

An example of how a concept of coping is incorporated into the PinC system of Recovery

Scenario

Frank is 48 years old. He has recently found it difficult to go to work. He is under a lot of pressure in his job and the pressure has been increasing over the past 4 months since a new manager joined the business he works for. Frank is directly responsible to report to the new manager and reports that he is finding it difficult to relate to this man. According to Frank a lot of new procedures have been introduced and when Frank raised his concerns about his ability to complete all the new as well as the already required paperwork and get things done on time, he is simply told to 'make it happen.' He has spoken to colleagues who describe the new manager as a 'lunatic' and as being hard to relate to. Frank has been in the job for 17 years and liked working there, because until recently his work has been clearly structured and he felt comfortable with the routine of his job. However now he feels very unsettled overwhelmed and wakes up from bad dreams most nights. He has not been able to sleep for some time and feels physically exhausted.

He also suffers frequent migraines and has used increasingly higher quantities of pain killers. He also admits to drinking a little more than before but still within reason. In his view, a man deserves a drink after a hard days work and that this is the only time now that he enjoys himself.

Frank is married with two teenaged boys aged 15 and 13. He says that he loves his children but finds them challenging at the moment as they display some rebellious behaviours. He used to take them fishing on the weekend, but they do not want to do this with him anymore. He says he has a 'good wife' but they don't talk much and he likes to rest after work and watch television. On Saturdays he goes to the pub and meets up with some other regulars. He likes this because it takes his mind of things for a while. Otherwise he does some maintenance tasks around the house and watches television.

Introduction to the concept of Coping

The concept of coping had been based on one of two main assumptions. One assumption is that coping is a relatively stable state or disposition, The other assumption is that coping involves processes, i.e. responses/skills that deal with specific situations. Therapy based on the assumption that coping is a relatively stable state or disposition is aimed at improving the application of these relatively stable characteristics to impact on the person's ability to

cope. These characteristics include optimism/ pessimism (Carver, Sheier and Weintraub, 1989), extraversion/intraversion/neuroticism/self-esteem and self efficacy (Bandura 1986), locus of control (internal, external or balanced) (Parkes, 1984), Type A personality (Carver, Sheier and Weintraub, 1989) or the Sense of Coherence (Scheier, Carver and Bridges 2001).

Although this state or dispositional assumption about coping provides the basis for the general formulation in the ways that people cope, it does not provide adequate understanding of how people deal with specific situations (Moos and Holahan 2003). An alternative is to see coping as being based on the assumption that coping is a process, which means that improving a person's wellbeing is about improving and developing skills of coping with specific situations. Unfortunately this approach fails to provide a holistic way of understanding the phenomenon of coping (Moos and Holahan 2003)

Combination of different concepts

The understanding of coping within the PinC system of Recovery is based the work of Moos and Holahan (2003). They propose that coping as a multifaceted phenomenon consisting of both dispositional and process (contextual) approaches. Understanding of dispositional factors incorporate the contribution of the enduring characteristics of the individual's coping styles , e.g. coping styles, self efficacy and personality characteristics while the process approaches emphasises the person's use of skills in dealing with stressful situations. The person's health and wellbeing is affected by the interplay between these dimensions, life stressors, resources and new life events.

Relevance of Coping to Frank's situation

In the scenario presented Frank's wellbeing is being affected by the changes resulting from the appointment of a new boss. He is feeling very unsettled, overwhelmed, exhausted, has migraines and has increased his use of pain killers. In addition he has sleep disturbances and increased consumption of alcohol. His existing way of coping seems to be cognitive avoidance (process/contextual) in which he distracts himself by the increased consumption of legal drugs, watching television and using an external locus of control, i.e. blaming his boss. While this approach may offer some relief it has the disadvantage of failing to deal with the core concern namely his additional responsibilities at work and his relationship with his boss.

Encouraging Frank to take a cognitive approach style (process/contextual) in addressing this issue may be helpful. However without making sure that Frank has adequate resources before adopting a cognitive approach style may be detrimental to Frank's wellbeing.

Within the PinC system of Recovery, once a working/therapeutic alliance is formed with Frank, the mental health worker helps him to identify his concerns and priorities them (concerns other than his work situation may figure higher in his list of priorities e.g. his changing role in the family). The mental health worker would encourage Frank to address each of the concerns he had prioritised by talking about them and working with him to identify his usual pattern of coping characteristics (state/dispositional characteristics) such as his coping styles, self efficacy and personality characteristics and also the ways he deals with stressful situations (processes/contextual factors) e.g. cognitive and behavioural approach and avoidance.

The resources that Frank seems to have at the moment are his interest in house maintenance and his relationships with his mates. Frank may be interested in developing these further. Apart from his Saturday drinks with his mates, Frank seems to be socially isolated. A major resource that he could be encouraged to develop is his relationship with his wife. Exploration with Frank into this area would hopefully result in Frank communicating more with her and discussing the issues that he is unhappy about thus getting more social support. Whatever resources are identified and developed success in helping Frank deal with his concerns will be ensuring that a match exists between them and the use of coping approaches.

References

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