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REVIEW ARTICLE

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EXAMINATION OF EMOTION-FOCUSED AND PROBLEM-FOCUSED FAMILY THERAPY WITH SYSTEM APPROACH

Sistem Yaklaşımıyla Duygu Odaklı ve Sorun Odaklı Aile Terapisinin İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the effects of the integration of Emotion Focused Couple Therapy (EFT) and Problem Focused Systemic Family Therapy (McMaster Family Therapy Model) in the intervention processes of social workers working with couples and families. On the basis of the systems approach, a holistic approach is proposed for the solution of dysfunctions encountered in the relational dynamics of individuals and couples. The structure of EFT, which focuses on emotional processes, combines with the systemic framework of the McMaster Model to strengthen the internal and environmental harmony of couples. This integrated model aims to create lasting changes in social work practices.

Keywords: Emotion-focused couple therapy, problem-focused systemic family therapy mcmaster family therapy model, systems approach

ÖZ

Bu makale, çiftler ve ailelerle çalışan sosyal hizmet uzmanlarının müdahale süreçlerinde Duygu Odaklı Çift Terapisi (EFT) ve Sorun Odaklı Sistemik Aile Terapisi (McMaster Aile Terapisi Modeli) entegrasyonunun etkilerini incelemektedir. Sistem yaklaşımı temelinde, bireylerin ve çiftlerin ilişkisel dinamiklerinde karşılaşılan işlev bozukluklarının çözümünde bütüncül bir yaklaşım önerilmektedir. EFT'nin duygusal süreçlere odaklanan yapısı, McMaster Modelinin sistemik çerçevesiyle birleşerek çiftlerin içsel ve çevresel uyumunu güçlendirmektedir. Bu entegre model, sosyal hizmet uygulamalarında kalıcı değişimler yaratma amacı taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Duygu odaklı çift terapisi, sorun odaklı sistemik aile terapisi mcmaster aile terapisi modeli, sistem yaklaşımı

INTRODUCTION

The ideal family structure is defined as a social system in which individuals can build their individual identities and autonomy while establishing deep emotional bonds with each other on the basis of love, respect and unconditional acceptance. Family therapies, on the other hand, as

an interdisciplinary approach that aims to restructure relationships and increase the functionality of the family system by intervening in the conflict and dissolution processes of these dynamics, took its roots from the Progressive Era of the 19th century and manifested itself in the form of the destructive effects of war, disruption in family structures, losses, economic crisis and social traumas, especially in the post-World War II period.

Mass migrations, genocides and war veterans in Europe transformed the social structure. The declaration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 encouraged steps to protect family integrity, and different family models emerged in the West with social and economic reforms. “Hippie” family structures and the post-war “baby boom” are indicators of this transformation (Hammond and Cheney, 2010).

In line with welfare state policies, social expenditures were increased, marriages were encouraged and leisure activities of families were supported. In this process, the reconstruction of family structures and the development of academic family studies have become an important pillar of social transformation (Kafes, 2021).

In recent years, the importance of theoretical and methodological diversity for assessing family dynamics has increased. Virginia Satir is one of the pioneers who shaped the basic approaches in this field by making innovative contributions to the discipline of family therapy. Satir’s work on the integration of family communication and social work has revolutionized the discipline (Haber & Russell, 2002). In this context, Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy and the McMaster Family Therapy Model offer a holistic framework that focuses on strengthening emotional bonds and understanding systemic dynamics. Addressing these models on a common ground with a systems theory perspective provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the contextual and relational functioning of individuals and families.

Systems Approach: Principles, Applications and Relationship with the McMaster Model

According to Daniş (2006), “The system is expressed as a whole formed by interconnected and mutually interacting parts”. Systems theory was first introduced by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, centered on biology. Bertalanffy emphasized that the general principles of systems theory can be applied in different disciplines regardless of their sociological or biological contexts. As a matter of fact, it is widely used in many fields today. The fact that entities are in constant interaction with their environment makes



systems theory an indispensable tool for making sense of these entities within their environmental context (Koçel, 2005, p. 245). Since the 1960s, the systems approach has been a primary method for evaluating and analyzing human behavior in the discipline of social work. With the increasing interest in family therapy in the 1970s, Bowen's family systems theory addressed the family with its environment and internal dynamics. This approach focuses on analyzing systemic relationships while evaluating individuals and families with their environmental contexts.

System Approach and Domino Effect in Social Work

The domino effect can be associated with systems theory in the context of social work discipline. It shows how a change within an individual, family, society or broader social systems can affect other subsystems. The family is considered a complex social system influenced by internal dynamics and environmental resources (Cui & Hong, 2021). Systems theory is a way of knowing used to understand the world rather than a reality (White & Klein, 2002). This theory provides a tool to analyze and explain social structures. The family can be considered a unique social system in this context and can be described as "an example of an open, ongoing, goal-seeking, self-organizing social system" (Broderick, 1993). Systems theory aims to explain the dynamics that arise as a result of the arrangements in a given system and the interactions between the parts that are only possible through this arrangement (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

While systems theory creates a holistic paradigm to evaluate the interactions between individuals and the ecosystem in which they live, systemic family theory integrates this conceptual framework into family dynamics and situates individual behaviors within the interdependence relations of the family system (Crittenden, Patricia & Dallos, Rudi, 2009). It also attaches great importance to recurrent patterns of interaction within the family. For example, it examines the problematic behavior of an individual as a whole by associating it with the behaviors of other members of the family (Cottone et al., 2007).

Systemic Family therapy is a form of therapy that aims to analyze the mutual relationship networks of individuals by addressing family dynamics as a whole. Family systems theory focuses on the interactions and dynamics within the family structure, arguing that human development is based on the relationships between family members (Wright & Benigno, 2019). This model, like systems theory, considers the family as more than the sum of its parts in the same way that systems are more than the sum of their parts, and draws attention to the importance of interactions within the family (Lorås, et al., 2017). He argued that observation has a direct impact on the therapy process and emphasized that counselors should act as a part of the system rather than being an active observer. Thus, it was revealed that the applied problem could play a functional role for the continuity of the system (Winek and Jon, 2010).

For example, an individual who constantly complains in a family may seem to be a trigger for conflict within the family from the outside, but this person's complaints can lead other family members to take action and break the stagnation. When examining issues, the counselor focuses not only on the negative aspects of the problem, but also on how this situation benefits the system (Kılıçarslan, 2010).

As a result, systemic family theory treats the individual's behavior not only as an individual problem but as a result of dynamics within the family system, and this approach provides a comprehensive basis for therapeutic interventions (Johnson et al., 2016). Bowen's family systems theory highlights eight key dynamics: triangles, differentiation of self, nuclear family emotional processes, family projection process, multigenerational projection process, sibling positions, emotional rupture and social regression (Ray & Johnson, 2016). Bowen's family systems theory is seen as one of the most effective approaches in the field of family therapy. The basic concept of the theory is the "differentiation of the self" that enables the individual to make decisions by developing emotional awareness (Handley et al., 2019). The family is considered as one of the main elements of this study. Family systems theory explains the complex interactions between members and the dynamics of individual roles by focusing on the emotional unit within the family. It is emphasized that changes in one of the family members affect the overall functioning of the system and that emotional dependency is a fundamental element that supports harmony within the family (Bowen Center, 2024).

Systemic Family Therapy: Practice, and Therapeutic Interactions

According to O'Gorman (2012), family systems theory reveals that behavioral concerns are directly related to the overall level of functionality of the family unit.

Systemic family therapy provides a comprehensive treatment for the problems that individuals and families face. If they are in dysfunctional cycles, it aims to transform them. Systemic therapy, which examines family relationships as an interconnected and constantly interacting structure, states that the individual's problems are not only his/her own, but will be shaped in connection with his/her environment and relationships (Burnham, 1984; Miller, et al., 2000).

The family is a collection of interrelated parts and these parts are not considered in isolation from the rest of the system. The structure and organization of the family are among the main factors that shape the behavior of its members, and therefore, family functioning can only be approached holistically.... Family therapy involves restoring the functionality of the family system and moving in a positive direction rather than individual treatment (Samancı & Ekici, 1998).

The basic assumptions that constitute Problem-Focused Systemic Family Therapy (McMaster Family Therapy Model) are as follows:



1. All parts of the family are interrelated.
2. One part of the family cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of the family system.
3. It is not possible to fully understand family functioning simply by understanding each family member or subgroup.
4. The structure and organization of the family are important factors that strongly influence and determine the behavior of family members.
5. The transactional patterns of the family system largely shape the behavior of family members (Epstein et al., 1978, 1982, 1993)

In conclusion, Problem-Focused Systemic Family Therapy (McMaster Family Therapy Model) is a comprehensive model that includes an integrated theoretical framework, measurement tools and intervention techniques.

Emotion-Focused Couple Therapy Basic Principles and Application Areas

Historical Background

Our emotions have a significant impact on people's attitudes and can guide individuals to develop attitudes and take actions towards objects in their environment. It was developed in Canada in the early 1980s by Dr. Johnson and Dr. Greenberg to address deficiencies in existing couple therapy models. By the 1990s, EFT's reputation had greatly increased. Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) is characterized by a trusting bond between the counselor and the couple, active involvement of the counselor, and immediate guidance for emotional processes. Dr. Johnson's book *The Practice of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy* (1996) provided therapists with a clear guide for practicing EFT and has become a foundational text in the field. The therapy supports the development of a secure bond between partners, ensuring that the relationship is a safe and healing environment for both individuals. According to Johnson, the main aim of the Therapy is to provide a three-stage process for couples to transform their relationship: First, problematic interaction averages are identified and resolved, while emotional needs are strengthened. In the second stage, negative interaction patterns are changed and secure attachment dynamics are created. The establishment of secure attachments is based on emotional accessibility and sensitivity; not only physical presence is not sufficient for the formation of an emotional bond, but the individual must also be emotionally accessible (Johnson & Whiffen, 2003).

Emotion-focused therapy emphasizes the importance of establishing secure emotional bonds by addressing emotions both at the individual level and in the context of the relationship (Johnson, 2009). It is used to solve relationship difficulties between romantic partners. Just as we cannot consider individuals independent of their environment, it is not possible to consider individuals independent of

their environment in emotionally focused therapy. This therapy model offers a unique and short-term framework that aims to restructure relationship dynamics (Johnson, 2019).

Emotion-focused therapy aims to transform negative cycles of communication and interaction into more transparent and sensitive relationship dynamics because one of the most important issues in emotion-focused therapy is communication, and this has a significant impact on the relationships of family members or couples with each other (Johnson & Denton, 2002).

The Relationship Between Attachment Theory and Eft and Its Effect on Couple Dynamics

This approach, which is closely related to attachment theory, allows partners to access their deep-seated and repressed emotions and unmet attachment needs. Although Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory was initially developed to examine infant-mother relationships, it also offers important implications in the context of couple therapy and adult romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This approach provides a comprehensive framework that explains the formation of emotional bonds between individuals. In this process, it aims to reduce interpersonal stress through the expression of emotions and the restructuring of negative interaction patterns (Wiebe & Johnson, 2016). For example, when there is a lack of communication between a couple, it may not only lead to a lack of talking or emotional distance, but it may also affect their perception of trust in each other, their need for attachment, physical distancing and subjective emotional emptiness.

Comparison of Problem-Focused Systemic Family Therapy (Mcmaster Family Therapy Model) and EFT

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) also comprehensively addresses how it reflects on relationship dynamics and how it shapes the emotional needs of both parties. Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (FFCT) focuses on the processes of recognizing, accepting and transforming individuals' emotions and supports the processes of change. McMaster Family Therapy Model, on the other hand, offers a system-based approach that defines problems and structures family dynamics. While the McMaster model creates an effective framework based on problems, FFT contributes to the strengthening of the family system by focusing on the emotional dimension.

Emotion Focused Couple Therapy (FFCT) addresses communication problems in relationships by encouraging individuals to express their emotions in a direct and healthy way. For example, individuals may often use indirect or defensive language instead of directly expressing their caring needs, which can lead to conflict in the relationship. Learned patterns in childhood, such as the perception of expressing emotions as weakness, can lead to the suppression of emotional needs. By enabling individuals to overcome these stereotypes, the SOCT makes important contributions to individuals'



gaining emotional awareness, developing healthy attachment and increasing relationship satisfaction (Clothier et al., 2002; Dandeneau & Johnson, 1994; Denton et al., 2000; Goldman & Greenberg, 1992; Halchuk et al., 2010).

Integration of Emotion-Focused and Problem-Focused Family Therapy

In this context, Emotion Focused Couple Therapy and Problem Focused Systemic Family Therapy (McMaster Family Therapy Model) are among the effective tools. Conducting counseling services with a multidisciplinary approach, without focusing on a single therapy model, both facilitates problem-solving processes and helps clients make sense of the situation they are experiencing. According to Zastrow (2015), the family system has an important place at the micro practice level of social work intervention.

Social work intervention consists of the stages of meeting, pre-assessment, planning, implementation, and final evaluation. In these intervention processes, we can integrate the application of Problem-Focused Systemic Family Therapy from the meeting stage and start the meeting stage by establishing an open, collaborative relationship with the family. By defining the current current problems within the family, the expectations of each family member are determined during the session. When the pre-assessment stage is reached, the observation and

what the problem is is made clear to the family and the counselor. Problem identification, summarizing the identified difficulties and a list of problems to be addressed are created. In the planning stage, mutual expectations, goals and responsibilities of the family regarding the treatment and how the problem will be solved are discussed. When it comes to the implementation phase, the aim is to change dysfunctional family interaction patterns. Expressing the emotion experienced at that moment, developing mental insight and talking about emotions in a structured way are critical for triggering the transformation process (Duyan, 2003).

Emotional experience not only provides a conceptual framework for the process of defining and making sense of the relationship, but also constitutes a fundamental building block in shaping the perception of the partner. As Greenberg (2004) states, access to primary emotions provides an important source of information that deepens individuals' self-understanding, increases their motivation for problem solving and facilitates the solution process. It also allows partners to communicate more openly and effectively about their needs.

The Role of Emotion-Focused Couple Therapy in the Intervention Process

In the implementation phase, the counselor utilizes emotion-focused couple therapy to help partners develop a comprehensive understanding of how they experience the relationship and how these ex-

periences affect their roles and positions in the relationship. Conducting intervention processes with emotion-focused approaches that include both partners allows partners to discover new aspects of each other, while reinforcing the level of trust and openness between them (Greenberg and Johnson, 2023). In the final evaluation phase, family members summarize their experiences and what they have learned during the therapy process. The counselor assesses the extent to which the goals have been achieved, verifies the feedback and addresses the missing points. An optional follow-up appointment can be scheduled after the therapy, thus allowing for a review of the success of the process and the benefits to the family.

An example of the focus on communication in family and marital therapy is that in the early 1950s, a group of researchers in Palo Alto, California, examined the communication patterns of schizophrenia patients and their families. As a result of this study, the importance of emotional tone and activating elements in emotional interactions was emphasized. Relationships in which both partners are insecure tend to exhibit more conflict and disharmony. On the other hand, relationships in which both partners have secure attachment characteristics present a more harmonious and conflict-free dynamic (Johnson & Zuccarini, 2010).

In the communication between the couples, it was ensured that the initial sudden anger reactions were recognized and these reactions were transformed into an expression of sadness and loss corresponding to the perceived threat. The fact that couples display more harmonious emotional expressions instead of secondary emotions during the therapy process is also effective in showing more empathetic and compassionate reactions to each other over time (Greenberg 2015; Woldarsky-Meneses and McKinnon 2019). For this reason, Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) is an effective and short-term intervention and solution method for couples experiencing problems in close relationships in terms of recognizing, accepting and complementing emotions such as anger, hurt, shame or fear in the couple therapy process and processing these emotions (Johnson, 2019).

Case Example: Assessment, Contract Formation, Treatment and Termination Phases

This plan was developed based on emotion-focused couple therapy and problem-focused family therapy approaches. The basic principles of both approaches are integrated into the intervention phases detailed below.

1. Evaluation Phase

The couple, Ayşe and Murat, applied for couple therapy due to the recent increase in arguments, emotional intolerance and distancing in their six-year marriage. At the beginning of the sessions, the counselor aimed to establish an open and collaborative relationship with the couple and assessed their attachment patterns, emotional reactions and interaction styles in line with the Emotion Focused

Therapy (EFT) approach. During the interviews, it was observed that the couple could not express their emotional needs clearly. Ayşe associated her husband's withdrawal with the fear of being alone and abandonment, while Murat associated Ayşe's critical attitude with his own inadequacy. The systemic context of this interaction cycle was analyzed with the Problem-Focused Family Therapy approach.

2. Contract Creation Phase

Following the assessment process, a therapy contract was created with the couple to identify therapeutic goals. The counselor shared methods for strengthening emotional bonds and resolving conflicts based on Emotion Focused Therapy; from the perspective of Problem Focused Therapy, she presented systemic intervention strategies for the observed behavioral patterns. Accordingly, the goals were set as increasing emotional closeness, restructuring dysfunctional communication cycles and learning to express attachment needs clearly. A clear agreement was reached between the parties regarding the therapy process and methodology.

3. Treatment Phase

In the therapy process, both emotional restructuring strategies of Emotion Focused Therapy and behavioral interventions of Problem Focused Therapy were used together. The primary emotions and attachment needs underlying the surface anger, reticence and defenses were focused on. Ayşe realized that she was experiencing her husband's indifference as a fear of abandonment; Murat expressed his feelings of inadequacy in the face of criticism and therefore withdrew. The counselor supported the development of these insights and empathic communication practices were developed to help the couple better understand each other's emotional world. In between sessions, small tasks were given to encourage practice, and emotional contact and functional communication were supported. In line with the principles of Problem-Focused Therapy, structured practices were planned for the couple to achieve the behavioral goals set.

4. Finalization Phase

At the end of the process, it was observed that the couple developed a more open, compassionate and understanding attitude towards each other; their emotional closeness was re-established and they were able to cope with conflicts in a healthier way. The counselor shared with the couple that the goals set were largely achieved and carried out the termination process in a planned manner. Communication and emotion regulation strategies that they could use in the future when faced with similar problems were shared with the couple; the counselor told them that they could reapply to the therapy when needed and the intervention process was terminated (Miller, Ryan, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The systems approach, which is the theoretical basis of social work, stands out as a dynamic intervention tool that focuses on the interaction points that couples and families establish with their environment in order to increase their social functionality. This approach offers a wide range of application opportunities in the field of social work, allowing individuals and families to intervene in their problems from a holistic and functional perspective. Virginia Satir, one of the pioneers of family therapy and an important figure in the field as a social worker, drew attention to the fact that dysfunctions in the family system are the main source of problems that

arise in individuals. In this context, the use of integrated approaches such as Problem-Focused Therapy (McMaster Family Therapy Model) in family therapy today increases the scope and effectiveness of counseling services. Problem-Focused Therapy (McMaster Family Therapy Model) offers a systematic model for understanding and improving the complex structure of families, both through its theoretical background and the assessment and treatment tools it provides. This model has been empirically validated in various therapy settings and plays an important role in the process of assessing and improving both individual and collective family functioning. By focusing on the “macro” stages of the therapeutic process, Problem Focused Therapy (McMaster Family Therapy Model) supports the development of collaboration between family members and the counselor, open and direct communication, and the family taking responsibility for change. This approach is centered on the current problems and is directed towards the targeted solution of the therapy. Conducting the process from a single perspective in couple therapy can often lead to ignoring the root causes of dysfunctions. At this point, the integration of Emotion Focused Couple Therapy (EFT) and Problem Focused Therapy (McMaster Family Therapy Model) offers a therapeutic approach that focuses on both the internal markers of the individual and the macro dimension of the system. Emotion-focused interventions deepen the level of interaction between partners by centering on individuals’ inner world and emotional experiences. This integration improves the communication skills of couples and contributes to a more robust and harmonious structure in their relationships with their environment.

In conclusion, the blending of Problem Focused Therapy (McMaster Family Therapy Model) and Emotion Focused Couple Therapy approach provides a holistic approach to the problems experienced by couples and families. By bringing together individual and systemic layers, this model offers the potential to create more in-depth and lasting changes in the field of social work intervention. The dissemination of this method in social work practices will enable couples and families to create a healthier social structure.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

There are no potential conflicts of interest in this study.



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