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PSYCHOANALYTIC COUNSELING IN WORKING WITH INMATES: SYNTHESES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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The article addresses the topic of the implementation of psychoanalytic counseling in the prison environment, analyzing several established studies in the field. The literature review reveals that psychoanalytic counseling requires modifications to meet the distinct needs of prisoners, given the influence of the prison environment on the therapeutic dynamics and the psycho-emotional characteristics of the beneficiaries. From a therapeutic perspective, research in the field highlights the importance of empathy and the assurance of a safe communication environment, thus making it possible to explore the deep emotions of the beneficiaries. Also, the consideration of cultural factors in therapy is crucial to improve the understanding of psychological and social factors affecting inmates' behavior. In this study, we emphasize that psychoanalytic interventions in the prison context can attenuate deviant behaviors and assist in social reintegration, when individualized approaches are developed and implemented.

Keywords: *psychoanalytic counseling, inmates, prison environment, trauma, emotional regulation, rehabilitation, social reintegration, empathy, setting.*

CONSILIEREA PSIHANALITICĂ ÎN CAZUL DEȚINUȚILOR: SINTEZE ALE STUDIILOR INTERNAȚIONALE

Articolul abordează subiectul implementării consilierii psihanalitice în mediul carceral, analizând mai multe studii consacrate în domeniu. Analiza literaturii de specialitate relevă faptul că consilierea psihanalitică necesită modificări pentru a răspunde nevoilor distincte ale deținuților, având în vedere influența mediului penitenciar asupra dinamicii terapeutice și caracteristicile psiho-emoționale ale beneficiarilor. Din perspectivă terapeutică, cercetările în domeniu subliniază importanța empatiei și a asigurării unui mediu de comunicare sigur, făcând astfel posibilă explorarea emoțiilor profunde ale beneficiarilor. De asemenea, luarea în considerare a factorilor culturali în terapie este esențială pentru îmbunătățirea înțelegerii factorilor psihologici și sociali care afectează comportamentul infractorilor. În acest studiu, subliniem faptul că intervențiile psihanalitice în context penitenciar pot atenua comportamentele deviante și pot ajuta la reintegrarea socială, atunci când sunt elaborate și implementate abordări individualizate.

Cuvinte-cheie: *consiliere psihanalitică, deținut, mediu carceral, traumă, reglare emoțională, reabilitare, reintegrare socială, empatie, cadru.*

Introduction

Psychoanalytic counseling in working with inmates involves several theoretical and technical aspects that address the unique challenges and needs of this population. This therapeutic approach must also be adapted to the institutional context of prisons, where traditional office practices may not be feasible, and psychoanalytic concepts fundamental to the field of psychoanalytic counseling such as transference, countertransference, and the framework, likewise require a review and perhaps a readjustment. In the context of the complexity of the prison environment, its impact on the relationship between the counselor and the beneficiary becomes a particularly relevant topic in forensic psychotherapy. Recent studies emphasize the importance of understanding not only the interpersonal dynamics but also the emotional and cultural influences that affect both inmates and therapists. An adapted psychoanalytic approach is essential to respond to the specific needs of inmates, given the systemic and psychological challenges encountered in the prison environment. This paper analyzes the impact of the prison environment on the counselor-beneficiary relationship, highlighting the need to integrate psychoanalytic concepts with a deep understanding of the socio-cultural and historical context of each individual. Also discussed is the importance of developing empathic listening skills and creating a safe space for expressing emotions, which are crucial in the therapeutic process. Through a synthesis of specialized literature, this article aims to explore the challenges and

opportunities in psychoanalytic counseling of young recidivists, thus emphasizing the need for personalized interventions that contribute to their rehabilitation and social reintegration. However, the analysis of specialized literature reveals that psychoanalytic counseling, based on the theoretical foundations of psychoanalysis and its technical tools, offers significant therapeutic resources in working with this category of beneficiaries.

Several arguments on the relevance of psychoanalytic counseling in prison settings

A review and synthesis of studies on psychoanalytic counseling applied to recidivist youth inmates reveals a comprehensive approach to addressing the complex psychological needs of this particular demographic. Numerous researches explore the effectiveness of psychoanalytic interventions in reducing the deviant behaviors of recidivist young inmates, although psychoanalytic counseling specific to this group is less present in the specialized literature.

Delinquency has been a central interest in psychoanalysis since Sigmund Freud, investigated the link between criminal behavior and human psychology. Freud (1915), according to Hoffmann (2009), believed that psychoanalytic therapy can be successful in the case of criminals with a well-developed superego, suggesting that unconscious desires for self-punishment can be the basis of minor crimes committed by young people. However, Freud noted that this theory is not universally applicable, there are also criminals without remorse, who justify their deviant behavior based on a conflict with social norms [Ibidem]. Hoffmann (2009) argues that in the carceral environment, psychoanalytic approaches focus on the unconscious processes that manifest in the daily life of therapeutic communities and psychotherapy [4].

Burnett et al. (2005) highlight the importance of early preventive interventions and the identification of risk factors in increasing the effectiveness of psychotherapy and counseling for reducing problematic behaviors and supporting the resistance process. They show that psychotherapy and psychoanalytic counseling promote behavioral change and help reduce recidivism by treating underlying problems at an early stage [1].

In carceral settings, psychoanalytic approaches need to be concerned with the unconscious processes that manifest in therapeutic communities. McWilliams (2011) highlights the particular difficulties in working with individuals who present with psychopathic traits, a category often found among prisoners. Psychopaths display a profound lack of empathy and often distort the therapeutic process to their advantage. To manage these challenges, McWilliams suggests firm and consistent strategies centered on setting clear boundaries and maintaining continuous vigilance on the part of the therapist. This allows for the prevention of therapy diversion and redirecting the patient towards internal goals for change. Establishing a stable therapeutic alliance is a major challenge with psychopaths, as they tend to manipulate and engage superficially in interpersonal relationships. McWilliams (2011) recommends that therapists provide a structured and predictable framework that encourages the minimal collaboration necessary to conduct therapy. Although the therapeutic alliance may remain at a superficial level, setting clear and measurable goals focused on behavior change can facilitate therapeutic progress, the author maintains. In working with prisoners who display psychopathic traits, a thorough understanding of their emotional deficits is essential. Psychopaths display a significant lack of emotional depth and empathy, which makes long-term change difficult. McWilliams (2011) highlights that therapists need to adjust their expectations, focusing on developing a minimal awareness of the impact of the patient's behavior on those around them, even if changes in empathy remain limited. Finally, the American psychoanalyst points out that progress in therapy often depends on the patient's ability to learn self-control and manage impulses. Although changes are usually slow and gradual, even small steps toward empathy and self-control can have a significant impact on reducing violent and deviant behavior [7].

Subsequent studies, such as the one conducted by Mariamdaram and Ishak (2012), demonstrate that group psychoanalytic therapy sessions can reduce depressive symptoms in youth inmates, suggesting a positive correlation between depression management and improvement in general behavior [6]. Stavros (2018) adds that psychoanalytic interventions must consider the social impact of detention, including the effects of incapacitation and discouragement, which can influence the success of therapy [14]. In this sense,

personalized interventions become essential, as shown by the study by Guerra et al. (2014), who emphasize the importance of recognizing the unique experiences of each young inmate to create effective therapeutic programs tailored to their needs [3]. Current literature suggests the need for additional research evaluating the long-term effectiveness of psychoanalytic counseling by analyzing the impact on recidivism rates, social reintegration, and psychological well-being of inmates.

Issues inherent to psychoanalytic counseling in working with inmates

The impact of the prison environment on the counselor-beneficiary dyad

The theoretical aspects of this approach emphasize the importance of understanding the impact of the prison environment on both the therapist and the inmate. This includes recognizing emotional identification with inmates and the potential for countertransference, where therapists might fear or retaliate against inmates' aggressive impulses, as shown in their research by H. Osofsky and M. Osofsky (2009) [9]. One of their conclusions shows that psychoanalytic concepts are crucial in working in a maximum security prison, helping to effectively communicate and understand the impact of the prison environment on both inmates and correctional officers. The authors analyze the complexity of prison environments, emphasizing the importance of emotional identification with prisoners and highlighting the need to address countertransference issues to ensure ethical and effective professional intervention in this context. In the study "Like Father, Like Son: A Psychoanalytical Approach to Interviewing in Extreme Circumstances", the authors study the information obtained from interviews conducted with correctional officers and inmates at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola [9]. The paper emphasizes the significance of using psychoanalytic concepts in borderline situations, emphasizing their importance for a better understanding of intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics. The study also highlights the need for empathy and creating a safe space that facilitates authentic and effective communication in extreme situations. Thus, their research highlights the transformative impact of engaging in challenging interviews, highlighting the personal development, empathy, and meaningful insights that result from interacting with individuals in extreme situations.

Capitalizing on the beneficiary's cultural background

The integration of cultural context into psychoanalysis has gradually evolved, marking a transition from an individualistic model to one that recognizes cultural and relational influences on the self. Sanville (2000) was among the first to emphasize the need to move from an individual-centered psychoanalysis to an approach that includes interpersonal relationships and cultural context in therapeutic dynamics. „in the multicultural society which is increasingly ours, few of us are purely representative of one culture” [12, p. 428].

Subsequently, psychoanalysis was criticized for its Western ethnocentrism, being accused of neglecting cultural and racial dimensions [5]. In this context, the need for a reassessment was highlighted, recognizing the importance of adapting psychoanalytic methods to local cultural norms to enhance the effectiveness of therapy, as was demonstrated in India, where the gap between psychoanalysis and Indigenous cultural values was a major obstacle to therapeutic effectiveness [13]. Along these lines, cultural context has become a fundamental element in psychoanalytic practice, promoting the integration of patients' cultural narratives and expressions to reflect cognitive and emotional diversity [16, 17]. This approach facilitated the deep exploration of social influences on defense mechanisms and cultural symbolism, better managing traumas and dissociations in a specific cultural setting [9]. Later, Sommers-Flanagan (2018) argued that traditional psychoanalytic methods must be adapted to include the historical and cultural aspects of each individual, highlighting the shortcomings of classical psychoanalysis in adequately addressing these essential dimensions [14].

Ethical dilemmas in psychoanalytic counseling of inmates

Forensic psychotherapy, as described by Farrall (2005) in the review of the book „Life within Hidden Worlds: Psychotherapy in Prisons” by Williams-Saunders, (2001), involves the adaptation of psychoanalytic methodologies to the prison environment, confronting systemic difficulties such as the absence of intimacy and the imperative of therapeutic neutrality and confidentiality, which are frequently undermined in the carceral context [2]. The main focus of the work of Williams-Saunders, (2001) cited by Farrall, (2005) revolves around the exploration of psychoanalytic counseling, a specific form of therapy dedicated to the

exploration of the unconscious and its significant impact on human behavior, especially within the confines of the prison environment [2]. This therapeutic approach consists of dialogue-based sessions, commonly known as „talking cures”, to uncover deep-seated emotions and thoughts that can play a critical role in shaping the behavior of incarcerated individuals. Williams-Saunders (2001) aims to provide a detailed analysis of the functioning of psychotherapy in the prison environment, providing essential information for prison staff to understand the complexity of the work of psychotherapists in these environments. It also explores the many challenges encountered, including the lack of private spaces for therapeutic sessions and unexpected transfers or removal of prisoners, which can significantly affect the continuity of the therapeutic process. Furthermore, the paper provides a detailed analysis of the complexity of role conflicts frequently encountered by therapists in the penitentiary environment. They face the dilemma of balancing the function of facilitators of psychological healing with security responsibilities, which generates increased levels of anxiety and tension among inmates. Ethical dilemmas are also discussed at length, particularly regarding the viability of adhering to the principles of „absolute confidentiality” and “therapeutic neutrality” in the restrictive and supervised context of prisons. The paper suggests re-evaluating the concept of total confidentiality and emphasizes the need for therapists to navigate a multifaceted ethical spectrum in the context of addressing deviant behaviors and underlying psychological dynamics. In addition, it provides valuable insights into the psychodynamic factors underlying acts of aggression and misconduct in the penitentiary environment, clarifying the therapeutic process of people involved in criminal activities and emphasizing the importance of integrating crime-oriented interventions into the comprehensive framework of therapy [2, 18].

Building a narrative about the beneficiary's history

Oliveira et al. (2020) argue that psychoanalytic counseling can facilitate the reconfiguration of subjective identity, allowing individuals to reassume their central role in their own existential experiences [8]. Particularly valuable aspect in a prison context, where inmates often experience feelings of helplessness and alienation. The practical implications of this work are complex and varied. An essential aspect highlighted is the development of listening skills, with an emphasis on empathic and non-judgmental listening, as an integral part of the therapeutic process. Through active and unbiased listening, counselors can access a deeper understanding of patients' intrapsychic conflicts and difficulties, contributing to an intervention more tailored to their needs. This type of interaction fosters a genuine and deep therapeutic connection, facilitating extended psychic exploration and a strengthened therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, psychological counseling is presented as a catalyst for personal and social change. By giving people a safe space to discuss their problems, counseling allows them to explore new perspectives and solutions through dialogue. This process can facilitate the emancipation of the individual, catalyzing profound changes at the personal level and contributing to an extensive dynamic of social transformation. Through personalized counseling approaches, Oliveira et al. (2020), emphasize in their study the importance of considering each individual's unique historical and personal context. Adapting therapeutic strategies according to the context and individual experiences increases the effectiveness of the psychological intervention, facilitating a more relevant approach with a deeper impact on the therapeutic process [8].

The importance of increasing accessibility to psychological counseling services is emphasized, highlighting the significant role of psychological services in public contexts, the study argues in favor of increased access to counseling resources for the entire population, thus including the category of young recidivist inmates. The integration of these services is essential to broaden the scope of mental health support and to respond to the variety of individual needs within society. In addition, immediate support through psychological counseling is highlighted as essential for addressing urgent mental health issues and providing timely interventions. This rapid response can have a significant impact on people in crisis, providing them with essential support in times of greatest need [8].

Recent studies on the effectiveness of psychoanalytic therapy in the case of patients with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, caused by serious trauma, such as those carried out by Özildirim et al. (2023), indicate that similar methods, such as psychoanalytic counseling, may be beneficial for youth inmates with traumatic histories, even in the presence of certain methodological constraints. The study highlights the potential

advantages of applying psychoanalysis to this specific patient segment, despite research design limitations such as the absence of a control group and randomization [10].

The theoretical approach to psychoanalytic counseling intended for young prisoners who relapse requires a detailed understanding of the prison context, the adjustment of traditional methods of intervention and the focus on the psychological dynamics specific to each individual and their needs, to encourage personal development and reduce inappropriate behavioral manifestations.

Conclusion

Therefore, psychoanalytic counseling for young inmates is a complex and necessary approach that responds to the specific challenges faced by this vulnerable population. The analyzed studies emphasize the importance of adapting traditional psychoanalytic concepts to the prison context, highlighting the impact of the prison environment on the therapeutic relationship and the need to integrate cultural and historical aspects in psychotherapeutic practice. Also, the effectiveness of psychoanalytic interventions in reducing deviant behaviors and in supporting the rehabilitation and social reintegration process is confirmed. Therapists must develop empathic listening skills and create a safe space for the expression of emotions, thus facilitating authentic and deep communication. In addition, the accessibility of psychological counseling services needs to be expanded, given the crucial role of these interventions in supporting the mental health of young prisoners. Finally, future research should focus on long-term evaluation of the effectiveness of psychoanalytic counseling to ensure tailored and relevant interventions that contribute to reducing recidivism and promoting the psychological well-being of incarcerated youth.

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