



Therapeutic Potential of Poetry in Psychotherapy

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ABSTRACT

The paper explore the therapeutic potential of poetry within the context of psychotherapy. Poetry has long been recognized as a powerful form of artistic expression that can facilitate emotional exploration, self-reflection, and healing. In the field of psychotherapy, poetry is utilized as a creative and metaphorical medium through which clients can convey their innermost thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This paper delves into the various ways in which poetry can be integrated into therapeutic sessions to enhance communication, promote insight, and facilitate psychological growth. This paper underscores the richness of poetry as a therapeutic tool and advocates for its continued integration into psycho therapeutic practices to enhance holistic healing and well-being.

Keywords : Poetry, therapeutic benefits, emotions, effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION :

“Poetry is the spontaneous outflow of powerful feelings, it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquility” - *William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads, 1802.*

“A poem begins with a lump in the throat, a home-sickness or a love-sickness. It is a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment. A complete poem is one where the emotion” has found its thought and the thought has found the words - *Robert Frost*

“Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted” - *Percy Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, 1821.*

Poetry may be of different forms and meanings. Each person may find different levels of connection and emotion towards language and expression. Any thoughts or feelings that makes a human feel pleasurable or distressed will take a form into the world through words and the medium which the words are being expressed as story, writings, journals and poetry. More specifically when poetry takes its form, it can transfer the depths of any emotions into a relatable, understandable and also into a therapeutic language.

With it's high quality of transforming human minds, poetry has taken the shape of a powerful healing tool. Psychology, philosophy, counselling, psychiatry everything can be blended by poetry in the form of expressing human emotions. Poetry is *not specific only to literature, It has it's importance and essence in every genre.*

According to The National Association For Poetry Therapy, “*Poetry therapy is the use of language, symbol, and story in therapeutic, educational, growth, and community-building capacities. It relies upon the use of poems, stories, song lyrics, imagery, and metaphor to facilitate personal growth, healing, and greater self-awareness. Bibliotherapy, narrative, journal writing, metaphor, storytelling, and ritual are all within the realm of poetry therapy.*”

Historically, it is recorded that humans used poetry as a form of emotional expression such as music, lamentations and love songs. Poetry has also further developed into therapy in later ages. It's history can be traced from ancient Egypt in 400BCE where they words as a form of medicine. People use to write the words in papyrus and dissolve in a solution, so that It can injected into the human body, from which it is believed to be cured more faster. Likewise, in the contemporary era, it is used as a therapeutic tool for the people who undergo stressful conditions. For example Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an English Poet used poetry to relieve himself form his distress.

In 1960, it was identified that poetry therapy was an effective tool that paved the way for people to feel comfortable in expressing themselves. (National Association for Poetry Therapy)

Methodology

The objective of this study is to analyse the effectiveness of poetry therapy and the ways in which it is useful for the therapist to connect with the client. The research will use quantitative approach with collected database from secondary sources that includes articles, research papers, academic journals. The paper employs to review database from different websites, journals to formulate the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychotherapy and Poetry

“Psychotherapy (also called talk therapy) refers to a variety of treatments that aim to help a person identify and change troubling emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Most psychotherapy takes place one-on-one with a licensed mental health professional or with other patients in a group setting”- *National Institute of Mental Health*.

Psychotherapy is a process of helping someone to identify their exact thoughts and feelings and allows the individual to accept and commit to the certain feeling in order to bring in a behavioral change that doesn't harm or cause any discomfort to the individual. Psychotherapy takes place in four stages commitment, process, change and termination. Each has its own sub stages where it changes according to an individual. It also works on different approaches such as Psycho-dynamic, Behavioral-cognitive, humanistic and eclectic. Each one is focused on the change of thoughts or behaviours in learning, thinking and holistic well-being. The ultimate aim of psychotherapy is to provide a different or the right perspective for any challenges or difficulties that the clients face. It uses many different methods that may help both the client and the therapist to provide a focused treatment on basis of the problem. The methods include cognitive behavioural therapy, Psychoanalysis, Group therapy, Exposure therapy, Existential therapy, Attachment therapy, Drama therapy, Art therapy and so on.

Poetry therapy is an unique tool in psychotherapy, where it allows the therapist to delve deeper into the client's innermost feelings, thoughts and desires. The therapist may decode the inner motivation of the client which may not be expressed during one on one sessions. Sometimes, reading or writing a poem can help the client find his/her problems by their own.

“Poetry therapy involves the use of poetry in the psycho-therapeutic setting in which the poem can be used to journey into one's unconscious. In writing a poem, the person can express self through the use of verbal imagery and unconscious metaphorical references to his/her own life-situations.”

In this, the therapist may use the existing literature that is related to the client's problem, either in a group session according to the common concerns or for an individual. The therapist may either read a poem and observe both verbally and non verbally or ask the client to write a poem. The therapist observe the facial changes or change in expressions, tone that helps in identifying the exact feeling of the client towards the problem.

Poetry is intertwined with the emotional aspects of humans. In "I Could Not Have Defined the Change: Rereading Dickinson's Definition of Poetry" by Julie Deppman (2002), the author delves into Emily Dickinson's conception of poetry and reevaluates the meaning of her famous statement, "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry." According to the poet Dickinson, poetry is associated with heightened emotional states or profound intellectual and spiritual insights.

Examples of poetry that helps in expression

Poetry therapy is a form expressive therapy that utilizes varies art forms to express individual's feelings to promote emotional healing, self worth and holistic development. It helps in self reflection, emotional release and resilience, communication, narrative development, coping skills, personal transformation, healing, mindfulness. The steps in poetry therapy involves introduction, where the therapist briefs about the methods and ways to carry out the therapy. Next is the selection, where the therapist either collaboratively or individually select poems that can resonate with the client's emotions and feelings. The next is reflective writing, where the client expresses themselves through writing their own feelings and impressions. The next in which the therapist actually discusses and analyse or interpret the writings of the client is called interpretation and insight. The final step is that the therapist once gained some insight of the client's problem, decides to focus on particular feelings or thoughts that has to be treated or changed accordingly.

"The Use of Poetry in Psychotherapy: The Flesh Became Word and We Dwelt Amongst It" by Ger Murphy explores the integration of poetry into the practice of psychotherapy. It delves into the examples of poetry that is used to bring out the heightened emotions of humans.

It is possible that I am pushing through solid rock

In flintlike layers,

As the ore lies, alone.

I am such a long way in I see no way through, and no space...

(Rilke, 2014: p.161)

This poem can be helps a client who is going through a strong grief.

One day you finally knew

what you had to do, and began,

though the voices around you

kept shouting

their bad advice...

(Oliver, 2004: p.79)

This poem helps a client who is going through a dark time

The time will come

when, with elation,

you will greet yourself arriving

at your own door, in your own mirror,

and each will smile at the other's welcome

(Walcott, 2009: p.39)

This poem opens the door for self love, self esteem and to regain the self.

Above some examples of poems as mentioned in the review of articles that help clients for better understanding and expression and to relate themselves with certain situations or to experience emotions to the fullest.

Therapeutic potential of Poetry in Psychotherapy

Brand, A. G. (1979). *The Uses of Writing in Psychotherapy*. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 19(4), 53-72.

In "The Uses of Writing in Psychotherapy" by A.G. Brand (1979), the author explores the various ways in which writing can be beneficial within the context of psychotherapy. Brand delves into the therapeutic value of writing as a tool for self-expression, reflection, and exploration of emotions and thoughts. The article likely discusses how writing can help individuals externalize their internal experiences, gain insights into their psychological processes, and promote personal growth and healing. By engaging in writing exercises or keeping journals, clients in psychotherapy can develop greater self-awareness, enhance their communication skills, and process difficult or complex feelings more effectively. Overall, the article underscores the importance of incorporating writing techniques into psychotherapeutic practices to support clients in their therapeutic journey.

Silverman, H. L. (1983). *Poetry as a psychotherapeutic intervention*. *Psychotherapy in Private Practice*, 1(2), 47-64. In "Poetry as a Psychotherapeutic Intervention" by H.L. Silverman (1983), the author explores the use of poetry as a valuable intervention in psychotherapy. The article likely delves into how poetry can serve as a creative and expressive medium for clients to explore and communicate their emotions, experiences, and inner conflicts within the therapeutic context. Silverman discusses how engaging with poetry, either by writing or reading poems can facilitate self-reflection, promote insight, and encourage emotional processing in therapy sessions.

McArdle, S., & Byrt, R. (2003). *Fiction, poetry and mental health: expressive and therapeutic uses of literature*. *Journal Name*, Volume 8, Page 517-524. In their work on the expressive and therapeutic uses of literature, S. McArdle and R. Byrt explore the intersection of fiction, poetry, and mental health. They delve into how literature can serve as a powerful tool for self-expression and healing. It explores how writing or reading poetry and fiction can help individuals process emotions, cope with mental health challenges, and gain insights into their own experiences. It discusses the role of literature in therapy, including how therapists can incorporate literary techniques into their practice to support clients. Overall, the author highlights the value of literature as a means of promoting mental well-being and fostering personal growth.

Wilson, B. Jr. (2010). *Using poetry in psychotherapy*. *International Journal of Scholarly Academic Intellectual Diversity*, 12(1), 1. The paper delves into the utilization of poetry within the realm of psychotherapy. The article discusses the therapeutic benefits of integrating poetry into psychotherapeutic practices. It explores how poetry serves as a creative and expressive medium for individuals to articulate and process their emotions, thoughts, and experiences. It provides insights into the practical application of poetry in therapeutic settings, highlighting its potential to enhance self-awareness, promote healing, and foster meaningful therapeutic connections between therapists and clients.

Hoffman, L., & Pate, C. V. (2014). *Poetry as a creative process in psychotherapy*. The paper highlights the transformative potential of poetry within the therapeutic process, promoting creative expression, emotional exploration and personal growth for clients undergoing psychotherapy.

Tegnér, I., Fox, J., Philipp, R., & Thorne, P. (2009). *Evaluating the use of poetry to improve well-being and emotional resilience in cancer patients*. *Journal of Poetry therapy*, 22(3), 121-131. The paper explores the potential benefits of utilizing poetry as a therapeutic tool for enhancing the well-being and emotional resilience of cancer patients. The study investigates the impact of poetry on cancer patients' psychological and emotional states, aiming to determine if engaging with poetry can effectively contribute to their overall well-being. It employs a research methodology involving the participation of cancer patients who engage in activities related to poetry, such as reading, writing, or discussing poems, as part of their therapy. Through qualitative and quantitative assessments, the researchers analyze the effects of poetry engagement on various aspects of the participants' lives, including their emotional resilience and coping mechanisms in the face of cancer-related challenges. They also explore the patients' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of poetry as a therapeutic intervention. The findings of the study suggest that involvement with poetry can indeed have a positive impact on the well-being and emotional resilience of cancer patients. Engaging with poetry provides patients with a creative outlet for expressing their emotions, fostering self-reflection, and facilitating a sense of connection with others. Additionally, it may empower patients to confront and cope with the emotional distress

associated with their illness more effectively. Overall, the article contributes to the growing body of literature on the therapeutic benefits of artistic expression, particularly poetry, in promoting psychological well-being and resilience among cancer patients.

Alfrey, A., Field, V., Xenophon, I., Springham, N., & Holtum, S. (2022). *Identifying the mechanisms of poetry therapy and perceived effects on participants: A synthesised replication case study*. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 78, 101882. The paper delves into the exploration of poetry therapy's mechanisms and its perceived effects on participants through a synthesized replication case study. In this study, the authors aim to gain insights into the underlying mechanisms of poetry therapy by synthesizing existing research and conducting a replication case study. They investigate how poetry therapy functions as a therapeutic intervention and examine participants' perceptions of its effects. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers analyze data from previous studies and integrate them to identify common themes and mechanisms associated with poetry therapy. Additionally, they conduct a replication case study to further explore these themes and mechanisms in a real-world setting. Through their analysis, the authors uncover several mechanisms of poetry therapy, including self-expression, emotional catharsis, perspective transformation, and social connection. These mechanisms contribute to the perceived effects of poetry therapy, which include enhanced emotional well-being, increased self-awareness, and improved interpersonal relationships. Overall, the article provides valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying poetry therapy and its perceived effects on participants, contributing to our understanding of its therapeutic potential in the field of arts-based interventions.

The reviewed literature mentioned and more literature that have been reviewed explains the therapeutic effects of poetry in psychotherapy. Language is the best medium of communication when one is struggling to convey it through words. Writing can easily bring out one's intimate thoughts and connection towards the situation or a person. As stated by William Wordsworth, "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility."

Conclusion

Poetry therapy is a very unique and useful tool in psychotherapy or any type of counselling. When it comes to mental health problems or any problems related to expression poetry therapy plays a crucial role in bringing out the expressive side of an individual. This therapy should be employed in almost all the settings, which helps both the client and the therapist to peep deeper into the emotions and identify the troubling emotions to arrive at the right perception for the case. Words that are written and make us relate to what we have been going through transforms a lot of emotions within and that emotions being invested in the right way, is where therapy and poetry meets.

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