Does Basic Psychological Needs Fulfillment in Psychotherapy Predict Higher Rates of Client Retention?
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BACKGROUND

- According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs - autonomy, competence, and relatedness to others, is essential for optimal development and mental health. The three needs, as they apply to psychological treatment, are:
  - Autonomy: client's internal perceived locus of causality for treatment
  - Competence: client's sense of efficacy in completing autonomously selected goals
  - Relatedness: client's sense of being cared for and connected with the other

- There is a paucity of research on the importance of needs satisfaction within the psychotherapy context, the individual relationship between the basic needs and working alliance variables, and the relationship between need satisfaction in psychotherapy and treatment persistence.

METHOD

Participants

- Of the 150 adults who ended their course of treatment at the Centre for Mental Health Research (CMHR) within the past three years, 39 met study consent requirements for initial contact:
  - Client consented to being contacted for future research projects; study participation consent required from both the student therapist and supervising therapist
  - Of those 39 former clients, all except for 11 were lost to follow-up. Participants (n = 11) included 5 males and 6 females, aged M=34.8, SD=15.45, agreed to participate.

Procedure

- Eligible participants completed an interview (either via phone or in-person) regarding their retrospective sense of basic psychological needs satisfaction in therapy, working alliance with their therapist, status at termination (planned vs. unplanned), and reasons for ending therapy.
  - Planned Ending: client discussed ending therapy with their therapist and termination was mutually agreed upon;
  - Unplanned Ending: client had not discussed ending therapy with their therapist and termination was unilateral

Measures

- Basic Needs Satisfaction in Psychotherapy (BNSP; adapted from Basic Needs Satisfaction in Relationships scale; LaGuardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000)
- Working Alliance Inventory – Short Revised (WAI-SR) (Hatcher & Gillaspy, 2006)

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Tables 1 - 3: Relationship Between Basic Needs Satisfaction in Psychotherapy and Working Alliance

Analyses

- Overall self-reported needs satisfaction in psychotherapy was correlated positively with overall self-reported working alliance.
- Distinct patterns of association between needs satisfaction subscales and working alliance subscales were evident:
  - Relatedness and autonomy, but not competence, positively correlated with overall working alliance.
  - Relatedness and autonomy, but not competence, positively correlated with the bond scale.
  - Relatedness and competence, but not autonomy, positively correlated with the task scale.
  - Autonomy, but not relatedness or competence, positively correlated with the goal scale.

- t-tests indicated that:
  - Client ratings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness on the BNSP were unrelated to termination status.
  - Client ratings of task, bond, and goal on the WAI-SR were unrelated to termination status.

Conclusions

- Preliminary results are based on a small, self-selecting sample. Future research should examine these variables on a broader scale, prospectively.
- Subscales of the BNSP and the WAI-SR were not associated with therapy persistence. However, a consistent pattern emerged which suggested lower scores on these measures for unplanned enders compared to planned enders. It will be important to examine whether a larger sample size will better estimate the relationship between basic needs satisfaction in psychotherapy, working alliance, and therapy persistence.
- Working alliance and needs satisfaction variables were highly correlated. It is likely that the working alliance and basic needs measures are tapping into similar constructs.
  - E.g., clients endorsing a strong bond also tend to feel more cared for and connected, and perceive experiencing more autonomy in therapy; clients endorsing a high degree of agreement on therapeutic tasks tend to feel more competent in learning and applying techniques and more relatedness.