

# **EXISTENTIAL POINT OF VIEW OF COUNSELLING**

**CC-11 (Counselling Psychology) Unit 2; SEM III**

**By**

**Dr. Priyanka Kumari**

**Assistant Professor**

**Institute of Psychological Research and Service**

**Patna University**

**Contact No-7654991023,**

**[E-mail-drpriyankakumari1483@gmail.com](mailto:drpriyankakumari1483@gmail.com)**

# EXISTENTIAL THERAPY

- Existential therapy is a philosophical approach that influences a counselor's therapeutic practice. This approach is grounded on the assumption that we are free and therefore responsible for our choices and actions. We are the authors of our lives, and we design the pathways we follow.
- The existential approach rejects the deterministic view of human nature espoused by orthodox psychoanalysis and radical behaviorism.
- Existential therapists acknowledge emphasize our freedom to choose what to make of our circumstances.
- A basic existential premise is that we are not victims of circumstance because, to a large extent, we are what we choose to be.

- **A major aim of therapy is to encourage clients to reflect on life, to recognize their range of alternatives, and to decide among them.**
- **Yalom (2003) emphasizes that the first step in the therapeutic journey is for clients to accept responsibility.**
- **Van Deurzen (2002a) writes that existential counseling is not designed to “cure” people of illness in the tradition of the medical model.**
- **In existential therapy attention is given to clients’ immediate, ongoing experience with the aim of helping them develop a greater presence in their quest for meaning and purpose (Sharp & Bugental, 2001).**
- **Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, James Bugental, and Irvin Yalom all developed their existential approaches to psychotherapy from strong backgrounds in both existential and humanistic psychology.**

## **The basic Dimensions of the human condition, according to the existential approach, include**

- the capacity for self-awareness;**
- freedom and responsibility;**
- creating one's identity and establishing meaningful relationships with others;**
- the search for meaning, purpose, values, and goals;**
- anxiety as a condition of living; and**
- awareness of death and nonbeing**

# Proposition

## Proposition 1: The Capacity for Self-Awareness

- We are finite and do not have unlimited time to do what we want in life.
- We have the potential to take action or not to act; inaction is a decision.
- We choose our actions, and therefore we can partially create our own destiny.
- Meaning is the product of discovering how we are “thrown” or situated in the world and then, through commitment, living creatively.
- As we increase our awareness of the choices available to us, we also increase our sense of responsibility for the consequences of these choices.
- We are subject to loneliness, meaninglessness, emptiness, guilt, and isolation.
- We are basically alone, yet we have an opportunity to relate to other beings.

## **Proposition 2: Freedom and Responsibility**

- **People are free to choose among alternatives and therefore have a large role in shaping their destinies.**
- **A central existential concept is that although we long for freedom, one try to escape.**
- **Even though we have no choice about being thrust into the world, the manner in which we live and what we become are the result of our choices.**
- **It is possible to avoid this reality by making excuses.**

## **Proposition 3: Striving for Identity and Relationship to Others**

- **People are concerned about preserving their uniqueness and centeredness, yet at the same time they have an interest in going outside of themselves to relate to other beings and to nature.**
- **Each of us would like to discover a self—that is, create our personal identity. This is not an automatic process, and creating an identity takes courage.**
- **As relational beings, we also strive for connectedness with others. Many existential writers discuss loneliness, up-rootedness, and alienation, which can be seen as the failure to develop ties with others and with nature.**

# Proposition 4: Anxiety as a Condition of Living

- Anxiety arises from one's personal strivings to survive and to maintain and assert one's being, and the feelings anxiety generates are an inevitable aspect of the human condition.
- Existential anxiety is the unavoidable result of being confronted with the "givens of existence"—death, freedom, choice, isolation, and meaninglessness (Vontress, 2008; Yalom, 1980).
- Existential anxiety can be a stimulus for growth. We experience this anxiety as we become increasingly aware of our freedom and the consequences of accepting or rejecting that freedom.
- Existential therapists differentiate between normal and neurotic anxiety, and they see anxiety as a potential source of growth.

# Proposition 5: Awareness of Death and Nonbeing

- Existentialist does not view death negatively but holds that awareness of death as a basic human condition gives significance to living.
- A distinguishing human characteristic is the ability to grasp the reality of the future and the inevitability of death. It is necessary to think about death if we are to think significantly about life.
- From Frankl's perspective, death should not be considered a threat. Rather, death provides the motivation for us to live our lives fully and take advantage of each opportunity to do something meaningful.
- Rather than being frozen by the fear of death, death can be viewed as a positive force that enables us to live as fully as possible.
- If we defend ourselves against the reality of our eventual death, life becomes insipid and meaningless.
- Realization that we are mortal, we know that we do not have an eternity to complete our projects and that the present is crucial.

# Therapeutic Goals

**Bugental (1990) identifies three main tasks of therapy:**

- **Assist clients in recognizing that they are not fully present in the therapy process itself and in seeing how this pattern may limit them outside of therapy.**
- **Support clients in confronting the anxieties that they have so long sought to avoid.**
- **Help clients redefine themselves and their world in ways that foster greater genuineness of contact with life.**

# Phases of Existential Counseling

- During the initial phase of counseling, therapists assist clients in identifying and clarifying their assumptions about the world. Clients are invited to define and question the ways in which they perceive and make sense of their existence. They examine their values, beliefs, and assumptions to determine their validity.
- During the middle phase of existential counseling, clients are encouraged to more fully examine the source and authority of their present value system.
- The final phase of existential counseling focuses on helping people take what they are learning about themselves and put it into action.
- The aim of therapy is to enable clients to find ways of implementing their examined and internalized values in a concrete way between sessions and after therapy has terminated.

# Application

- Focus client on significant areas such as Assuming personal responsibility, Making a commitment to deciding and acting, and Expanding their awareness of their current situation.

## Application to Group Counseling

- Enabling members to become honest with themselves,
- Widening their perspectives on themselves and the world around them, and
- Clarifying what gives meaning to their present and future life.

# **CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE INTEGRATION OF PSYCHOTHERAPIES**

- **The subjectivity of the client is a key focus in understanding significant life changes.**
- **A full presence and commitment of both therapist and client are essential to life-changing therapy.**
- **The main aim of therapy is to help clients recognize the ways in which they are constricting their awareness and action.**
- **A key focus of therapy is on how clients actually use the opportunities in therapy for examining and changing their lives.**
- **As clients become more aware of the ways in which they define themselves and their world, they can also see new alternatives for choice and action.**
- **In situations involving transference and countertransference, therapists have an opportunity to model taking responsibility for themselves while inviting their clients to do the same.**

# Limitations and Criticisms of the Existential Approach

- lacks a systematic statement of the principles and practices of psychotherapy.
- Existential orientation describe their therapeutic style in vague and global terms such as self-actualization, dialogic encounter, authenticity, and being in the world.
- There is a distinct lack of studies that directly evaluate and examine the existential approach.
- Existential therapy makes use of techniques from other theories, which makes it difficult to apply research to this approach to study its effectiveness.
- High level of maturity, life experience, and intensive training required of practitioners



**Thank  
You**