

An International Journal
of Psychology in Africa

Vol. 12 No. 1, 2004

IFE

PSYCHOLOGIA

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Published by the Ife Centre
for Psychological Studies

VOLUME TWELVE

ISSN 1117-1421

NUMBER ONE

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MARCH, 2004

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IMPORTANCE OF LOGOTHERAPY IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

The importance of logotherapy has been neglected in the clinical practice in Nigeria. This paper raises some important aspects of logotherapy, which have not been taken into consideration. For instance, there is the issue of using knowledge and wisdom in logotherapy. Other issues are the great emphasis of responsibility of the client/patient, especially the encouragement of self-help of individuals and normalization. These important key issues are geared towards the spiritual dimension of individual patients in the clinical practice.

Introduction

The relevance of logotherapy cannot be under scored in Nigeria culture because logotherapy is the only psychotherapy in the Western culture that had acknowledge the spiritual dimension in both counseling and treating people in despair and in doubt. For instance, Asagba R.B (2000) noted that many studies have shown how difficult the freedom to explore and create is. It is even known to be exciting or could sometimes require self-assurance and self-understanding. Therefore, the complexity of the world has made decision-making more tasking to handle even for mature adults. An important estimation of adulthood in every society is the ability to come to terms with one's inner meaning or life fulfillment and to live a productive and satisfying life.

Logotherapy as a field of study is one of the psychotherapies grouped under existential psychotherapy. It is a therapy through inner meaning fulfillment that implies that man's motive in life is to constantly search for meaning. Logotherapy or existential analysis (Existence Analyze in German) was founded by late Professor Viktor Emil Frankl, who is popularly known to belong to the third Viennese School of Psychotherapy. As Frankl (1967 and 1988) has pointed out, logotherapy was named from the Greek word, LOGO that means "the meaning of being". Therefore, logotherapy is a "therapy through meaning". It is also known as therapy "through searching for the meaning" Fabry (1987 and 1981) or "treatment through finding meaning and purpose in life" (Grumbaugh, 1988).

Logotherapist energises the meaning potential in each person that is the ability to use some of the logotherapy concepts. Meaning is therefore the centre of the therapy. Many individuals are helped to maintain mental health through search for meaning and adaptation to their life changes.

For example, Lukas (1988 and Asagba 1993) have demonstrated the practical application of logotherapy in many fields of human behaviour. They both showed that it can spread a psychological safety net under people not only in the western world but also in developing countries. Because of its provision of tools for clinical psychology and it provides what Frankl calls "medical ministry" for the suffering, this caring is supplied through knowledge and wisdom.

The knowledge of logotherapy

According to Lukas, logotherapy has a deep understanding of what human beings basically are and what they strive for; and it guides them in their search. It comprehends the human spirit and its resources, and makes therapeutic use of them. It knows what keeps people going in situations of unavoidable suffering and supports them on their way to meaningful solutions.

Lukas (1988) also demonstrated the unique contribution of logotherapy at a Munich conference for gynecologists. Questions that were discussed included the who and how of conveying the message to parents when a badly deformed child is to be born. General agreement was that there is not just one way to do it. Logotherapy's emphasis is to help the parents understand that the important issue is not that the child is "normal" or "abnormal" – the important issue is the meaning that can be actualized in taking care of the child in either case. Parents need to be told to prepare for both positive and negative eventualities of the child, and they need to be helped to see that assignment is to care for the child with love and affection. The logotherapist arouses the parents' "defiant power of their spirit," as a precondition for a modification of attitudes. Drawing on the resources of the human spirit provides strength needed to find fulfillment within their fate.

Socratic dialogue can guide parents to realize that it is not always necessary or possible to be "happy" parents – even with "normal" children. Sometimes the parents with handicapped children find even greater fulfillment. The handicapped child does not have to be a source of sadness, but rather can be a challenge to make the most of the opportunity.

Such positive attitudes, Lukas explained, require an existential anchoring point. Logotherapy does not presume to compete with religion. But if we are not anchored in some kind of faith that enables us to face the ups and downs of life, we have to face these questions through philosophy. Questions such as "why?" or "why me?" demand answers – and therapists can help find answers in the teachings of logotherapy.

Other schools of psychiatry deal with death and suffering through educating and theorizing (for instance, Kubler-Ross' stages of mourning death). Logotherapy is one of the few schools that gives existential help to those suffering from Frankl's "tragic triad."

Meaning in Developing Countries

The logotherapeutic experience of finding meaning in suffering can help clients discover otherwise hidden opportunities. This is possible in all sorts of unavoidable suffering, including suffering experienced in developing countries where economic crises are the cause of much pain. The challenge often is that of survival. Some persons turn to corruption, drug dealing, and other unhealthy ways to survive.

Logotherapy distinguishes situations of fate (which we cannot change) and those of freedom (which we can change). We must accept our genetic "fate" that we are Africans or Nigerians, but also we must use our areas of freedom, tempered by responsibility, and develop self-reliance within our capabilities. Instead of searching for white-collar jobs – not everyone can be a doctor or manager – we can go back to the land and plant crops or make use of our raw materials to produce something that is needed.

Few people think of what they can do for the country – instead they just complain about the situation. We cannot change our "fate" of being Nigerians, but we can work together and see that our country develops like Germany or Austria did after the first and the second World Wars. We can transform Nigeria into a better place to live.

The Wisdom of Logotherapy

Scientific knowledge alone is not enough to save the human race, as we have learned from atomic research. Scientific knowledge alone is not enough to keep us healthy. Knowledge must be complemented by wisdom. This is true even for clinical psychology whose therapeutic techniques and psychological strategies too easily propel clients into sub human channels that plunge them more deeply into illness.

What is the logotherapeutic wisdom that may have significance for clinical psychology? Not the development of fashionable techniques, but rather a consideration of the basic values and goals of all therapies. These ethical guidelines may be listed as:

- a. Normalize, don't psychologize,
- b. Encourage self-help, and
- c. Don't take away responsibility.

Lukas considers normalization an important aspect of clinical psychology. Patients may lose their trust in clinical psychology if they are psychologized instead of being helped to make things better for themselves.

Regarding the second ethical guideline – encouragement of self-help – Lukas points out that it is not the physicians who primarily cause a physical or psychological wound to heal. They can treat a wound with ointments and dressings but the process of healing is accomplished by the self-healing powers of the body. Modern medicine increasingly is becoming aware that health is more likely to be restored when the natural inner system is supported than when the attempt is made to “drive out the devil with the Beelzebub” of artificial chemical intervention.

Clinical psychology must become aware that not only are there psychological causes of illnesses, but also there are noetic forces of self-healing that can conquer such illnesses or even prevent them. A wise psychology will seek out and promote these self-healing forces so that wounds will heal, even when their origins cannot be discovered.

Self-help is successfully applied in such organisations as Weight Watchers and Alcoholics Anonymous. Many patients with chronic disorders recover through the books or radio talks by Lukas, Frankl and other Logotherapists. Unfortunately not all people (even the experts) know the meaning of self-help. Sometimes they use it as something like self-medication. Self-help importantly includes an appeal to the resources of the human spirit such as the will of meaning, goal orientation, and self-transcendence.

Related to the emphasis on self-help is the third ethical guideline stressed by Lukas: Responsibility must not be taken away from patients by medical personnel. Patients need to be directed and assisted to carry out their own responsibility.

This also concerns Nigerians as a nation. All people must make themselves accountable for the economic failure. Each person, rich or poor, can do something instead of blaming the leaders. We are free to act regardless of the conditions in which we find ourselves in our country.

A logotherapist's major task is to stress responsibility of patients rather than leave it to the doctors and medical personnel. Therefore, patients are encouraged to learn about their diseases and about positive ways to live not only with it, but also, the importance of assuming accountability are stressed.

Conclusion

Psychology should be made to go beyond clinical practice. That is, the clinical psychology experience should be extended to the society at large. This is the reason why normalization (instead of psychologizing), encouragement of self-help, and responsibility are very important issues in clinical practice.

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