

Existential psychotherapy for trauma

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Background:

The topic of recovery from mental disorders, dealing with mental vulnerability and especially the role of grief and trauma in this process is a promising way of approaching the interface between mental health care and spiritual care, requiring a multidisciplinary approach. This chapter aims to provide an overview of the state of affairs in research and practice, especially informed by psychiatry, psychology and chaplaincy related to the role of recovery in relation to embodiment, trauma and grief.

Aim:

The aim of this chapter is to look at this from the perspective of psychiatrist Viktor Emil Frankl who developed the Existential Analysis and Logotherapy, which specifically and systematically includes meaning and spirituality. Although Viktor Frankl, as a psychiatrist and philosopher, emphasizes that (existential) psychotherapy and spiritual care are different fields of work in mental healthcare, he includes spirituality and religiosity in his anthropology and in his approach to mental vulnerability.

Results:

The principles of Existential Analysis and Logotherapy are used to explore the interface between mental health care, spiritual care and the professional approach of trauma. In mental healthcare different anthropologies lead to different therapeutic schools which sometimes seem contradictory in their approach. Frankl developed his existential psychotherapy in the first decades of the 20th century. As a survivor of the Holocaust he documented that people suffering from trauma can find recovery and resilience by the logotherapeutic approach. In his anthropology, Frankl opposes Freud and Adler as they both state that humans are primarily driven by psychological thrives as pleasure and power respectively. For Frankl, the deepest thrive of human is the will to meaning which unfolds itself in the spiritual dimension. To avoid any religious connotations, Frankl refers to the 'noetic' or 'noölogical' dimension when he aims on the role of spirituality and religiousness. Spiritual caregivers generally focus on restoring people's narratives when they experience the brokenness of life. According to Frankl, human existence is meaningful in itself, as objective givenness, even if brokenness like trauma occurs. In Logotherapy specific techniques as the Socratic Dialogue, paradoxical intention, human values, and the will to meaning are used as psychotherapeutic tools to lessen the mental suffering that may occur after trauma. It has to be kept in mind, that for Frankl as a psychiatrist, the noölogical dimension is rather an anthropological than a theological dimension.

Conclusion:

The theoretical principles and practice of existential psychotherapy work on the interface between the practise of psychotherapists and that of spiritual caregivers. A shared noölogical- anthropological vision and approach can lead to a shared vision on helping people, whatever their complaints and how deeply affected by trauma they may be. Frankl recognizes the differences between different fields of work while he introduces an anthropology and language field that forms a connecting link and provides a bridging function in terms of the interface between dealing with mental vulnerability, psychotherapy and spiritual care.

Reference:

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