Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Case Study

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Academic Integrity Pledge: “I have abided by the Academic Integrity Policy on this assignment.”

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Introduction

Social workers who work with intimate partners should consider certain theories they can apply to best help them. An explanation of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and locus of control will be provided as well as what is appealing and unappealing. This paper will show how CBT and locus of control theory can be applied to this case. For this paper, the names of the clients will be Mabel and Abdel. Some alarms can go off inside a social workers head while assessing clients. In this case, possible domestic violence is brought to the social workers attention. The text will show how a social worker can approach her clients with that matter. Also, the literature will discuss cultural, ethical, and social justice issues for Mabel, Abdel, and the children.

Explanation of Theories (Appealing/Unappealing)

Cognitive theory is used among therapists and clinical social workers to help bring awareness of their clients’ innermost beliefs which brings about certain behaviors and emotions (Early and Grady, 2017). Behavioral theory focuses on the influential possibilities from the outside ecological happenings “of respondent stimuli and operant reinforcing consequences” (Early and Grady, 2017 p 39). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is based on combining Cognitive theory and Behavioral theory which is beneficial for a social worker because social workers focus on the person-in-environment (Early and Grady, 2017). Social workers can use CBT to help clients learn new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting towards stimuli. According to Early and Grady (2017) the counselor who uses CBT helps “the client to reinterpret” situations “in a more adaptive manner through conscious processes of recognizing, challenging, and restructuring thinking” (p 41).

CBT can be used on married couples to help identify what behaviors and feelings one partner has or does toward the other that can be disruptive toward the relationship. According to Epstein (2001) CBT “can contribute to the development and maintenance of distress and dissolution of intimate couple relationships” (p 300). Relationships that are experiencing unhappiness have been found to have partners act in a harmful manner than acting in a helpful way with each other (Epstein, 2001, p 300). Social workers can help couples identify what parts of the relationship are relating towards the negative behaviors and feelings.

Another area of concern in relationship and individual therapy is considering what a person’s locus of control is at. Is there locus of control inner our outer? According to Kelland (2014) locus of control is a person who believes that something happens because of them (internal) or something happens to them because of outside forces (external). For instance, human beings’ insights of the “causal relationship between their behavior and the potential rewards” rests on what type of “reinforcement” they get (Kelland, 2014, p 235). Social workers can identify a clients’ locus of control by asking how they perceive the reward or outcome of a circumstances. If a client says something like it is all my fault or I cannot do anything right, then the client has an internal locus of control. On the other hand, if a client says something to the nature of it is all my husband’s fault or my husband makes my life horrible, then the client is presenting with an external locus of control.

Locus of control also has a cultural context. Kelland (2014) suggests a basic acceptance of “social class and ethnic groups are important determinants of personality” (236). A person who was raised middle class could have a different locus of control from someone who was raised in lower class. According to Kelland (2014) middle class African-Americans and Caucasians appear to have an internal locus of control, whereas lower class African-Americans are more apt to have an external locus of control.

The appealing aspects of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is that a social worker can help a person identify a certain situation and why they go to a certain thought, reaction, and feeling. A social worker can then help a person learn new ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling towards a certain situation (Early and Grady, 2017). The unappealing parts of CBT is that there is some information that a social worker can work with intimate partners, but it can be troublesome (Epstein, 2001). A social worker must train properly to work with couples using CBT. This social worker, herself, is apprehensive to work with intimate partners.

What is appealing with locus of control is that is helps a social worker identify if a client is experiencing internal or external locus of control. The social worker can then assist the client to think of different ways they can think and handle certain parts of their life. What is unappealing about locus of control is that the study only looked at Whites and Blacks in a cultural and class context. It seems more research needs to be done to understand other cultures and what their locus of control relates too (Kelland 2014).

Theory Application to Case

First, a social worker should work with Mabel and Abdel together and individually. There are a lot of issues that need to be covered as a couple and individually. This case is particularly difficult due to the possible domestic violence incidents. Even though Abdel has not physically harmed Mabel or his children, he is abusing them with intimidation. A social worker should help Mabel understand the abuse. One way is to explain the power and control Abdel is using by showing her the power and control wheel which is readily available on the Internet. The main part a social worker could explain is how there are “different types of abuse, intimidation, and coercion” (Rankine, J., Percival, T., Finau, E., Hope, L-T., Kingi, P., Peteru, M.C., Powell, E., Robati-Mani, R., and Selu, E., 2015, p 278). A social worker can only work with what the client wants to, but it is their responsibility to educate possible abuse.

A social worker can apply CBT with the Mabel and Abdel by focusing on how one situation, for instance Abdel raising his voice to Mabel. The social worker would ask Mabel what her first thought is, when he raises his voice, what action does she take, and how does she feel. The social would then ask Abdel what he heard form Mabel. Next, the social worker would ask Abdel what thought he has when the situation is that makes him feel he needs to raise his voice. The social worker could explore with Mabel how she can begin to change her thoughts when Abdel yells and what she can do and feel differently. This would take some time to help Mabel think, feel, and react differently towards Abdel’s yelling. The same for Abdel with his actions of yelling at Mabel. This is, of course if both agree that this part of their relationship that needs to change (Early and Grady 2017 and Epstein 2001).

A social worker can apply locus of control with Mabel by discussing what she believes is keeping her from getting a job. For instance, Mabel described her husband stopping her because he is supposed to take care of the family financially and that should be good enough. It appears Mabel’s locus of control is external because it is an outside force hindering her. Another area of concern is his verbal abuse towards Mabel and her children. A social worker would have to dissect if this could be both external and internal locus of control. A social worker could work with Mabel to identify which part of the spectrum of the locus of control seems to be weighing heavier. In other words, is she more afraid of his verbal abuse (external) or is her self-esteem and self-worth (internal) playing a bigger part in this (Kelland, 2014)?

Abdel’s locus of control could be internal because he feels it is his duty to care for the family financially. A social worker could ask if he was raised to believe he must be the provider for his family. It also appears his cultural beliefs are part of his internal locus of control as well. A social worker should gain an understanding of Abdel’s upbringing by asking him what his childhood was like. The social worker could then identify if his father treated his mother with verbal threats and if his father ever hit his mother. A social worker should go a bit further and ask Abdel if this is a practice within his family or throughout his culture. Then there could be an understanding as to why Abdel is verbally abusive to Mabel and his children. Was it his internal locus of control affecting his way of being with his family (Kelland 2014)?

Cultural/Ethical/Social Justice Discussion

Social workers must gain an understanding for each client’s culture. For this case a social worker would have to understand Egyptian and Pacific Islander cultural beliefs and practices. Even further, a social worker should investigate specific gender expectations from each culture. Social workers must always be aware of ethical issues, such as biases and mandatory reporting. A social worker could have an automatic bias of possible domestic violence. This bias could create unethical behavior towards her clients; she should immediately speak with her supervisor about such feelings. The social worker should also gain enough evidence to support imminent harm to Mabel and her children before reporting it.

Social justice is also a social worker’s concern. It appears that Mabel and her kids are experiencing domestic violence. Domestic violence happens across all cultures; however, Mabel identifies as Pacific Islander and Abdel identifies as Egyptian. These cultures could be teaching them that domestic violence is okay. Mabel may also not be aware of the laws in the United States as well. It is a social workers responsibility to make the laws aware to her clients.

Conclusion

Social workers can face many areas that need to be addressed in clients’ situations. Sometimes clients come for marital therapy, but a social worker can identify other parts that need to be addressed, such as domestic violence. A social worker must know when and how to address certain situations. Therapies and theories can help a social worker, such as CBT and locus of control. CBT and locus of control can go hand in hand; however, CBT helps the client identify a situation that makes them think, feel, and act towards it. On the other hand, locus of control helps the client realize whether it is internal or external. Then the social worker can begin to help the client identify other ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving towards certain situation. Also, if it is self-talk or “blaming” some outside force, the social worker can help the client work towards a more even locus of control. Working with intimate partners can be challenging which takes a lot of patience on the social workers part.

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