Reminiscence therapy

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Meaning:

Reminiscence therapy is defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as "the use of life histories - written, oral, or both - to improve psychological well-being. The therapy is often used with older people." This form of therapeutic intervention respects the life and experiences of the individual with the aim to help the patient maintain good mental health.

What is reminiscence?

Reminiscence has been described as “the volitional or non-volitional act or process of recollecting memories of oneself in the past”. In other words, it involves the recalling and re-experiencing of one's life events.

The History of Reminiscence as Therapy

The idea that reminiscing could be therapeutic was first proposed in the 1960s. Robert Butler, a prominent psychiatrist who specialized in geriatric medicine, coined the term "life review." He proposed what many now take as a given: When approaching death, people find it helpful to put their lives in perspective. In an earlier decade, talking about distant memories was thought of as "living in the past" and therefore a problem.

The idea behind reminiscence therapy is consistent with the theories of adult psychological development that were being proposed around the same period by another famed professional, the psychologist Erik Erikson. Erikson thought that for the greater part of adulthood, we are challenged to find creative, meaningful work in order to avoid feeling stuck. Then, in the final phase of life, we may try to review where we have been and what we have accomplished in the hope that we can feel good about our lives. Reminiscence therapy, which incorporates both Dr. Butler's insights into life review and Dr. Erikson's theory of psychological development, may help a person achieve that goal.

Types:

The two main subtypes are intrapersonal and interpersonal reminiscence.

- Intrapersonal takes a cognitive stance and occurs individually.
- Interpersonal takes more of a conversational side and is a group-based therapy.
- Reminiscence can then be further broken down into three specific types which are: information, evaluation, and obsessive.
Method

Psychological research has identified two types of reminiscence therapies that are particularly effective: integrative and instrumental.

- Integrative reminiscence therapy is a process in which individuals attempt to accept negative events in the past, resolve past conflicts, reconcile the discrepancy between ideals and reality, identify continuity between past and present, and find meaning and worth in life. An integrative life review provides individuals with the opportunity to examine events in their lives that may disconfirm negative self-evaluations associated with depression. Many depressed people ignore positive information and focus on memories that support their dysfunctional views, so this therapy helps lead clients to seek fuller, more detailed accounts of their life story and more balanced interpretations of past events. Participants review both good and bad experiences within the context of the entire life, which shows them that negative experiences in one life domain can be mediated with positive events in another. Individuals may disconfirm global, negative evaluations of the self that are associated with depression and begin to develop a more realistic, adaptive view of the self that incorporates both positive and negative attributes.

- Instrumental reminiscence therapy helps the elderly recollect past coping activities and strategies, including memories of plans developed to solve difficult situations, goal-directed activities, and the achievement of one’s own goals or goals one helped others meet. Instrumental reminiscence therapy may exert a positive effect on individuals’ self-esteem and efficacy by recollection of successful experiences in which individuals acted effectively to control their environment. This approach to reminiscence therapy puts roles and commitments that are no longer rewarding or attainable to the periphery and help these patients invest in other goals that are more in tune with current conditions of living. This can be especially helpful for the elderly who may not be able to do what they were once capable of doing.

How Does Reminiscence Therapy Work?

Reminiscence therapy can be conducted formally or informally with individuals, families, or groups. Typical topics are:

- Family and friendships
- Loves and losses
- Achievements and disappointments
- Adjustments to life's changes

Sessions can last from 30 to 60 minutes and occur weekly or even several times per week. Depending on the training of the clinician, the patient's needs and the setting, the goal may be to:

- Improve communication
- Foster a person's sense of self
- Improve mood
• Provide an enjoyable social activity

Different Mediums used for Reminiscence Therapy and Activities
A variety of mediums can assist the act of remembering that use different senses. It means that people who have difficulty communicating verbally can have the opportunity to do so in other ways. Establishing identity with or without words is a good example of how we have to adapt, giving a valuable opportunity to acquire and use new skills of communication.

• Visually: photographs, slides. Painting pictures, looking at objects of autobiographical meaning.
• Music: using familiar tunes from the radio, C.Ds, or making music using various instruments.
• Smell or taste: using smell kits, different foods
• Tactile: touching objects, feeling textures, painting and pottery.

Applications of reminiscence therapy
Reminiscence Therapy is used predominately in elderly patients. This may in part be due to the common disorders reminiscence therapy has been used for are prevalent in the elderly, such as depression. It has often been used in nursing homes or assisted living facilities, as it provides a sense of continuity in one's life and therefore may aid these types of transitions. Patients with chronic conditions may also benefit from reminiscence therapy, as they often suffer socially and emotionally. Other issues have been addressed using reminiscence therapy, including behavioral, social, and cognitive problems. Studies have found group reminiscence therapy sessions may lead to strengthened social relationships and friendships within the group.

Mental health and life improvement
Many studies have examined the effects of reminiscence therapy on overall affect. One group of researchers implemented reminiscence therapy into a community in response to a rash of suicides. The researchers administered the therapy to older adults (predominantly women) at a local community center for the elderly. A questionnaire administered after the group reminiscence therapy session revealed that 97.3% of participants enjoyed the experience of talking, 98.7% enjoyed listening to others, 89.2% felt that the group work with reminiscence therapy would help in their daily life, and 92.6% wished to continue in the program. The researchers suggest their results support the previously reported effects of increased life satisfaction and self-esteem. Another study showed that after one session a week for 12 weeks of integrative reminiscence therapy, institutionalized older veterans in Taiwan experienced significant increases in self-esteem and life satisfaction as compared to the control group.

Behavioral Evaluation
The most frequent characteristics used to measure the outcome of reminiscence therapy on the patients involved are;
- Depressive symptoms
- Psychological well-being
- Ego-integrity
- Meaning or purpose in life
- Mastery
- Cognitive performance
- Social interactions

**Influencing factors:**

Overall, positive outcomes seem to result from reminiscence therapy, although to differing degrees. The variability in the results is thought to be due to various factors, including the form of reminiscence therapy, the format of the sessions (group versus individual setting), the number of sessions completed, the health, age and gender of the individual, where the patient lives and if the individual had experienced any events that cause major changes in their life.

**Conclusion:**

Reminiscence refers to recollections of memories from the past. It is familiar to us all and can be utilized for the benefit of others. For people with Alzheimer’s disease encouraging the act of reminiscence can be highly beneficial to their inner self and their interpersonal skills. Reminiscence involves exchanging memories with the old and young, friends and relatives, with caregivers and professionals, passing on information, wisdom and skills.