I blame myself for not being capable enough.

I thought I was being thoughtful, but it turns out I wasn’t. I started to lose sleep and appetite. The feeling of helplessness has made me more anxious every day than the other. Fortunately, one of my friends realized something and asked me what was wrong, I felt I could no longer bear the stress and spit my feelings all out to her. As I thought she was going to judge me, she comforted me by saying she had the exact same feelings when she first got here. And she encouraged me to talk to my parents because they deserve to know all the things that are going on with me but not just the good ones. Under her encouragement, I talked to my parents about all the problems that I couldn’t solve for myself and that I needed help. They told me not to worry and gave me some advice immediately. They cheered me up by saying they believe in me as well as my capability. After the talk, I felt much stronger than before as if I had received their strength. I finally understood how important it is to talk to the people you’re close to when you have problems, because that’s what family and friends are for. They cheer you up when you are down, help you when you have trouble, and make you a better person. Now I always talk to my parents whenever I have a problem or an accomplishment.

F) Personal Experience and/or Commentary- an account of your experience with this therapy in its relation to SM and/or your opinions on the therapy with rationale

When I started to grow up I realized that how small my family truly was and that any moment I could be with them I would, especially having old grandparents because I was always worried that one day I could lose them. My family has had problems with cancer in the past and
knowing at any moment someone could get diagnosed makes me feel that much more obligated to see any of my family members.

Having a family history of cancer, I was always stressed and having anxiety about the day that will come where someone so close to me will become diagnosed. Unfortunately, one day I found out my uncle who was only 52 had been diagnosed with brain cancer. Getting the phone call about this made my heart drop. I was not able to sleep for days my anxiety was so bad. All I could think was if he was going to make it and fight through it. My best friend was there when I received this phone call, and he immediately did anything to make me smile. My uncle fought the battle for 20 months and unfortunately he did not make it. I was on my spring break when I received the phone call of my uncle passing. I was torn to pieces. Just like that my best friend was gone. My friends and family knew how much he meant to me they supported and cared for me anytime I needed them. My friends sat by my side for months making sure I always had a smile on my face anytime I was down. They do their best to make me happy. The support I received helped me tremendously, allowing me not be stressed or have anxiety about it because I knew I always had people there for me at all times.
Works Cited


